War Crimes in the Nuclear Age

Richard Falk

International lawyer and activist, Richard Falk delivered the Kelly Lecture to the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation in April 2026. The lecture coincided with the expiration of Trump's first of several threats and deadlines directed at Iran. This war was initiated by Israel and the US on February 28, 2026, and bears the legal taint of a war of aggression in flagrant violation of Articles 2(4) and 51 of the

I am well aware that we are gathered in this peaceful setting at a critical moment in world history, a time of potential genocidal escalation in Iran or an unexpected and likely temporary respite brought about by a narcissistic logic of retreat. I feel I should begin my talk by commenting on this emergency situation that unexpectedly coincided almost to the minute with Donald Trump's totalizing destruction of ancient civilization as the climax of an unprovoked US war of aggression. This may turn out to be our Weimar moment. The Nobel economist, Paul Krugman, in a recent pronouncement well expresses the domestic facet of this time of crisis:

> I think our constitutional order is at risk. What we need instead is our Julius Caeser moment where the Roman would be tyrant is brutally removed from the playing field of political conflict. America and its way of life is being tested as never before. Can the citizenry resist? So far it has meekly protested, staying in line while Trump stamps on the rights of a free society.

... Since Hilal and I moved to Santa Barbara 24 years ago NAPF has been an important part of our local life in this beautiful town. Unlike most Kelly Lecturers who come to us from elsewhere I speak and express these Foundation comments as an NAPF insider. Santa Barbara has been for us a blissful bubble during these difficult years of de-democratization at home and dangerous militarized geopolitics in much of the world. I would stress that although this negativity has been feasting on steroids since Trump's re-election in 2024, it preceded his presidency.

This is an important orienting observation because it underscores the

disquieting reality that the national and global crises that agitated the peace communities here in the U.S. and elsewhere were structurally driven during the decades that preceded Trump's ascent to the White House throne. It was fully exhibited in the US complicity in the crimes against Occupied Palestine since 1967. The Democratic Party leadership remains complicitly silent about this unconditional support of Israel to this day. It was particularly evident in President Biden's determined foreign policy choices of a geopolitical war against Russia, foregoing a seemingly diplomatic compromise in reaction to the Russian provoked attack on Ukraine in 2022. This confrontation of Russia in Ukraine on international law grounds contrasts with Biden's glowing support for Israel's genocidal assault in Gaza following the Palestinian attack of October 7, 2023.

Double standards pervaded this US treatment of international law pre-Trump, dramatized by condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine while unconditionally shielding Israel from international censure at the US and even in domestic civil society. This high visibility manipulation of international law as a policy tool to be used against adversaries, while neutralizing and circumventing its relevance to the behaviour of friends, partners, and of course, itself. Law is not law if it fails to be a regulative framework that is obligatory for friends as well as enemies, as well as binding on the strong along with the weak. If so abused, international law, properly viewed, loses its authority and should be discounted as state propaganda until all states can be persuaded to treat equals equally when it comes to the application of international law. Respected interpretations of international law, even if not respected by governments or enforced by the UN, retain usefulness in civil society settings. International law is often invoked to underpin the decisions of people's tribunals or the solidarity initiatives of activists.

Despite the urgency of the moment, I reach two overarching conclusions that are drawn from the current crisis relating to the Iran War, but expose structural features of international relations:

1. Much that is deficient with respect to war/peace concerns preceded Trump.

2. In assessing Iran's nuclear program, it is crucial to realize that Israel possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons. Unlike Iran, Israel has waged a series of regional wars of aggression in addition to having committed numerous international crimes against the Palestinian people.

