

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY JAN KAVAN
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As a young student, I joined others, in what was then Czechoslovakia, who wished to promote at least a rudimentary civil society. Our common goal was to fight for basic respect of human and civil rights, for ethical rules of behavior and to pressure the Communist government to at least respect *its own* laws.

The government then responded by expelling us from universities and drafting some to the army. We helped to bring about a major liberalization that became known as the 1968 Prague Spring only to experience, nine months later, the Warsaw Pact invasion, foreign occupation, silencing of some, imprisonment of others and exiling of yet others, including myself.

During my 20 years of exile in London, I tried hard to smuggle to the opposition groups whatever they requested, from literature to duplicating machines or video-recorders. I concluded that the superpowers tactic of divide and conquer must be challenged by widespread mutual solidarity and cooperation. I, therefore, tried to link up all the different East European opposition groups, from Czechoslovak human rights group Charter 77 to Polish trade union Solidarity to Hungarian democratic opposition, East German civil rights activists, etc.

In the West I worked closely not only with the Leftist members of the British Labour Party, but primarily with groups such as the British END (European Disarmament Movement). END, unlike other single issue peace groups, advocated not only disarmament but also demilitarization of Europe and democratization of the then Soviet sphere of influence. I was instrumental in establishing a dialogue between END and Charter 77.

This greater understanding of the East European reality enabled END to support the 1985 Prague Appeal for the end of Cold War, reunification of Germany and for peace and democracy to prevail in Europe. What looked like an impossible dream began to acquire some concrete shape only 4 years later. The end of the Cold War raised many hopes, some were fulfilled, some were soon dashed, others remained an aim to struggle for.

After initial years of shortsighted but psychologically understandable anti-Communism, search for internal enemies, admiration of anything that came from the West, especially from the USA—including counter-productive shock therapy—we elected in 1998 a social democratic government and I became Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Inspired by my friend Robin Cook, a British Foreign Minister, I tried to pursue an ethical foreign policy, though it was difficult. To pursue a balanced policy was not easy when only a week after joining NATO we were confronted with a NATO decision to bomb former Yugoslavia, not only without a mandate from the UN Security Council, but at a time when ethnic cleansing was taken place in Kosovo.

At the time, we reluctantly agreed with the NATO action, though I rejected Havel's term "humanitarian bombardment," and more or less immediately started to work with my Greek

counterpart on a peace initiative designed to bring about a ceasefire and transfer decision making powers from generals to diplomats.

At the end of my term of office I was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly. The 2002 to 2003 term under Kofi Annan was the most difficult year in recent United Nations history. Because of the Iraq war, the identity of the UN and the philosophy on which it was based, were questioned.

Despite the fact that absence of democracy was likely only an excuse for the war against Iraq, it is impossible to ignore the argument that Hussein was a cruel dictator who systematically violated the human rights of Iraqi citizens. The world is undoubtedly better off without Saddam Hussein. The crucial question that remains is whether he could not have been removed by some other method. President Bush argued for a “regime change.” I have lived in an undemocratic country where we could not remove the ruling dictators alone and by using non-existent democratic means. So I do find the argument that undemocratic states which systematically abuse basic human rights open themselves up to military intervention by democratic states, in the name of protecting the fundamental human rights of sovereign citizens, to a certain extent attractive and logical. However, I have to reiterate that international law, as it exists at any given time, must always be fully respected and observed. If that is not the case, we shall find ourselves, in time, in a legal climate where only the will of the strongest prevails. Pope John Paul II pointedly argued that peace and international law are linked: to prefer laws of power to power of law will lead to injustice and lawlessness.

The current international law still recognises the 17th century Westphalian principle of sovereignty of nation states. We are told that the ideology of human rights must overrule the principle of sovereignty; that indicates that current international law, dominated by the inviolability of state sovereignty, has to be either ignored or changed.

The idea that a “regime change” is justified by a gross violation of human rights in a given country assumes the existence of a kind of universal justice. Such a system does not exist. Universal justice requires a proper institutional framework that is, for example, not consistent with US attempts to bypass the United Nations or the rejection of the International Criminal Court. Without an institutional background and the full support of the international community, even a well intentioned decision to invade and overthrow a repressive regime can resemble an old fashioned imperial decision.

