ENDING WARS - 2025 Lecture of the Movement for the Abolition of War
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Ending individual wars has always been a preoccupation for those embroiled in them, but as Professor Michael Howard, who was the doyen of military history in Britain, noted *"throughout history the overwhelming majority of human societies have taken war for granted and made it the basis for their legal and social structures."* However, addressing the problem of ending wars as a damaging phenomenon of human society has become ever more urgent and challenging in recent years.

There was a relatively peaceful period following World War 2 because the horrors of the two twentieth century global wars had left politicians and people across the world conscious of, and profoundly concerned about, the prospect of a third world war, especially because the Second World War had ended with the ushering in of the age of nuclear weapons and the existential threat they represented. However, more recently there has been a serious deterioration in global peacefulness, as evidenced by the 2025 Global Peace Index (GPI) published by the Institute for Economics and Peace. My friend, Steve Killilea, and his IEP colleagues have been monitoring and publishing objective measures of the level of peacefulness around the world for nearly two decades and that 19th report covers 163 independent states and territories containing some 99.7% of the world's population and rating their various levels of peacefulness. The GPI is now the world's leading measure of global peacefulness and for the sixth year in a row that measure has deteriorated. The average country score on the GPI has also deteriorated for 13 of the last 17 years and has not improved on average in any year since the 2013 GPI. This means that the deterioration in global peacefulness is measurable, continuous, and deeply worrying.

The existential threat posed by nuclear weapons seemed to have receded for some years because global leaders realized that if one side were to use nuclear weapons, the other side would respond, with the very real danger that a nuclear war would end all human civilization. As the memory of two devastating global wars faded and the stable instability of the Cold War gave way to a deterioration in relations between the

nuclear powers there were also major developments in missile technology. An explosive payload, including a nuclear payload, could now be delivered at hypersonic speed leaving no time for human reflection on the decision to respond. Increasingly there is a pressure to use Artificial Intelligence in decision-making about how to respond, and AI has already been used in Israel/Palestine where thousands of Palestinians have been targeted and killed by the IDF using AI programmes.

At the same time the worsening environmental crisis is making some parts of the world uninhabitable resulting in population movements that are triggering political conflict.

These developments require us to review our understanding of the nature of war and what to do about it. **We must find a way to bring wars to an end, before wars bring an end to us.**

The efforts to address the ending of wars which came to the fore in political and intellectual circles at the end of the First World War were not the first attempts to address ending wars. Arguably the Westphalian settlement of 1648 was the most significant earlier attempt to construct a system of agreements that would prevent wars between the major states in Europe. However, the wars did not disappear and the bloody revolution in France in 1789 led the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, to pen his essay *"Toward Perpetual Peace"*, setting out a 'democratic peace theory'. He believed that however long and difficult the road, if men were freed from monarcho-aristocratic regimes, the public debate that would result from democratic republican forms of government would eventually lead to men concluding that they should manage their disagreements in a non-violent way. Kant was not an optimist about human nature, and in this he differed from most of the 'philosophes' of his time, who believed that mankind was naturally good, but was corrupted by malign leaders However, Kant saw that war was so horrifying and costly in both 'blood and treasure' that he believed, in the end, rationality and a moral imperative would ensure the adoption of a more peaceful way of living.

The Enlightenment philosophers challenged the old ways of thinking in almost every area of life including the view that wars were an inevitable element in the human

condition. They were convinced that the success that the application of ‘rationalism’ would bring to other aspects of human endeavour could apply to war, and the adoption of rational thought, and rational social organization would rid humanity of pointless and destructive violent conflict. It seemed that progress was being made along that path until the outbreak of the First World War. The massive slaughter between 1914 and 1918 punctured that liberal optimism, though a good many remained hopeful that the end of empires and the expansion of liberal democracy would protect future generations, with research and education holding the key to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

The establishment of the League of Nations after the First World War created a structure by which governments could address their disagreements through rational negotiation and the American President Woodrow Wilson tried mightily to promote the new body. For his efforts he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919, but he was unable to persuade his own country to join.