Against this background of concerns, a large part of my personal enchantment with NAPF, aside from my ardent support of its agenda to rid the world of nuclear weaponry, has been my close friendship with and admiration for its two inspirational presidents …

By now, many of you may be forgiven for suspecting that I am trying to evade my assigned role to speak about the future of humanity at a time of peril, and you could be right. Appreciating that NAPF has always been about more than elimination of nuclear weapons is suggested by linking its name to the 'nuclear age' rather than more narrowly to 'nuclear weapons.' Yet the focus throughout its history has been on what it would take for states to coexist in a world without nuclear weapons. I find talking globally about peace and justice a daunting challenge for two reasons further complicated by the epochal crisis of this very hour: first, the nuclear and ecological storm clouds presently hovering over the planet and our country are beset by radical unknowability when it comes to the future. This uncertainty accentuated the risks associated with nuclear weapons that could in various settings be subject to miscalculation, malice, pathology, and even accident. This sense of chaos, uncertainty, and irresponsible leadership haunts our serenity even as we gather tonight. Any sane person would be frightened by the latest of Trump's arrogant ultimatums and outlandish threats that magnify the risks of uncertainty.

Secondly, humanity is politically embodied internationally in distinct sovereign states that are recently bound together due to a shared species destiny. This destiny is multiply entangled with a series of death traps from which there is currently no realistically visible escape. Indeed there exists scant evidence of even the political will to escape such entrapments on the part of world leaders. The United States is particularly responsible for this warmongering feature of a pattern of entrapment firmly linked to militarist pathologies prevailing at this time in the West. These are being dangerously played out not only in the war of unprovoked aggression being waged against Iran, its government, and above all, against its people, but also more indirectly against the Ukrainian people.

With some sense of shame as a US citizen, I quote the words of President Trump's latest bit of notorious and incoherent foreign policy guidance posted April 4th on Truth Social, his private channel that provides the auspices for his late night rants:

> Tuesday will be Power Plant Day and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the Fuckin' Strait, you crazy bastards or you'll be living in Hell. JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.

In the spirit of taking seriously what it means to live in the nuclear age, we may wish to ask why things have gone so wrong in the United States, which was until recently a prosperous and powerful country with a proud and patriotic citizenry. We must ponder the following questions: Why do the American people and their elected representatives tolerate, and even

embolden such leadership? What can be done nationally and globally to change course before it becomes too late? Why are we so timid as a nation when it comes to invoking the 25th Amendment as a sign of our collective societal sanity? When the supreme leader of a nuclear superpower has so convincingly demonstrated mental instability and yet retains unlimited and exclusive authority to press the nuclear button, we are all responsible if we remain passive and docile citizens as the constitutional guardrails are being destroyed one by one. More dangerous than pretending to be a madman so as to bend others to our will by inducing fear, is to have a certifiable madman wielding unconstrained power in the course of governing the most powerful military state in human history.

At the same time and as earlier suggested, the collective maladies in this country should not be exclusively attributed to Trump, although his antics certainly brought them to the surface, and are inseparable from the clear and present dangers of American foreign policy as a personalized expression of Trump's grandiose vision of the US as all powerful and unrestrained by either prudence or morality.

Perhaps naively, I find shocking the establishment bipartisan branding of the Iran War at its outset as a 'war of choice' rather than what it is, an unabashed 'war of aggression.' Even the NY Times, which I grew up revering as the most trusted source of commentary on unfolding foreign policy and world news, has the reckless temerity to uncritically refer to the Iran War as 'the ultimate war of choice.' This terminology recalls the earlier lamentable use of 'war of choice' to describe the US/UK launch of the 2003 Iraq War. This unprovoked aggression ended up decapitating the leader, imposing a state-building form of regime change, and commencing a long costly and bloody occupation that gave rise to national chaos and international terrorism. The law-evading designation had been originally articulated by Richard Haass, former President of the Council for Foreign Relations and in 2003 an influential government advisor. *This re-branding of wars of aggression amounts to the US abandonment of the core norm of both the UN Charter and general international law.*