There are, we are told by U.S. Freedom House, at least 49 undemocratic governments ruling a third of the world’s population. Most of the ruled are among the world’s poorest people, with little personal security and fewer human rights. In the absence of clear rules and criteria, who will decide which country is so grossly undemocratic that its government should be removed by force? Whose human rights are more important than others? Who, and how, will decide to justify a war during which many of these poor and oppressed citizens will die? Who and how should decide that Iraq situation justifies an invasion but, for example, Burmese military regime can be tolerated? I always believed that human rights are indivisible.

Following the massacre in Rwanda in 1994, and later in Srebrenica in former Yugoslavia, and especially since the 1999 “humanitarian intervention” or bombardment of Kosovo, UN diplomats were trying to square the circle between the respect for sovereignty of nation states and the need to protect people from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing or gross violation of human rights.

Finally, in 2005 UN acknowledged the principle of responsibility to protect. The principle acknowledges the primary responsibility of the state to protect its own citizens. However, if it fails to do so or is unwilling to do so, then the international community should take collective action, through the Security Council and in accordance with the UN Charter. Under such circumstances, force may be used, but only as a last resort.

However, the UN 2005 summit accepted only a very watered down version of what was proposed in two earlier UN reports (Our Shared Responsibility and In Larger Freedom). Members of the Security Council obviously wanted to preserve their right to make decisions case by case according to *their own interests*. However, it is to be welcomed that the same article also includes these words: “We stress the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law.”

This leaves hope that the General Assembly will attempt to return to some of the clear and more objective criteria that have been proposed in earlier sessions. The GA can, of course, only reflect the political will of member governments and, therefore, these governments would need to be put under pressure by their own citizens, by their own civic societies, by people who care. However, the situation is even worse. The GA can run against the veto wielding states with representatives on the Security Council, who may not wish to have their decision-making freedom restricted in any shape or form. And, therefore, without a radical reform of the SC it is difficult to imagine an effective implementation of this principle of responsibility to protect which is crucial to oppressed citizens living in undemocratic countries. I hope that reform is equally important to those living in democratic countries who believe that military actions should be multilateral and always in harmony with international law.

It seems to me that the Bush Administration underestimated the power of a precedent. It was significant that, less than three weeks after the invasion of Iraq, an Indian Foreign Minister argued, using the *preventive war* concept, that India has even better justification to attack Pakistan than US had for Iraq. In October, Putin, referring to US arguments, declared Russia’s right to intervene anywhere in the world.

While in the United Nations General Assembly, I successfully negotiated, though it took us more than six months of intensive negotiations, a resolution on the prevention of armed conflict. Among the stumbling blocs was an Arab states insistence that the resolution must condemn foreign occupation of land and US insistence that the International Control Commission (ICC- Geneva Accords) cannot be mentioned in any way. The resulting compromise, was, in my opinion, very good.

Some of the bitterest arguments concerned the definition of the roots of armed conflict. We finally agreed that they were multidimensional, but had to give up an attempt to agree on an exhaustive list. The discussions, however, highlighted: gross violation of human rights, extreme

poverty, religious or ethnic intolerance, including ethnic cleansing, xenophobia and racism, but also social exclusion, absence of basic health care and basic education, various forms of discrimination, etc. If you add the perpetually unsolvable political problems in the Middle East to this already explosive mixture, you get a dangerous cocktail filled with feelings of extreme tension, powerlessness, frustration and anger. This is a fertile soil for radical, extremist, or even terrorist behavior.

Depending, of course, on the political will of Member states, multilateral organisations such as the United Nations should be able to help to create, in time, an optimal socio-economic environment, where people would be free from fear of hunger, as well as free from fear of oppression, where the rule of law and justice—including social justice—would prevail. Within such an environment, it would be far easier to nip in the bud these individual sources of tensions and conflicts, even of wars. It is clear that humanity needs to channel feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and anger away from the use of violence and towards a constructive work for change.

The international community must find a way to resolve its struggle against terrorism toward an absolute of universal human rights. Respect for human rights and basic freedoms is an ethical imperative. To violate this imperative is an unacceptably high price for the false sense of increased security. State repression and violation of human rights closes peaceful channels and political channels for political dissent, and this definitely results, as we have seen over and over again, in the channeling feelings of injustice and alienation towards acts of extremism and violence. And thus, the current methods of struggling against terrorism achieve the very opposite of what they proclaim is the goal.

For example, the invasion of Iraq did not defeat those Islamic terrorists that Saddam Hussein would not allow to operate in his secular dictatorship but, instead, created a haven for them, and now terrorists from all over the world now have a haven in Iraq and the greater region. These terrorists are highly motivated and, I am sorry to say, have plenty of American targets at hand, as well as people of other nationalities, on whom to exercise their acts of extremism and violence.

