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A Better World Emerging from the Crises

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Seventy-five years ago, this August 15, World War II came to an end when General Douglas MacArthur accepted Japan’s surrender. MacArthur spoke simply of “a better world” to emerge from the carnage. In many respects a better world did emerge: The United Nations was founded, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, World Health Organization was created, along with other institutions and laws to promote peace and human dignity.

Within a decade, however, the Cold War had set in under the influence of Communist authoritarianism and political science Realism.

It lasted until 1989, when the Realists declared all-out victory. They announced the end of the two-super power rivalry and the beginning of American hegemony. There was no “peace dividend” because competition for Realists is forever. But competition requires competitors,

so the search was on immediately for a new enemy; military spending continued, and so did NATO, though founded to defend Europe from a Soviet invasion. War games and weapons research never lagged.

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has experienced hardly a year without major combat, dragging NATO and other allies along. So much for victory.

And, yet, this constructed world of competition in economics and military force is not the only one in view. Others exist. One other, with extraordinary potential, is emerging in the pandemic, the movement for Black lives, and the campaign for the environment. It is characterized by cooperation and solidarity and sees human beings as fundamentally decent and capable of compassion. Albert Camus's *The Plague* offers a brilliant contrast to the constructed reality of Realism's war of all against all, kicked off in earnest by Thomas Hobbes's book, *Leviathan* in 1651.

Rutger Bregman's *Humankind* confirms Camus's belief in compassion and the natural human inclination for solidarity and justice. It is a view shared by the architects of international law, including Hobbes's contemporary, Hugo Grotius. General principles of law from equality to good faith depend on the capacity for compassion. This alternative perspective rejects pointless, zero-sum competition and defines security as the flourishing of health, the environment, and social justice.

The coronavirus pandemic has shown the solidarity paradigm in action. Communities acting in the interest of all are succeeding. Those committed to going it alone, playing the blame game, and the like are worse off. Donald Trump's attacks on the WHO is a case in point. He is willing to undermine an organization built on cooperation for the good health of all to gain personal advantage for himself by deflecting attention away from his failures.

The us-v-them approach is also seen in militarized policing. Those who challenge the *status quo* of racism, authoritarianism, and wealth disparity are met by armored personnel carriers, automatic weapons, chemical agents, and incarceration. The pursuit of money has replaced other social values, including the rule of law, as Sarah Chayes reveals in her new book, *On Corruption in America*.

The failures of the competitionists and the successes of cooperationists should signal a major shift. Yet, the status quo, built up over centuries will be hard to budge.

Nor is this the time for a great, two-sided debate over the better world view. Such a debate would adopt the adversarial approach. Better to let the ideas speak for themselves. The ugliness of much health, economic, environment, and security policy may finally be countered in the intellectual space being opened by the multiple crises of the moment. It is a space that needs to be filled with all our creativity and resolve to prevent our crashing beyond the "planetary boundaries" within which we must live, as identified by Johan Rockström. The chance to step away from the edge needs to be taken, not discussed.

Communities seeking emancipation can move toward coordinating mutual protection from social harms, just as they coordinate a common response to the pandemic. Solidarists can draw on aesthetic philosophy, the great faiths, and transcultural humanism for inspiration and guidance. They need not descend to pitched rhetorical battles with Realists. Time and effort are better used creating and teaching the social pursuits that will transcend the demands for money and military assets.

The non-polar world can watch from relative safety as the old behemoths rumble on toward new depths of economic competition and new ways of killing. The defense establishments of the U.S., China, and Russia give no signs of relinquishing the failed paradigm. They abandon arms control treaties and search in vain for military advantage through weapons research. Instead of green technology, the competitionists invent killer robots. Instead of cyber security, their researchers find new ways to destroy through computer applications. China builds coal-fired power plants to pay for a navy bigger than the U.S.'s.

The contrast with the non-polar world could not be greater. The pandemic is leading to decoupling from hegemonic rivalry. Figures like Putin, Trump, or Xi, are not found among those committed to solidarity. And the solidarists are everywhere. Their names reach headlines without stoking cults of personality, including, Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand), Elyes Fakhfakh (Tunisia), Danny Faure (Seychelles), Pope Francis (The Roman Catholic Church), Sigrid Kaag (The Netherlands), the Dalai Lama (Tibet), Sanna Marin (Finland), Emmanuel Macron (France), Médecins sans Frontières, Angela Merkel (Germany), Moon Jae-in (South Korea), Carlos Alvarado Quesada (Costa Rica), and Leo Varadkar (Ireland).

They are succeeding against the virus and for the dignity of their communities. Meeting the challenge of COVID-19 has shown the solidarity paradigm to great advantage. The pandemic is a shared global experience, demonstrating that hyper-connectivity is not just a technological or economic reality but also the reality of the natural world in need of a new ideational construct. The global alliance to find a vaccine and share the results equitably is a model. The competitor world view of "vaccine nationalism" is its mirror opposite.

The further examples of peaceful protestors in Hong Kong or for Black lives around the world will accomplish more to secure the future than military force or economic competition. The Lebanese people, long victims of base corruption and militarism, are demanding a responsive, competent, and legitimate government that cooperates beyond the sectarian factions whose rule has paralyzed the country for years. These and other pro-democracy and equality activists could advance more quickly with better ideas to support them. Moving beyond militarist and capitalist competitive thinking, the concepts of international law and organization offer the ideas and means to a future beyond fear and greed. Solidarity activists will thrive with the emergence of green and equitable economic concepts. Those of us who are educators can teach the role of law in building cooperation and its tools of non-violent change. We have been here before as our predecessors helped envision and realize

something better after the carnage of World War II. So many international lawyers worked tirelessly, avoiding despair despite all they had suffered individually, to develop new law for a shattered world community—law for peace, for self-determination, and for human dignity.

The magnitude of what lies ahead can overwhelm. The Cold War mantra of confrontation is drilled into us. For Cold Warriors and their progeny, cooperation through international law is a fool's game. But fundamental change may now be possible in the cold glare of what competition has wrought: pandemic, rising authoritarianism, and militarized policing. And if more evidence is needed, read Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* or Lawrence Wright's *The End of October*. Both showcase the future of societies using technology for self-interested ends. Then read *Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.