#  ‘Misfortunes never come singly’

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On **Mar 4, 2022**

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This week is a grim week in Europe and the world. Last week, there was still time to discuss how to avoid armed conflict and war in south-eastern Europe. Now, Russia’s brutal and massive invasion of Ukraine rages. It is unbelievable to all, observers, victims, attackers, and to those who fuelled the crisis and those who opposed it. The war is between the West and the East, between Europe/America with NATO, on one side, and Russia on the other.
Ukraine is caught in-between and that is where the actual war takes place. It is less a war between Russia and Ukraine than it seems; it is between the powers on both sides of the ‘new iron curtain’. As long as we have that divide, there will not be peace and cooperation in what is a very advanced part of the world. The leaders of the countries seem not to have peace in their hearts and minds. The immediate task ahead is to stop the fighting and also create peace in our hearts and minds. We must never try to win the whole world and lose our soul.
Being practical and pragmatic, I would hope that the Russian leaders could now say that they miscalculated the way the military invasion of Ukraine would go, with major resistance and high numbers of casualties on both sides. Therefore, Russia should go for immediate ceasefire and negotiate a settlement of the conflict. Then Russia could come out of the terrible tragedy with some honour, otherwise, the outcome for the superpower will be disastrous with long shadows for decades to come. We must all pray for Ukraine. It was not entirely blameless itself, though, but that is not on the agenda today. The West’s responsibility is also not on the agenda today, but it will certainly be tomorrow. Today, we must try to find in our hearts space for prayers for the perpetrators and attackers, and indeed the victims, and those behind the scene on all sides and fronts.
Many people, at home and abroad, say they are ashamed of President Putin and the Russian leaders now—and for good reason. But I am also ashamed of the military alliance of NATO and the leaders of its thirty member-countries, including the US and its president, and the political and economic organisation of the EU with twenty-seven member-countries and its leaders—for having failed in dialogue and negotiations with Russia (and Belarus).
How come the situation was allowed to escalate to this level and end in a terrible armed conflict? The leaders have had over thirty years to discuss and sort out conflict and peace issues, and develop future cooperation avenues, not conflict and war, since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989-91. For a number of years, NATO has focused on rearmament instead of disarmament. NATO countries today have a military budget ten times, some estimate fifteen times as high as Russia’s budget. But Russia is the world’s major nuclear power.
Ukraine has been encouraged by the West to do all they can to withstand the Russian occupation, and it receives unison support, including of military kind, from shocked countries and people, including from politicians, NGOs, companies and individuals. As a pacifist, I am, however, in principle against armed resistance since it can lead to more death and suffering, and every human life is sacred. People must be free to flee the country; Ukraine now restricts men between 18-60 years to leave. A protracted war can lead to more refugees, too.
The West is enforcing a number of stiff sanctions and restrictions for trade and finance on Russia, and companies freeze or pull out of business and industrial investments. This will lead to severe difficulties for Russia and a likely economic and financial crisis or collapse. Yet, the West needs Russian oil, gas, minerals and other natural resources, and the country will maintain income from those. There will also be political consequences. In the longer run, there is need for discussions and negotiations otherwise the US and Europe will get another step closer to becoming ‘world empire leaders’. China on its side wants cooperation with the West as well as with Russia and also Ukraine. It has expressed concern about the conflict and has offered to mediate.
As for Russia’s withdrawal from Ukraine, which seems to be the only way to settle the conflict, I believe that certain compromises should be made, realizing that Russia cannot be expected to take too much humiliation, but it should take some, and so should NATO and the West.
Not long ago, President Zelensky of Ukraine said that he couldn’t see that Crimea would be returned unless there was regime change in Russia. This week, though, he said that Crimea should be returned, and the country should be allowed to seek NATO membership. (An EU membership application, or intent, was delivered this week.) Alas, one can only suspect the West has pushed Crimea on the issues, knowing full well that Russia does precisely not want to accept those. Russia shall have offered a ceasefire if the mentioned demands were accepted.
In East-Ukraine, which is culturally more Russian than the rest of Ukraine, there has been a war-like situation for eight years, with 14,000 people killed (a quarter civilians) and 30,000 injured. Last week, Russia declared that Donetsk and Luhansk should be recognized as independent republics. Also, other land areas in east and south Ukraine, in a strip all the way to Crimea, might have to be given a (temporary) autonomous status, but how it will be in the long run, the parties must agree upon in detail.
Importantly and in the longer run, I would suggest that the United Nations coordinate in a broad peace and security process in Europe and the world, where the West, USA, NATO, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other stakeholders, commit themselves to actively seek binding coexistence, cooperation, and democracy. This should lead to a new world peace and security order, beyond the current system built on seeing the world as it was in the last century, including during the Cold War and when the Soviet Union ended. Russia has to a major extent been cut off from cooperation and change, partly caused by Russia itself, though. It has been an era when the West, USA, and NATO have moved unilaterally to dominate the world, especially militarily.
To reach a new world peace, a paradigm shift, the United Nations and other key organizations should develop and implement a concrete, systematic programme for a ‘Culture of Peace and Democracy’ in all countries. Today, peace efforts are seen as subordinate to the military. Peace activism is mainly left to NGOs and other well-meaning groups, including schools. But it is not given major state-focus.
In the world ahead, with pandemics, climate change, conflict and war, we must move away from the military mindset to a broader and deeper understanding of peace and development for all. Haven’t we wasted enough money and resources, sacrificed too many human lives, allowed too much suffering, so that we may finally realise that it is time to turn around and do what is right and good for all God’s creations? Peace development is the only realistic way ahead. Some hawks will say it is naive and unrealistic; I say it is the only way ahead, Let us build the world of tomorrow through peace and democracy through peace education, religious conviction, knowledge for development and coexistence, and simple common sense already possessed by ordinary men and women, indeed by children and youth. We can do it if we want and spend massive resources and work on it. Then we will never have more disasters like the current one in Ukraine.