As far as the United Nations is concerned, the real decision-making power is still vested in the Security Council, in which the permanent members have veto power. UN founders obviously wished to guarantee that no international action of either peace-making or peace-keeping nature could be authorized against the will of the most powerful states, now nuclear states, in the world. Thanks to the privileged position of these great powers, the UN, understandably, gives the impression of selectivity and inconsistency that somehow lessens its legitimating force and the force of international law. The UN and international law did little for the Chechens subjected to an onslaught by the Russians, or for the Tibetans under pressure from the Chinese and was unable to prevent Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia and Hungary or to stop US troops from invading Iraq. I can only repeat that the UN, as intergovernmental organization, *can only reflect the political will of its members*, and some members have far greater weight than the others. In the absence of political will of the major , the UN is powerless and unable to prevent such great human tragedies as occurred in 1994 in Rwanda or later in Srebrenica.

However, I do not perceive this fact as an argument against international law but rather it highlights the need for a major reform of the Security Council and, even more importantly, for a political breakthrough in some of the most important world capitals. The crucial problem for the

United Nations continues to be in how to accommodate the great power of the only superpower that emerged from the ruins of the Cold War. Some people stress that this is the first time since Roman Empire that there is a superpower which has no equal strategic opponent.

It has long been argued that a strong state is the most important guarantor of the individual's security. Much of the criticism of "the state" in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War and of the fall of communism in Europe concentrated on the oppressive and potentially warlike nature of the state. Indeed the critics called—understandably, I hasten to add—upon the development of civil society as a check upon the state.

Nevertheless it needs to be recognized that many of the so-called "new wars" are characterized by weak, failed or disintegrating state governments. Lack of reasonably strong institutions for the maintenance of security and order characterized the spiraling descent into genocidal wars in the former Yugoslavia, and should serve as a warning to those who perceive the weakening of the state as a desirable development. On the other hand, it is clear that under the conditions of a globalized marketplace, as well as in the existence of global terror movements and other security threats, the state can no longer fulfill its traditional functions, including those with regard to providing order and security. Security threats arising out of environmental degradation, global terror networks, etc., are indeed beyond the capacity of individual states to deal with. However, the central role of the state in the provision of security has not really altered all that much and is likely to continue in the future. One of the central tasks for the state is to ensure that it acts as a force for peace rather than for war, that it upholds peace, rather than becomes the main threat against it. States should be made more accountable, to both their citizens and to the international community.

This may appear to support the claim for a universal spread of democracy. In practice we need to be very careful about this, as there is little evidence that democracy can be successfully exported and enforced by international action. And democracy would have a very uncomfortable seat on rolling tanks. However, that does not preclude the support of internal democratic movements, as some of us did in 70s and 80s.

Peace movements, as vital aspects of civil society, undeniably have an important role in generating public support towards peace. The question remains as to whether the pursuit of a very narrowly defined peace (e.g., the largely negative definition of peace as absence of war) can be effective without addressing the wider questions of the causes of conflict and of war, causes such as poverty, oppression, ethnic hostility, absence of democracy and basic civil rights, and others I already mentioned. Peace movements such as END in the past recognized that the pursuit of peace under the Cold War conditions in Europe was unlikely to be successful in creating strong public support for peace without addressing the political oppression and human rights violations in the former Soviet Bloc. This is not to argue that the Cold War came to an end solely because of the successful dialogue between this Western peace movement and the dissident, human rights based movements in Eastern Europe. There were many other important factors behind the ending of the Cold War. However, the contribution of the peace movement, through its dialogue with the dissident movement, towards this outcome should not be underestimated either. This dialogue helped to change the agenda in East-West relations in Europe and affected the development of inter-state relations. The capacity of civil society

movements and organizations to open a dialogue across national boundaries, and thus contribute to the process of building up social solidarity across borders, is very important.