There were many other efforts to prevent a return to war. One interesting example was **The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation** established in Paris in 1922 bringing together some of the foremost thinkers of the day, including Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Gilbert Murray, and Henri Bergson. In addition to publishing books and papers, and organizing courses and university exchanges the Committee engaged in discussions with some of the most eminent intellectuals in the world. One of the best-known exchanges is found in the letters between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud published under the title **“Why War?”.** Einstein laid out with impressive clarity the challenge as he saw it and Freud’s response is worth reviewing since, while there have been changes in the wider context, his summation still sets out the question with great clarity.

Freud started by saying, *“It is a general principle, then, that conflicts of interest between men are settled by the use of violence….domination by brute violence, or by violence supported by the intellect.”* The rule of law then comes about when several weaker individuals come together to confront a more powerful individual. Freud pointed out that this must be maintained as a stable community of interests if it is to provide for a culture of lawfulness, for such an agreement can lead to the

growth of emotional ties which strengthen the agreement and provide stability. A significant historical example of such a process was the negotiation between King John and the barons at Runnymede in June 1215, when the king was pressured to sign what became known as the Magna Carta – a document that has been the basis for much subsequent Anglo-Saxon law.

Freud went on to point out that the key to further development is the extent to which the rule of law in such an agreement applies equally to all. If it does not, this may become the cause of a return to violence, either because the powerful do not want to relinquish their power, or from dissatisfaction of the less powerful who want equality. This use of violence, or threat of violence, tends to lead to partial or temporary solutions, with a reduction in minor wars but their replacement by a few 'wars on a grand scale' – less common but more destructive.

Freud agreed with Einstein about the principle of setting up a global authority to which all would agree to submit. However, he was doubtful that it could be done in practice. It would need to have more power than the League of Nations, indeed it was Freud's view that it could only be held together by the force of violence or by strong emotional ties between its members. Unlike the religious/nationalist identifications of the past there no longer seemed to be a 'big idea' exerting a sufficient unifying authority. His views were prescient given what happened in Europe shortly afterwards.

Freud then set out in a simplified form something of his developing ideas about the Life and Death instincts – Eros and Thanatos –referring to the power and necessary interaction of Love and Hate - not of Love simply being better than Hate, but rather of the importance of a combination of idealistic and destructive impulses. He thought that it was not possible to get rid of human aggressive instincts but that we could re-deploy or transform them in the 'evolution of culture/civilization'. He spoke of the strengthening of the intellect governing the instincts, and internalizing aggression, though warned that humanity would both benefit and suffer from civilization but that *"whatever fosters the growth of civilization works at the same time against war".*

He also noted that religion and psychoanalysis used the same word – Love – to describe these attachments and quoted the commandment from both the Old and New Testaments - *"Love your neighbour as yourself."*

At the end of his message Freud said that he felt that he had given a disappointing answer to Einstein for much of what he said simply repeated Einstein's own observations, and the two factors that he believed might ultimately lead mankind along a more pacifist road were not commonly held by most people. Adopting them would require not just the dread of the consequences of a future war, but also a change in the cultural attitude. As we will see later, while Einstein, and perhaps Freud himself, may have hoped for an easier solution to the question, these are indeed the two factors (dread of a future war, and a change in the cultural attitude) that we must return to consider almost a century later.

Taking the second of Freud's two factors, what kind of change in the 'cultural attitude' might be possible to mitigate disaster and potentially the end of humanity? Alfred, Lord Tennyson was Britain's Poet Laureate during the nineteenth century imperial reign of Queen Victoria and though he was called upon to celebrate military events he wrote much about peace. In December 1899, on the brink of the new century he published in The Advocate of Peace (a publication of the American Peace Society) a section of his much longer poem **"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After".** I am very familiar with this piece because it was a favourite poem of my father and often quoted by him.