A 'war of choice' would have no place in a law-governed world order. Indeed, the whole point of the UN Charter is to remove from national sovereignty the question of choice when it comes to initiating and waging war except in the narrowly defined exception of self-defence in response to a prior armed attack. In practice this rigid legal concept of self-defence has been somewhat expanded over the years by the urgencies of major provocation or by credible evidence of aggressive intent to launch an imminent war by the state attacked. Iran is a clear victim of aggressive war. As we speak a genocidal escalation of that originating crime is being threatened and actually enacted by Israel in nearby Lebanon. Trump's

crude threats against Iran to carry out genocide if Iran dares to refuse the one-sided terms of peace contained in the US diplomatic proposal supposedly produced failure at the first round of Islamabad negotiation between the parties. These early April 'negotiations' at least as disclosed are more an explanation of the take it or leave it character of US proposals. Iranian stiff resistance to this geopolitical bullying by way of an equally determined insistence on counter-proposals, while far more reasonable and stabilizing, were predictably unacceptable to the US.

The disappointing reality is that in serious war/peace contexts involving geopolitical actors, states called 'Great Powers' until 1945, international law has *always* been a tool of foreign policy rather than a regulative framework of rules and procedures providing global governance for all political actors, strong and weak alike. This critical comment is descriptive of the role of Great Powers throughout recorded history. These states have been consistently oblivious to the evolution of international criminal law that since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals at the close of World War II. Accountability for international crime continues to be confined in global security contexts to the punishment of losers wars or to mount complaints about the criminal behaviour of rivals.

We should remember that back in 1945, the architects of the new world order privileged the winners of World War II by giving them an unrestricted right of veto that paralyzed the decisional power of the UN at its birth. This constitutionally embedded procedure feature undercut UN competence to fulfil its war prevention mission where it was most needed. It also casts a shadow of doubt over the lofty war prevention promises of the Preamble to the UN Charter. As a Mexican delegate to the drafting conference that produced the UN architecture exclaimed when asked about what had been achieved: "We have created an organization that regulates the mice, while the tigers roam freely."

Although this gigantic geopolitical loophole seems deplorable from the vantage point of the present, it might have seemed responsible statecraft at the time. It reflected a recognition that if realistic accommodations were not made to the inequality of states, the most powerful states would boycott the Organization in some way, either by not joining or withdrawing. Even without the veto, it seems highly unlikely that the UN would be able to mobilize the political will to act against geopolitical actors, unless as in the Korean War the UN could be mobilized to act more as an alliance on one side of a political encounter. This was only possible in 1950 because the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council over unresolved issues concerned with the representation of China within the UN.

This institutionalized deference to geopolitics was reinforced at the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials that imposed criminality only for

the crimes of the losers, refusing altogether to scrutinize, much less prosecute the crimes of the winners. This refusal quite possibly meant that the development of nuclear weapons was never effectively prohibited as it might have been if legal scrutiny was anchored in the behaviour of states rather than by differentiating the accountability of winners and losers.

This reflection on international practice tempts reflecting upon an intriguing counterfactual. Let us suppose that Germany, which had its own advanced nuclear program, had won the race to develop the atom bomb, and then dropped its two bombs on British cities, yet went on to lose the war. Might humanity have then been spared the pervasive traumas of the nuclear age? As it was, the liberal West, led by the United States, did not have the moral compass and political acumen it needed to give the world not only a victory over fascism and imperialism but a peace building process for the future that included the prohibition of the development, possession, threat, and use of nuclear weaponry. A poignant thought considering that the geopolitical frustrations of military superiority in relation to Iran have moved the US to climb near the top of the escalation ladder. The world teeters closer to the edge of the most frightening nuclear abyss since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

It is also a disturbing part of the picture that the original aggression toward Iran has been erased from commentary on the wars in the Middle East by the most rational and wonkish of foreign policy establishment experts. Bipartisan mainstream talk has become more and more focused on whether the US is winning or losing this asymmetric war between countries of dramatically different capabilities.