I have experienced the elation of victories, the disappointment of dashed hopes and expectations as well as the sadness of defeats. And I have seen in others this sadness degenerate into despair and then into withdrawal from public life and politics and into a long term passivity. To prevent such descent into despair, when confronted with the failure of peace movements to either prevent war or to bring about its successful resolution, we cannot lose sight of where the important centers of power in international relations lie, and recognize that these power centers tend not to be swayed by civil society activities. There were two million demonstrators on the streets of London demonstrating their opposition to the threat of Anglo-American war against Iraq in 2003—the largest demonstration in Britain since the late 60s. This demonstration, and similar ones held in New York and elsewhere round the world, failed to avert the catastrophe that the war in Iraq turned out to be. Peace demonstrations are, of course, not identical with a long-term peace movement. Similarly, there were thousands of people in the streets of Sarajevo demonstrating their opposition to the coming war in Bosnia and the war occurred nevertheless.

This is, of course, not a plea for passivity or for conformity, but simply a reminder that struggle to achieve peace is a political process that does not take place in a vacuum, and requires forms of contributory activity on the part of various institutions (primarily multilateral ones) and other movements. Peace is not an outcome of a particular conflict but a continuous process of addressing the multiple potential causes of violent conflicts.

Let's just look at some of the examples of contemporary international crises/conflicts from the peace-making perspective:

Iraq

It is clear that Iraq is the primary theater for the central crisis affecting many of the other international conflicts today. Not only does the continuing civil war in Iraq, and the attendant continuing resistance to the occupation, maintain a highly unstable situation in Iraq but it also significantly contributes to the instability of the whole region. The inability of the central government to establish peaceful order in Iraq and to create some degree of cooperation among the disparate components of Iraqi society works to maintain a highly inflammable situation.

Given that the occupation of Iraq also stimulates Muslim militancy across the globe and helps to feed fundamentalism and the use of terror, it is pertinent to ask whether withdrawal from Iraq, in a reasonably short time, is not a vital first step. It is unlikely that the current administration in the US is going to contemplate such an act, and so it is important to address the need to put pressure on whatever new administration will succeed it. The presidential elections in the US next year provide peace movements with an opportunity to influence through public discourse, even to demand the formulation of policies towards Iraq on the part of the leading candidates. I, for example, quite liked the statements made by Dennis Kucinich, though, of course, I do not wish to interfere into the internal affairs of the USA.

Iran

There are two significant aspects to the worsening crisis in the US-Iranian relations that threaten to spill over into another war in the Middle Eastern regions. First is the suspicion that Iran plans to acquire nuclear weapons, despite Iranian claims that they wish to use nuclear energy only for peaceful purposes. Secondly there is the Iranian involvement in the conflict in Iraq and with Shia militancy in general. It is clear that the current administration in the US has not ruled out the use of military action against Iran as a “solution” for these problems. I agree with Zbigniew Brzezinski that this would “plunge a lonely USA into a spreading and deepening quagmire lasting 20 years or more and eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.” In March 2003, USA rejected the plea of the UN arms inspector chief Hans Blix for a 30-day extension, so that the inspectors could complete their work and submit a further report which probably would have spread cold water on any claims concerning the existence of WMD on Iraqi territory. In fact, it now seems that under UN pressure Saddam Hussein destroyed these weapons much earlier. It seems to me that today the US, in order not to repeat the same mistake, should allow Mohamed ElBaradei of the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) to finish his work and submit a comprehensive report before any military measure is even considered. USA should also avoid any further isolation, give up its unilateral approach as the world’s policeman and work on this issue with multilateral organizations such as the UN.

I admit that I would like to see a public discourse in the US on the issue that would, for example, force or at least encourage the leading presidential candidates to commit themselves to pursuing a non-violent solution to the issue. The discourse on a road map to a comprehensive peace settlement needs to be resurrected.

It cannot be stressed too often that only the UN can legitimize any action against Iran. Civil society movements could, in cooperation with the UN, help to mobilize opposition to a war; for example, many European states doubt the wisdom of military action. Many experts believe that the aim of any military action against Iran is not to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons but to bring about a “regime change”. One of the US neocon representatives, Bill Kristol, admits that consequences of bombardment of Iranian nuclear sites would be “positive” as it would influence the Iranian people to reconsider “if they really want this regime.” It seems to me that we can raise successful doubts as to whether this would be the first thought that would come to the minds of Iranian people left to bury dead fellow citizens amid the destruction that would be left after a bombardment. (I am glad that when I lived in an undemocratic country, the Cold War reality would have forced everyone to think again, if they wanted to rain bombs on us in order to convince us that we should reject our own repressive government.)

