

The path to a world without war is possible

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When asked if wars are inevitable many people say, “Yes, we’ve always had wars and we always will.” Unfortunately, a “yes” answer to this question may be a self-fulfilling prophesy. As long as we fail to have an ethical vision of how we can get along without wars, they are likely to remain as one of our ways of attempting to “settle” disputes.

If we can imagine other means of resolving disputes, we can consider new avenues of thought and new hopes for a peaceful future. An enlarged perspective and flexibility can play important roles in eliminating many of the conflicts which in the past led to war.

Let us begin by restoring confidence in international organizations such as the United Nations. In the past thirty years, faith in the UN has been replaced by trust in military alliances such as the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) or smaller partnerships which work for the welfare of a few powerful trading nations such as those within the G8 or G20 group. These organizations are more likely to be concerned with trade, security, military strength, and economic advantage for the comparatively few nations involved than searching for a global vision which includes the welfare of the whole planet. War or extraordinary preparations for war overwhelm considerations for the environment, global warming, decreasing arable land, starvation, loss of species, pollution of our oceans, diminishing forests, scarcity of water, poor air quality, and decreased natural resources.

Religion can, and often does, play influential roles in bringing ethical perspectives to global disputes. In the best cases, moral principles of justice, fairness, and equity, are presented by enlightened leaders. Unfortunately, the best efforts of religion are sometimes diminished by internal disputes and divisions. Many wars have arisen from narrow theological perspectives and inter-religious conflict, not only throughout history, but in modern times.

Military forces sometimes play a mixed role, especially in the past. But the countries most likely to start a war are those who see themselves most likely to win a war. Smaller, poorly equipped countries are less likely to start wars even though their grievances may be greater because of hunger, lack of health care, scarcity of jobs, and fewer resources.

Ideally, political leaders should act as statesmen. Doing so enables them to envision peaceful solutions. Yet, there is much about politics that makes it a competitive enterprise. This is just as true for the aggressive side of capitalist systems as for communist systems. Each system works most effectively in its own interests when the economy is growing, when resources are plentiful, when citizens are proud of the successes of their own country, and when people experience patriotism sometimes resulting in feelings of superiority over citizens of other countries. While their own approach may appear to be working well, at least for the leaders of each political system, unfortunately it does not promote peace and understanding among nations.

The more we think of world disputes, the more the need for sound ethical principles becomes evident. To solve big problems we need to think more clearly about the needs of others. *Doctors Without Borders*, an organization that cares about global health, reports that approximately one-seventh of the world's population is starving. This is a huge problem. Its solution begins with the ethical principles of caring and sharing.

If developing countries need nuclear power for energy and medical research, asking for our cooperation seems to be a fair request. It is also a request that the co-operation of under-developed nations can support. The ethical principle of trust in our fellow humans could occur much easier if international inspection teams have access to all countries, including those of the more powerful nuclear nations.

The first step to learning to live without wars is to believe that this goal is possible. To believe that, we need an ethical vision of how the world might function at its best. That vision can begin through promoting ethical principles of truth, justice, compassion, sharing, and equity. In the words of President Obama, "War is never glorious. It's a manifestation of human folly." Peaceful solutions to international human-made problems are surely not beyond the intelligence of humankind.