This Washington consensus has been framed more aggressively by John Bolton, a former National Security Advisor and UN diplomat who set forth an analysis of how in his words the US should act ‘to finish the job,’ which means continue the violence until victory is achieved. Devastation of Iran is not a sufficient outcome for Bolton that can be accurately claimed to be a victory in the war. Bolton ambitiously defines ‘the job,’ as he sees it, to be regime change in Tehran, which would be coupled with the collective efforts of European and Arab states to resolve forcibly the issues of the control of the Hormuz Strait, as well as a strategic pacification of all hostile forces in the region, referred to in Western propaganda as ‘Iran proxies.’ Only this combination of battlefield and political objectives would qualify in Bolton’s hawkish mind as a victorious finish to the war. Reference to ending the Iran War by devising a strategy to enable the aggressor to succeed without any reckoning of the human costs of death, trauma, and devastation is to absolutize realpolitik at the extremes of moral indifference, with the non-compliance with international law not even worth mentioning.

As a self-indulgent aside, I am proud to recall that when I was appointed as UN Special Rapporteur on Occupied Palestine back in 2008, Bolton was then US Ambassador. He described me to the media as 'a fruitcake' and my appointment 'showed what was wrong with the UN.' This attitude, rarely so openly voiced, helps explain how weak and marginal the UN is when it comes to addressing the agenda of global security: either the UN does the bidding of its main Big Brother and main funder, or it serves Satan. I don't mean to enhance my importance by recalling this anecdote of long ago, but it goes to illustrate the regressive mentality that passes for 'political realism' within the corridors of power.

At this moment it is important for us to take account of this disturbing pre-Trump background, accentuated by the threatened escalation in Iran, and further stressed by the persistence of Israeli genocidal expansionism currently being extended to southern Lebanon. If we are to avoid public gloom and private despair, it seems crucial to acknowledge all that is at stake in our search for a better future. Cornel West, a friend of many years and a long time ago a faculty colleague, recently spoke these impassioned words to help us discern the full extent of the surrounding darkness:

> We are not just facing a political crisis, we're facing a spiritual one! When greed is normalized, truth is disposable, and cruelty marketed, the soul of the nation is at stake. It's about our moral decay that rewards corruption and punishes integrity. We must call our young people back to courage, truth, justice, and love.

I would add to West's words that it is not only 'our young people' that need this spiritual awakening, but all people, and not only our people but people everywhere.

The zestful diet of American Exceptionalism no longer serves the nation or the world. The humbler pretension of identifying the destiny of the country with the wellbeing of humanity is the urgent message all Americans need to hear and heed 'with deliberate speed.'

I want also to call our attention to the warnings given by the Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney, at this year's meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Carney shocked the elite audience by his insistence that the unfolding condition of the present period of international relations is one of *rupture* rather than *transition*. Carney's remarks preceded the Iran War and were directed at the fraying tensions that were fracturing the Atlantic Alliance (essentially Europe and North America, with honorary kinship for Australia and New Zealand) that guided liberal democracies of the West throughout the Cold War and during the first three decades of its aftermath.

Carney's alarm was directed at the suddenly divisive leadership of Atlanticism by the United States as articulated by Donald Trump's narcissistic geopolitics – by which he evidently intended reference to, without naming the culprit, the Trump threats to the sovereign rights of NATO allies Canada and Denmark, and to a lesser extent, termination of material support for Ukraine on transactional grounds, as well as the demeaning insults directed at the European Union and its leading members. Carney's assessments were further validated in Europe and among several Arab leaders, by the US/Israel unilateral launch of the Iran War without consulting NATO, the EU, the UN, and even its own Congress as constitutionally required. Trump followed this imprudent unilateralism by a belated, embarrassing appeal to the NATO membership for help when Iran resisted in an effective manner not anticipated. When the lead European countries refused to be drawn into this failing war effort that was faced with a choice between cutting its losses by accepting defeat or taking a further escalating step, Trump being Trump chose an extreme form of rhetorical escalation while exhibiting his furious disappointment about the lack of European support by chastising these longtime US allies as 'cowards' and 'weak.'

Given Trump's abrasive diplomatic style and the onset of the Iran War, Carney's depiction of the world order crisis was interpreted by the media and others as a global dimension that stretched beyond the fracturing of Atlanticist unity. As well, this show of disunity in the West was viewed in many foreign capitals as far preferable to sheepish support for Trump's posture of ultimatum or annihilation. Yet Carney is ambiguous about whether his message is signalling a rupture of western domination of much of the non-Western world or is just one more rearrangement of the regional deck chairs in a European version of an inevitable Titanic-type disaster.