"After madness, after massacre, Jacobinism and Jacquerie,
Some diviner force to guide us through the days shall I not see?
When the schemes and all the systems, kingdoms and republics fall,
Something kindlier, higher, holier - all for each, and each for all?
All the half-brain, full-brain races led by armistice, love and truth?
All the millions filled, at length, with all the visions of my youth?
All diseases quenched by science, no man halt or deaf or blind;
Stronger ever born of weaker, larger body, lustier mind?
Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue?
I have seen her far away, for is not Earth as yet so young?

Every tiger-madness muzzled, every serpent-passion killed;
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert tilled;
Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles."

This vision of global peace was what inspired some of those imperialists who believed their nation to have the best religion, government and culture - British, French, German or other Later it was still that kind of vision that inspired those who believed that they had the best political system or philosophy and that others should grasp the opportunities of liberal democracy, or socialism, or communism or whatever political programme they espoused. However, all of these have proved insufficient to prevent war, and many even became a cause of war. Whatever structural, organizational and systemic solutions have been espoused, they have all failed to prevent war, and despite the pronouncement by Francis Fukuyama that in the post-war, liberal, rules-based international order we had finally arrived at such an evolutionary solution, we now see that too dissolving before our eyes. While some still believe in solutions that failed in the past, others hope that a new perfect system can be contrived to contain the violence of humankind, but it seems to me that looking for a system to solve the problem of war is a mistake.

Einstein realized, years before the Manhattan Project, that science and technology would take humankind along a road to the development of atomic and nuclear weapons so powerful and destructive as to be beyond imagination, and perhaps even beyond survival, and he continued to devote himself to thinking, speaking and writing about the dangers for the future of humankind. In **"The Real Problem Is in the Hearts of Men,"** an article published in The New York Times Magazine in 1946, after the detonation of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Einstein said, *"Many persons have inquired concerning a recent message of mine that 'a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels.'"* He went on, *"Past thinking and methods did not prevent world wars. Future thinking must prevent wars."*

Is there any indication of what such future thinking might look like?

After the invention of the atomic bomb and later the development of the hydrogen bomb (something that Oppenheimer who had headed the Manhattan Project opposed) the scientists at Los Alamos continued their more general research and began to realize that there were limitations to their understanding of mathematics and physics. They realized that in breaking everything down into fundamental components, they lost a sense of structure, data, and organization. These observations set the scene for the elaboration of systems theory and later, and more recently, of complexity thinking. Social scientists and psychologists also began to appreciate that addressing individuals and their functioning failed to explain many of the communal problems they were trying to understand. They could not bring about therapeutic betterment without addressing the context and relationships of individuals and their families, and societies. This approach came to be known as 'complexity thinking' and may turn out to be the 'future thinking' to which Einstein was referring. Scientific analysis until then had involved breaking things down into their more fundamental elements but also splitting knowledge and scientific activity into specialized silos. While experimentation in ever more specialized areas of knowledge has been incredibly successful as a scientific method and as an approach to technological development we may, as Einstein suggested, have come to the point where it no longer answers some of the most important questions we need to ask, and so a new approach is needed.

Complex systems exist at every level of organization but instead of seeing the commonalities we have tended to focus on the differences between subjects, levels and disciplines. In working with human beings, for example, we consider the psychology that explores individual functioning as quite separate from politics. But politics is really the psychology of 'large groups' and how we function as communities. Religion is regarded as completely separate from more scientific enterprises in human knowledge, however, if we set aside the authority structures, doctrinal and belief statements, and liturgical forms of worship in the different religions we find that fundamentally it is the way that individuals and communities engage with the complexity of our wider universe relationships. In other words, if psychology is the study of how we manage our contrary internal wishes and impulses – often loving and hating the same person at the same time (and that person may be ourselves) – and politics is how as communities we manage the

contrary wishes and impulses of our communities, both within large groups and between them – then religion is the way we manage our universe relations and obligations in the face of a degree of complexity, contradiction, and mystery beyond our understanding. Given the difficulty and complexity of Ending Wars we will require every possible understanding, and the holding together of both the simplicity and complexity of the task.