Furthermore, it is clear that the assumption that Iran’s government is a form of dictatorship in which no opposition can flourish is false. That may be true about some other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, but there is a lot of evidence that the policies of the current Iranian government have generated growing opposition in the country, where, after all, elections do take place. It seems to me that faced with the threat of war, a significant section of the internal opposition would rally behind their government to defend their country. Of course, the threat of war may also provide the government with an opportunity to mobilize support toward suppression of the opposition.

The current crisis in US-Russian relations

The proposed Ballistic Missile Initiative (BMI), entailing the construction of a missile base in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic, has had a significant impact on US-Russian relations. The purpose of the base is ostensibly the defense against the growing nuclear missile threat from “rogue countries” or rather from *the* rogue country Iran, as North Korea was recently quietly dropped from the list. Whether this should justify setting up a defensive system on Russia’s doorstep is open to some serious doubts. Iran has no long range missiles and, even if it will acquire the capability in next 10 years to launch a missile against the USA, to do so would be suicidal. It seems to me that the possibility that someone might surreptitiously deliver nuclear weapons to the US in a truck or in a commercial ship or aircraft represents a far greater danger. However, what is undoubtedly the case is that the Russian government has responded to this development very negatively, perceiving it as a provocation, as a measure directed at them. This attitude is enhanced by Russia’s particular sensitivity to the developments in the former Eastern European countries, as Russia perceives these to be of particular significance to Russia, for variety of strategic, political and historical reasons. It seems to me that the US administration seriously underestimated Russian sensitivity to American bases in Eastern Europe, so close to their homeland. I was not surprised when President Putin evoked the 1962 Cuban crisis, when Soviet missiles were similarly close to US homeland and the world was on the verge of a major war. The attempts to mollify the Russians and to offer them a measure of limited cooperation came too late and offered too little. Putin’s much more assertive foreign policy that reflects Russia’s economic and military revival is an additional factor in the deepening of this conflict.

The potential of this crisis to get worse ought not to be underestimated. Given some of the recent Russian retaliatory actions, it is likely that these developments will spark off a new and dangerous arms race.

A Czech peace group called No To Bases argues that the US missile bases have another role to play than a defensive one: they provide a platform from which the USA can carry out military actions, which they would not otherwise be able to unless they could claim a credible threat of nuclear retaliation. No To Bases appeals for worldwide support against the new “politics of confrontation.” And it is interesting that many of my friends, who helped us to fight for human rights during the Cold War and against both US and Soviet missiles then (“no missile is a peace missile”) are today helping these new movements. And once again such solidarity goes across the frontiers. And again the aims are the same: peace and democracy.

Aggression of one state against another, occupation of foreign territory, ethnic cleansing, gross violation of civil and human rights or other actions by those in power that prevent people from living in dignity—this we must resist decisively and together, everywhere and all the time. The need to align this resistance with the international law reflects the interest of stability and security everywhere in the world. In a lawless jungle where only the will of the strongest prevails, it is not possible to live in dignity nor in security.

I assume that such a vision of this jungle provoked British director Stanley Kubrick to observe that powerful states often behave like gangsters while smaller states often behave like prostitutes. While I was in the UN, I frequently stressed that the UN should, by its support for international law, attempt to restrict the unlimited power of powerful states and, at the same time, support cooperation and solidarity between smaller states, to increase their role in the world, so that—in time—Kubrick’s (realpolitik) remark will ring less and less true. I am sure that there are many people in the world who share this point of view. Activities of a more *global* civil society can

help to forge an atmosphere in which more member state governments would be prepared not only to authorize the UN to take appropriate steps, but would encourage member states to internally promote adequate security measures for themselves, measures that do not threaten human rights.

However, I have no illusion that this can be done easily or quickly. The inability or unwillingness of the international community to resolve conflicts in Darfour, Chechnya, let alone in the Middle East and elsewhere, ought to tell us something about the contemporary limitations to the peace-making process.

Let me conclude by sharing with you my own dream. I would like to live in dignity, in a healthy environment, in peace and in security, in a world free of hunger, repression and wars. For this dream to become true, we have to target extreme poverty, injustice, oppression, ignorance and intolerance, exploitation and manipulation of people. I believe that individuals, groups and institutions who share the same values and convictions are a vital part of a global civil society which, in a world of infinitely better communication tools and outlets than existed during the Cold War, can play a very important role. The impact of our activities is unlikely to change the world tomorrow. Dream castles in the air are dangerous illusions. I am, however, convinced that if we are consistent and determined to persevere, then we can decisively contribute to a long drawn out process of necessary political change. This is definitely worth an all out effort by all decent people who care.

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