Supposing that a rupture of world order has occurred, what kind of modifications, if any, are likely to emerge? Carney fails to make clear, perhaps even to himself, that his concerns are limited and directed exclusively at the non-geographic ethnic groupings encompassed by the Atlanticist Alliance that has led the West since the end of World War II. Its core is the NATO membership of Europe and North America, but its writ extends to the breakaway British colonies of Australia and New Zealand, and more problematically and less civilizationally even to Russia and possibly Turkey. This dominant grouping is an entirely Western grouping of countries mostly committed to constitutional democracy and market-oriented economies, but also by less overtly acknowledged features as white ethnicity and the primacy of Christianity. Carney indirectly probably unintentionally clarified his sense of rupture by a surprising initial endorsement of the American aggression that gave rise to the Iran War, making clear that it was not the erosion of Western dominance that led him

to delimit rupture, but his concerns were directed at the *internal* fragmenting of Atlanticism. This perspective was not entirely new, reinforcing my thesis that the present world crisis is about more than oil, Zionism, Iran, Western unity, and even Trump.

If so, the question of rupture v. transition needs to be rephrased in relation to the *global* system of interacting states, regions, and civilizations. And not in the manner of Carney, which involves a rearrangement of the components forming the Western civilizational nexus.

Carney's advocated response to rupture was a split in Atlanticism between what he referred to as the 'middle powers' without specification, but seemingly composed only of Atlanticist states, acting as a balancing offset to American intra-Atlanticist pre-eminence. It was again not clear whether this was intended by Carney as a reaction to Trump's approach to Atlanticism or something deeper and more structural. In some unacknowledged way, Carney's March 2026 'Special Address' at Davos can be set off against Marco Rubio's reaffirmation of Atlanticist 'transnational unity' a month earlier at the Munich Security Conference, with a reassuring emphasis on the continuing vitality of the NATO alliance.

Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' argument (of the West against the rest) as set forth shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union was in its way a different image of 'rupture' than that of Carney. Yet, I would classify such a regional development, radical as it might be, as a rupture internal to Western dominance of a hierarchical world order that goes back at least as far as European colonialism that originated modern international relations at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The inclusion of Israel in the civilizational West is of course something new and different from the end of the geographical West.

Or if considering the world as a whole, an altered form of dominance superseding the earlier forms is epitomized by US aspirations to be 'a global state' with limited sovereignty and overt territorial claims. This confusion of world and region also is illustrated by referring to both 20th century major wars as 'world wars' rather than as 'regional or European wars.' These epic wars only felt entitled to use the word world because the region dominated the world, and they are best understood as Western rather than European because the US played a pivotal role in re-stabilizing Western dominance.

George W. Bush, more than two decades ago in 2002, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, triumphantly recognized this orientation toward civilizational governance in his cover letter introducing a crucial official document, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, in these triumphal words:

> The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise... We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.

This model of world order was an explicit recipe for regime-changing interventions throughout the Global South in the early aftermath of the Cold War when the US was behaving like 'the sole surviving superpower.' It offered a cloak of democratic, market-oriented development to the Global South under the questionable guardianship of the US, in collaboration with the Atlanticist coalition. Obviously, Bush did not envision the spectacular rise of China as challenging the historical triumphalism implicit in these 'end of history' claims that the US and its satellite liberal democracies had all the answers when it came to national governance, economic development, and global leadership.

Bush is oddly relevant for a second reason. His advocacy of and insistence upon the 2003 armed intervention in Iraq was partly publicly justified by seeking to destroy Iraq's supposed nuclear weapons program and partly as a democracy-promotion project to replace the autocratic regime of Saddam Hussein, with a West-leaning rebuilt state supposedly committed to upholding the human rights of its population.