The simplicity of war may be stated as follows. Wars arise because there are human beings. Without human beings there would be no human conflict. Human beings have differing wishes, interests and desires, even within themselves, but certainly between themselves and others. When some human beings decide to impose their will on others, and those others resist, there is a conflict. If both groups are prepared to use physical force to force their will, and to resist, there is a fight, which may escalate and cause enough casualties to qualify for the description of a war.

The complexity of war arises when we ask the questions, *"Why do human beings wish to impose their will on others, and persist in this when it creates risks of harm to themselves and their community?"*

There has been a general view that the causes are greed, ambition, inequality, and the rivalry of powerful people. That is why it was believed that moving away from governance by authoritarian leaders and constructing post-imperial liberal democracies would resolve the problem. But neither the end of empires and the growth of liberal democracy, nor the creation of the League of Nations and later the United Nations have resolved the problem, and we are facing the most dangerous period in the entire existence of humanity.

My own experience in addressing conflict, at first in Ireland, and then in various parts of the world was that there were three elements that were always present in situation of intractable political violence. The first was the existence of one or more communities who felt humiliated and disrespected. The second was the perception by such communities that they were treated deeply unfairly, and this was not just about economic equality. Thirdly, peaceful democratic processes had failed to

resolve the sense of disrespect and unfairness. Only addressing these three issues could remove the danger of political violence and war.

It is also clear from research studies into the 'will to fight', that in front-line combatants it is associated not with a desire for material benefit but with the sacrifice of material concerns, including both their own lives and the well-being of their kin, for the sake of 'sacred values', with the weight given to the relative spiritual (rather than physical) formidability of themselves and their adversaries, and by the closeness, even fusion with their fellow combatants. By sacred values is meant, not necessarily religious values but values that transcend and cannot be measured by a cost-benefit analysis using socio-economic metrics – the life of my child, and the survival of my community are sacred values.

The dangers of war are then increased when individuals and groups apply their intelligence, ingenuity, and creativity to the development of tools and instruments of war to enable them better to express their anger and aggression and impose their will on others, and if necessary, eliminate them. Until 1945 the limits of our capacity to destroy our enemies and wreak havoc, ensured that after a violent conflict the world could repair itself. Since that time, there is no such reassurance.

In addition, outside the context of conflicts and without the intention of harm, human activity has increasingly impacted the systems of the natural world and damaged its capacity to repair itself. We are therefore faced with the prospect of both nuclear holocaust and environmental catastrophe. The first of these existential threats conforms to what Freud referred to as *'the consequences of a future war'* and the latter is an additional threat of which there was relatively little awareness in his times and arguably not such a degree of peril until the post-war period. Now despite the danger and clear scientific and experiential evidence, there are only modest indications of humanity taking either threat sufficiently seriously.

In addition to these two existential threats the science that brought us the benefits and threat of nuclear power, has now brought us other technological developments, in particular what we call Artificial Intelligence. Like nuclear power, AI brings huge potential benefits but also dangers, including environmental challenges, because of

the huge amounts of energy the systems consume and also because they may also lead to humanity losing control to machines.

Let me return to the diminishing peacefulness set out in the IEP reports, for in an accelerating trend over recent years, months, and even days, there have been shifts in government policies, resources and public debate away from global peace, peacebuilding and development and towards national security and defence. This transition is driven by long-term changes in the global political-economy, especially the rise of China, the defection of Russia, Israel and the United States from a rules-based world order, as well as the effects of the climate change and new technologies to which I have just referred. These trends have been stimulated by frustration with the slow progress in fulfilling the expectations of a global society characterised by liberty, equality, and fraternity, and have been accelerated most recently by the significant disruption to longstanding US and international norms and institutions since the January 2025 inauguration of President Donald Trump for his second mandate.

The behaviour of Russia, Israel and the United States has irreparably displaced core elements of the post-World War II rules-based international order such as the inviolability of national sovereignty, and has promoted the pursuit of national interests through the law of force rather than the force of law, with a blatant disregard for the accepted norms of what is permissible in the conduct of war and abandoning those responsibilities required of occupying powers. As a result, for the foreseeable future, we will have to cope with a global system where at least two of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, as well as several other regional powers and states, are choosing to operate outside the parameters of the post-war international order. Many of the states around the world, including the remaining permanent members of the UN Security Council, are still trying to uphold what is left of the multilateral system, however some, especially in the industrialised West are at the same time shifting significant resources and attention to strengthening their national defence and security capabilities in the hope of deterring potential aggression from ‘defector’ states.

There is also less policy space for ‘peace work’ today than at any point since the end of World War II. Instead, the focus seems to be on maintaining national and international security through investments in military and related defence capabilities. Policy interest and budget allocations for peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding institutions, programming and research funding, has been in sharp decline, as resources have shifted to countering hybrid threats to national security and strengthening military alliances. A young military officer in Europe today is far more likely to be training or advising Ukrainian forces in the conduct of a full-scale war with Russia or engaging in NATO or European exercises to defend their country from a Russian attack, than in being deployed as a United Nations peacekeeper.

By the end of World War II, throughout the period of the Cold War, and in the decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, maintaining international peace and security and preventing another world war was the central focus of international diplomacy and the global multilateral system. The United Nations’ **“1992 Agenda for Peace”** introduced the operational concepts of peace-making and preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Many state and civil institutions were dedicated to promoting peace, developing mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding capabilities, and investing in knowledge about how to achieve and sustain peace.

This peace ecosystem had developed as a collective response to the two terrible global conflicts of the twentieth century, and the primary aim was the prevention of another war on that scale, especially since there was now the potential for mutually assured nuclear destruction. Hitler had been defeated by a conventional war, somewhat similar in its modality if not in its technology, to the defeat of Napoleon 130 years before, but the use and availability of nuclear weapons and now AI, have radically changed the likely outcome of any global conflict in the future and further technological developments are increasingly changing the character of war. Such wars would likely end in one of three ways. Either there would be a negotiated outcome (possibly after a ceasefire that facilitated negotiations) or there would be a collapse of one side through internal disintegration, or there would be a global nuclear catastrophe.

The stated purpose of having nuclear weapons was the deterrence of any attempt to defeat the regime that possessed them, however if they believed that they faced an existential threat from outside they were likely to press the nuclear button, with catastrophic consequences. The theory behind the rules-based international order was that if all states signed up to the rules, and could engage as members of the United Nations, a large-scale war would be prevented by the universal acceptance of the rules and the availability of recognized processes of negotiation. For the seven decades following the Second World War confidence grew that while there were still regional wars, the adherence to agreed international rules meant that these smaller wars could be managed so that none would scale up to become a threat to global peace and security.

But as the memory of the world wars of the twentieth century faded, the attention and resources of states shifted. It moved from maintaining the post-war peace through the period of the Cold War, to conducting a 'global war on terror', then the priority moved to preventing and countering violent extremism, and subsequently what was termed 'stabilisation'. The more recent wars in Ukraine and Gaza represent a tipping point where the focus on national and regional ambitions by some powerful states has displaced the commitment to maintain international peace and security. What is left of the peace ecosystem, will have to adapt to significant cuts in the funding of political and economic development assistance and peacebuilding, with a pivot in government attention and public debate to defence and related national security capabilities.

Over the post-war decades there had been an increase in knowledge about the factors that influence systemic resilience and societal stability. There was substantial development of capacities in conflict analysis, mediation, and institution-building and the United Nations showed that it could deploy ceasefire verification and other peace operations. In so far as this 'peace ecosystem' remains, it is of great value as we navigate the uncertainties and the challenges of the transition to a new international arrangement. In addition, some of the capabilities and lessons, that may appear less relevant just now in the context of inter-state war and the focus on national interest, may be needed again downstream, and if this knowledge and capacity are lost our

national, regional and international security and defence systems will be less resilient.