This packaging of the Iraq War of 2003 as a 'war of choice' anticipates the Iran War in basing its primary justification on pursuing national interests through foreign policy without adhering to the constraints of international law. Approaching war as a matter of choice throws international law far under the bus, exposing a consistent refusal of the US even to pretend to be in compliance with international law when it blocks the pursuit of national strategic interests.

A telling example of this contempt for international law concerns nuclear weapons. Reading the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it would seem a forward-looking win/win arrangement for both nuclear and non-nuclear states. The non-nuclear states pledged to give up their nuclear option while the nuclear states agreed to seek good faith negotiations aiming at reaching an agreement among nuclear weapons states to embark upon a secure nuclear disarmament process. The reality of the NPT has turned out differently, to be a procedure by which the dominant nuclear states maintained their geopolitical hegemony while guarding the gate to the nuclear club admitting only selected newcomers. Israel from one point of view, and North Korea from another are the main gate-keeping failures of a purely hegemonic approach to nuclear legitimacy. At the same time, these governments *in the West* felt entitled to wage unlawful preventive

wars to turn back states accused or suspected of 'going nuclear' or even alleged to convert their peaceful nuclear programs in ways that gave them threshold capabilities that created the capability to acquire the weaponry on short notice should national security interests so require. We should all ponder if Israel and the United States would have attacked Iran if it indeed possessed a retaliatory nuclear capability.

The non-nuclear states apparently accustomed to their subordinate status, maintained over the decades a sullen silence, partially broke away to the annoyance of the Western nuclear powers by binding themselves to a Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (in force since 2021; as of end of 2025, it has 74 ratifications and 25 additional signatories). Iran is alleged by Israel and the US to have become a threshold nuclear state. Even if this were true would it be an unreasonable response to constant threats and destabilizing acts designed to undermine its political independence? Additionally, Iran has been attacked without engendering any condemnation from the international community, either at the UN or elsewhere. Criticism of this second attack on Iran within a single year came mainly from dissident voices in civil society or governments plausibly concerned with the destabilizing impacts of launching an aggressive war with harmful implications for the Middle East and beyond.

When questioned about this discrepancy between NPT and US behaviour, national security insiders retort is along the lines of an admission that ''Article VI' (the nuclear disarmament obligations) has served the country well as 'a useful fiction' or words to this effect. This confirms the role of international law in US national security policy as a useful tool to criticize adversaries, while at the same time exempting itself and shielding allies from unwanted compliance commitments. In the 2020s these double standards were displayed when the US led the effort to criminalize the 2022 Russian attack on Ukraine while shielding all efforts to criminalize Israeli genocide in Gaza, demeaning and refusing to respect several one-sided judgments of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court that were critical of Israel's policies and leaders.

The pressure to focus all advocacy and activism on averting the geopolitical and humanitarian disasters that are unquestionably imminent in the nuclear age is fully understandable. The gravity and plausibility of present apocalyptic scenarios are undeniable and are currently climaxing. The encounter between Trump's threats of extreme escalation in Iran and Iran's resolute resistance even if it means collective martyrdom for the people of the country is a dangerous encounter that could produce a major war disastrous for both parties and the wider systemic wellbeing of the entire planet.

Despite the darkness of the hour, I will conclude by offering some brief

reflections on 'the day after' whether this turns out to be a charred landscape of devastation in a country of over 90 million now terrified Iranians or somehow manages deescalation that gives the Iranian people and its neighbours an occasion for a deep sigh of relief. I am aware that there are diverse views about how best to end the Iran War. This somewhat simplistic either/or path that I am hesitatingly endorsing envisions an ending of the war in either catastrophe or peaceful resolution in what I believe most clearly poses the choices facing leaders in the United States and Iran.

My first observation along these lines reinforces the earlier point that the world order crisis of our time is *systemic*, and not only *regional*, a prelude to the end of or at minimum the gradual decline of Western multi-dimensional dominance. This suggest that we need to assess Carney's rupture/transition reality from a *global perspective*, and not one implicitly devoted to safeguarding Western geopolitical priorities.