Not that all resilience is good, nor is all disruption negative. Many national, regional and international peace and development institutions have become inefficient, and vested interests have made them resistant to change. Resilience can be understood as the capacity of a system to maintain or return to its previous stability in the face of a disruptive impact. Where the steady state is an undesirable one, its resilience makes it difficult to effect lasting change for the better.

Contrariwise, new technologies that alter the type and balance of military hardware and the conduct of war, even though they can produce terrible destruction, can make systemic shifts more possible. New systems have often been simply an addition to the armamentarium rather than a replacement of the old weapons, and so fundamental systemic change is not always the result of technological advances. However, if directed thoughtfully, wisely, and creatively, resource and other pressures, including technological advances, can not only create an opportunity and a stimulus for those who conduct wars, but may also encourage those committed to peacebuilding and development to find ways to make them more lean, agile, flexible and creative, as they are forced to adapt to the needs and realities of the twenty-first century.

Countries like Japan that frequently experience natural disasters, and the people and institutions of the ‘global south’ who have been on the periphery of the rules-based international order, may have valuable experiences that can guide more developed industrialised societies in how to manage in these times of uncertainty and insecurity and navigate a way forward to a new resilience that accepts systemic change while maintaining and even bettering the well-being of their people.

This is all important because as Einstein said, the challenges we face will not be resolved by just adapting or updating our techniques and technologies. **If past thinking and methods did not prevent world wars, future thinking must prevent wars.**

During the decades after the Second World War some other very brilliant nuclear physicists who had worked on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos and in other places began to realize that to find explanations for the new observations they were making in physics they had to move beyond linear thinking to an appreciation of how from the smallest elements up to the largest, the universe seemed to be constructed as systems of systems. The question then became how these systems related to each other. Initially it was suggested that there seemed to be a hierarchy of systems with the higher and more complex systems being affected by the lower-level structures and being vulnerable to a return to that lower level when there was some break-down. When it became apparent that the lower-level systems could also be impacted by higher-level functioning, a simple hierarchical structure was no longer convincing, and so an appreciation began to emerge that all aspects of science had to consider a greater complexity of relationships than had previously been anticipated. This complexity thinking or complexity science has opened up new ways of thinking with studies that showed how complex adaptive systems and other complex systems respond to changes in their environment, and these ideas are now being applied in many areas of science, including in the social sciences. Complexity thinking with its focus on relationships may be the 'new type of thinking' that Einstein had called for and may be particularly relevant for navigating the current period of transition in the global order.

While World War II ended with the victory of the most militarily and technologically advanced alliance, the development and use of nuclear weapons has, somewhat paradoxically, brought to an end the victory of the most powerful for since then the United States has found it increasingly difficult to win wars. The Korean War ended in a draw; the Vietnam War was a humiliating defeat, as were the wars in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. In Iraq and elsewhere the more technologically and militarily powerful states have been able to inflict terrible destruction, but the result was not a victory for liberal democracy but a chaotic failed state. Top-down efforts at control are not enough to achieve predictable outcomes and less powerful groups can often bring about the defeat of much more powerful opponents.

One example of a very powerful state being brought to the negotiating table by a terrorist organization can be seen in the Northern Ireland Peace Process that ended

centuries of violent political conflict on the island of Ireland. After decades of failed attempts at bringing peace through the implementation of liberal democratic rules and structures, a lasting peace settlement was achieved through an approach based on addressing the three key disturbed historic communal relationships - between pro-British protestant unionists and pro-Irish catholic nationalists in the north of the island; between the people of the north and the people of the south in Ireland; and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Complexity thinking is characterised by a focus on understanding relationships whether personal or social, or at a more fundamental level in physics where it has become evident that it is not the study of particles but an understanding of relations at that fundamental level that provides new insights, just as is the case at every other level, including in societal dysfunction.

Bringing about system change also seems to require appropriate interventions at different levels. Top-level political agreements tend not to survive unless there are also changes in relationships on the street, especially between the agents of the state and the population. This can be observed, for example, in changes in relations between the police and the community.

A 'theory of change' informed by complexity thinking will also appreciate the significance of 'time'. Unsatisfactory situations can survive for much longer than one might expect from a rational examination of the pressures for change, but when that change comes, it can be explosive. Dams do not burst gradually. The pressure may build up gradually and not be noticed, but when the dam bursts it does so suddenly. Political change is often the same – long delayed, and then unexpectedly dramatic.

Other key insights from complexity thinking include the appreciation that social and other complex systems make sense of and cope with uncertainty by continuously adapting to their environment. They do not do this by working everything out in advance and then implementing 'the plan', but rather through a **'learning from doing'** process that consists of iterative cycles of strategic probing, evidence-based reflection and purposeful selection/rejection based on the emerging results of each cycle through an ongoing evolutionary process. Those working on sustaining peace, maintaining security and preventing future wars, including through deterrence, need

to employ similar adaptive approaches to make sense of, cope with, and proactively navigate the uncertainties of the global transition. In other words, it is a serious mistake to think that it is possible to make out a plan that can simply be followed through in an orderly way to bring a peaceful outcome. Those working for more peaceful relations have to be prepared to try various options devised to suit the particular conflicted relations of the context. They must be prepared over a series of trials and iterations to learn from the efforts that did not bring success in this particular context, as well as those that did. It can be difficult to persuade funders to support this approach because they want the plan that is proposed to be fully worked out in advance, and then costed and carried out, with careful monitoring to ensure that the approved scheme is being followed. However rational and apparently reasonable such an approach will seem, the evidence is that in human affairs, especially complex and conflictual relations, it usually does not work.

Another insight from complexity thinking is that networked systems, that benefit from the distributed knowledge, burden sharing and resilience of the larger system, are more robust in managing shocks and setbacks. Investing in mechanisms that facilitate and sustain cooperative relationships among those with shared interests, without limiting the adaptive capacities of the parts or the whole, thus seems key to navigating this new turbulent phase of world history.

This is the opposite of the approach being taken by President Donald Trump. He has decided that he has the solution to America's problems through imposing tariffs on other countries and focussing exclusively on American interests. This engagement is transactional rather than relational. In so far as there is a relational element to his analysis it seems to be what one might characterise as 'Yalta 2.0'. In February 1945 at a meeting in Yalta, FD Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, the leaders of the USA, Britain, and the Soviet Union, decided among themselves how their spheres of influence in the post-war world would be divided up. It would seem President Trump believes that he and Presidents Putin and Xi can similarly determine how the new post-liberal dispensation can be managed. This will not work.

The Yalta Agreement took place in the aftermath of World War II, and everyone was clear about the outcome of the war and who the victors were. When the United

Nations was created later in 1945 it was open to all states, but the central role of the UN Security Council, with permanent seats for the USA, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China, recognized this political reality. In 2025 there are continuing wars and no agreement about outcome. In addition, the political reality has changed. There are increasingly powerful states, such as India, Brazil and South Africa, that will not accept decisions being made over their heads, not to mention the states of the European Union who totally reject the new order that Presidents Trump and Putin might wish to see and are uncertain how to relate with China. In other words, it is a more complex world and governing it will require an understanding of how to engage in constructive relationships and influence and manage complex systems.

Just as the system of global governance will need to take account of these changes, so too those involved in the peace ecosystem will need to see their ideas undergo significant transformation if it they are to be relevant to the new realities of 'peace and security' in the 21st century. Much of the knowledge, and many of the practices and institutions that were developed in the aftermath of the wars of the 20th century remain relevant and valuable, but they need to be adapted and woven into the new realities and emerging needs of the 21st century. This is a century that is thus far characterised by a return to great power rivalry and authoritarian governments, rather than more respectful intergovernmental relations between an increasing number of liberal democratic states. One implication of the dissolution of the liberal democratic order and the return of authoritarian governance, albeit with many more players than at the start of the twentieth century, along with accelerating uncertainty and insecurity, is that peace practice and research will need to rethink its models and understandings. Peacemakers also need to become more adaptive and more pragmatically orientated towards resilience and with a preparedness to respond to future shocks and setbacks. If there is one key characteristic of the approach to peacebuilding in this new world of disorder, it is that we should focus less on structures, regulations and organizations, and more on the disturbed historic relationships between communities.