In a conceptual shorthand we should also for our own good have the humility to learn from China, and appreciate the peace, justice, development, and ecological benefits of their basic win/win approach to international relations. China has managed to extend its reach to 150 countries that have enjoyed the mutual benefits of infrastructural developments and economic relation without significant encroachment on their political independence and territorial sovereignty. This contrasts with the Western political and economic projections of *power over* rather than *power with other* sovereign states in which the status quo is protected, however corrupt, and development is often corrupted, exploitative of native labour, and ecologically harmful. The Chinese approach has a proven record of promoting win/win policies premised on mutual benefits. This record is epitomized by the Chinese 'road and belt initiative,' a multinational project of planetary reach that neither pretends to be a charitable undertaking in the spirit of pre-Trump foreign economic assistance nor transactional in the manner of Trump's 'deals,' but by design and practice is mutually beneficial.

A second line of transformative thinking that has the potential to become a creative force in the West is to downgrade and diversify viewpoints incorporated in the current paradigm of 'political realism' that has shaped the foreign policy of leading Western governments, following the acceptance of US leadership ever since 1945.

In a final semi-autobiographical and confessional tone, I end these remarks by reasserting the relevance of poetic speech by quoting a few lines from the last stanza of Robert Frost's famous poem, 'The Road Not Taken':

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

These few lines of Frost's poem have made a great personal difference in my life dedicated to the liberation of humanity from the thraldoms of nuclearism, war, oppression, ecological irresponsibility, and Orientalism. In a more detached vein, several lost opportunities of Western diplomacy since 1945 are illustrative of Frost's arresting metaphor of roads not taken.

Peacebuilding after WW II *Roads Not Taken:*
Nuclear disarmament, a democratized UN with at least co-equal status of General Assembly; primacy of international relations to global security and peace-building; reformulating 'political realism' to take account of nuclear age imperatives – instead of 'winners choosing continuity over transformation, treating transitional intervals as a time of creative, reconstructive rupture.

After the Vietnam War *Road Not Taken:*
Refusal to adapt to the limits of military agency, rise of political nationalism in the Global South and the mobilizing influence of rights to national self-determination; again transition and adaptation prevailed rather than rupture and transformative change, resulting in deficiencies of the world order being sustained rather than transformed.

After Cold War and Soviet Collapse *Other Roads Not Taken:*
A second opportunity was wasted by victors to achieve monitored nuclear disarmament, a more empowered, democratic, politically and financially independent, law-oriented operational UN; full implementation of NPT, especially Article VI mandating good faith nuclear disarmament negotiations. Blocked by another myopic phase of winners take all, confirming the primacy of obsolete political realism, post-colonial imperial dominance via projection of US military power reinforced the paralyzing influence of the military-industrial-corporate-media complex, as exemplified by the regime-changing failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, and retention of a bloated military budget at the cost of improving the life experience of people domestically and globally.

Concluding Remarks

The US government and citizenry, if once more fortunate in avoiding catastrophe, have a new opportunity to appreciate the folly of the Iran War and of militarist geopolitics generally: this could become a second chance

to learn the lessons that should have been learned after the decade-long Vietnam War experience, including taking critical account of post-Vietnam interventions and state-building failures; truly putting America first rather than lavishly funding the US global war machine underpinned by nuclear hegemony. This means privileging in national policy the needs and wellbeing of the American people, especially those disadvantaged by the exploits of globalized *finance capitalism*. Other imperatives: responding to ecological challenges worldwide, reinstating public policy based on fact-based knowledge, quality higher education, Enlightenment worldviews, empathy for those less fortunate, hospitality toward refugees and asylum seekers, and seeking non-hierarchical dialogical relations with non-West civilizations.

Working toward global rupture in the primary sense of producing an overarching framework of *global governance* relying on a humanistic and ecological ethos, demilitarized security structures, inter-civilizational and ethnic equality, and win/win cooperative and multilateral responses to planetary challenges taking equitable account of differential wealth/income levels of countries, with benign attention to the plight of political, economic, and environmental migrants.

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