I am convinced that the ending of individual wars and in so far as it is possible, ending war as a method of dealing with profound rivalries and deep disagreement, will not be achieved by identifying a religion, or nation, or new political philosophy or

system that can create Tennyson's *'warless world'*. If war represents a disturbance in historic relations between communities, then what would repair that breakdown? Instead of hoping or working for *"a single race, a single tongue"* as was Tennyson's dream, should we not recognize that we have different visions and values and that these will inevitably conflict, just as we have wishes in each of ourselves that clash, and which we must find a way to accommodate. Isaiah Berlin recognized not only *"that all cultures were not ultimately commensurable and that there were <u>not</u> objective ahistorical answers to the perennial questions facing us"* but rather that *"our values conflict and compete with each other".* This realization led him to develop the idea of what has been called **'value pluralism'**.

It is not the case that all values are of the same order, nor is there a simple hierarchy. Rather we must hold to our different perspectives even though they are in conflict with each other, but without violence – another example of the challenge of the difficulty of relationships. We used to say in Northern Ireland that the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was an agreement to disagree without killing each other. At an individual human level, we know that relationships are never 'sorted'. Even at a point where they are on a relatively even keel, they are vulnerable to internal disruption and external pressures. Relationships are 'organic' - fluid and constantly adapting to the changing environment. This does not mean that we cannot have trust that a relationship is stable, dependable, supportive and trustworthy, but these qualities cannot be taken for granted without constant nourishing of the relationship.

Such a recognition begins to change our perspectives about Ending War. It implies that there is no specific formula for ending wars and no structure or process that inevitably brings peace, stability, and reconciliation between enemies. So, for example, instead of being comfortable to keep repeating the French revolutionary rallying cry of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" we may have to substitute it with the much less simplistic **"Freedom, Fairness and Community".**

Freedom may be a more complex concept than liberty. Equality for all people is unachievable and therefore a false prospectus. We are all different, and if we are different and have different wishes and capacities, there cannot be equality in any

meaningful sense. That is not to say that the current obscene degree of inequality is not wholly unacceptable and destabilizing, but it is to say that the sameness that is an inevitable requirement of full equality is simply not achievable. Fraternity also suggests a positive relationship with those who already identify with each other, but when we live in a community that is not homogenous, we must develop a working relationship with those around us, whether they are friends or not. We need to work for viable community relationships with those who are very different from us and do not share our ideas about 'the good'.

It is not that we should abandon the search for agreement. It is essential that we continue to develop workable structures and negotiation processes that allow enemies to find a way to the table and away from the battlefield. My close friend and colleague, Sundeep Waslekar, has recently described in some detail an updated version of such an approach in his book, **"A World without War"** however, it seems to me, and I know from our conversations that Sundeep agrees, following the creation of the structures and processes will not bring a result without the development of positive working relationships between the participants. The best result that can be hoped for is not agreement all round, but rather a sufficient agreement to allow political institutions to function, with a sufficient disagreement that will realistically reflect the genuine cultural differences that exist.

The aim of conflict resolution is not therefore the reaching of agreement and satisfaction about all the social, political, economic, and legal options. It is rather about getting ourselves to a place as communities where those who differ deeply, can accept that disagreement without harming each other. If any particular war, or war more generally as a means of resolving differences, can be let go in this way then there can be some hope that a sufficient set of relationships can be established, and then subsequently nourished, so that the parties concerned can abandon war as a way of addressing their differences.