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The Ingredients of Prevention

The call for prevention of violence by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is both timely and essential for harmonious societies leading to a harmonious world. The reality is that the world is moving headlong in exactly the opposite direction. Before venturing into remedial pathways for giving teeth to the urgent appeal, a survey of realities on the ground indicates not only the extent and depth of atrocities, despoliation and deprivation, but tends to confirm that these have crossed all humanitarian limits. This paper is focused on measures that allow for a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, threats to the planet have been magnified to an extent that could not have been imagined. The most pressing concerns can be tabulated in order of priority as nuclear proliferation, the catastrophic decline in remaining pristine tracts around the world, demographic growth to levels well beyond the carrying capacity of the planet, pandemics, global warming, and last but not least, the technological and genetic breakthroughs that could alter the very nature and independent existence of our species. The time for despondency and throwing up one's hands is not yet upon us. In fact, answers—doable initiatives in reckonable time frames—are at hand to make a mighty effort to reverse the planetary decline and give future generations some hope for an existence that does not proximate a hell on Earth.

The Root Causes of Global Turmoil

While there are several direct and associated causes for the planetary decline, the two most significant factors are market capitalism in full cry and lack of fair global governance mechanisms that can be respected by all countries and peoples. For the foreseeable future, market capitalism is here to stay. Around the world, in countries rich and poor, the Gini coefficient, the most commonly used measure of inequality, remains for a vast majority of populations closer towards zero for the have-nots. Inclusive growth is hardly taking place in the majority of the countries, leading to a breakdown of the social cohesion of society.

At the height of the cold war the hands of the doomsday clock had come very close to midnight denoting how close humanity was to the brink. A similar condition has developed with the proliferation of nuclear powers and nuclear weapons. Going by current trends the world has taken the slow route to ultimate extinction for humankind and the vast majority of species that cohabit the earth with humans. Corrective measures that should have been in place several decades ago are still being endlessly debated in global forums without meaningful implementation.

What then is the Paradigm Shift?

While the world may have put in place mechanisms for mitigating the effects of natural calamities visited on humankind, it has yet to find ways to deal with the disasters brought on by the policies of powerful individuals, be they at the helm of affairs in some of the most powerful countries or shadowy non-State actors. The present great power policies are not conducive to peace in the world. A continuance of these policies threatens to dismantle the existing global order and plunge the world into deepening distress—for human beings as well as for the health of the planet. That being the case, the most important issue before the world is to put in place mechanisms that could act as a check on the untrammelled freedom enjoyed by world leaders, more so, where they are not in consonance with the wishes of the vast majority of the people of the planet, including, in many cases, the opinion of people within the countries that flaunt world opinion.

The starting point would be to examine as to why pressing global concerns are in limbo, many for several decades, when there is an ineluctable need for their immediate resolution. Conceivably, the most glaring lack is the lopsided, inequitable and non-representative power structure in the United Nations Security Council. Today, this is the only body that could, if it were more representative, bring about a sea change in the way critical global concerns are addressed. Before going any further, it needs to be clarified that the emphasis here is not on which country or countries should be co-opted as permanent members of the Security Council. It is the perceived absence of representation of the people of the world that is being referred to. Undeniably, on the face of it, 193 countries are members of the United Nations. But do they represent the 'people' of the world? The fact is that many country delegations at the United Nations represent only their Governments, not necessarily the aspirations or concerns of the people of their countries. In countries that do not function democratically, the party or coterie in power or the person exercising dictatorial control is represented. As for democracies, here again, the general populace often go largely unrepresented. In most cases, it is the government of the day that is represented. Perhaps not even the government, but often only the prime minister or president of the country. Hence, peoples' representation of a very large percentage of the global population is absent.

Strong Heads of State push their own agendas on the global plane without collegiate decisions and more often than not against the wishes of the people. For example, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, while the rest of the world watched in dismay, the principal players were the United States of America and a few European nations. Taking the case of important supporters of the United States President in Europe, notably the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Spain, it is estimated that nearly 80 per cent of the people of these countries were vehemently opposed to the Iraq intervention. Yet, both these countries and many others, ignoring the will of the people went right ahead. Their representatives at the United Nations were chosen by their respective prime ministers to push their own agendas, rather than speak out on behalf of their constituents at home. In the case of the United States the choice of President George W. Bush's nominee to head the United States delegation to the United Nations proved totally unacceptable to the American people. Confirmation of the Senate was not forthcoming. The United States President took advantage of a congressional recess to appoint his candidate, completely disregarding the will of Americans and their representatives on Capitol Hill. A few examples have been cited. These could be multiplied several times over.

The remedy that could transform the manner of functioning of the United Nations Security Council and conceivably lead to resolution of several intractable global problems would be the partial direct representation of the people. A proposed World Nuclear-cum-Environmental Council (WNC) would serve this purpose. This five-member body representing the people of the world would take its seat in the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member with veto rights at par with the veto rights of the P5. The manner of selection of this body so that the best minds find representation in the WNC as well as their periodic replacement has been spelled out in the book *Third Millennium Equipoise*. With this representation a major step would have been taken to meaningfully grapple with issues such as nuclear disarmament, global warming, habitat destruction, species extinction and climate change with the urgency that they deserve. The power of the people could thereby be directly exercised at the highest decision-making body in the world. The following additional aspects are considered prerequisites for any meaningful forward movement on a planetary scale:

- **Dilution of National Sovereignties** in matters relating to the health of the planet and the human race. Hereafter, the supreme national interest must yield to the supreme planetary interest. Evidently, it has to be applicable equally to the big and small as well as the strong and weak States without differentiation. The presence of WNC in the United Nations Security Council will safeguard the interest of the minnows.
- **Negotiation of Global Protocols.** Once nations have indicated their adherence to painfully negotiated global treaties such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and other treaties of a similar nature, there should be a no opting out clause in the national interest, because should there remain even residual uncertainty about certain countries, many others might feel that they too would have to keep all options open, to keep the powder dry, so to say. As an example, the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems signed between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1972 remained the anchor-pin of global military stability even after the demise of the Soviet Union, until United States President George W. Bush unilaterally abrogated it, opening the flood gates for the militarization of space.

- **Universal Declaration of No-First-Use** by all nuclear weapons powers. This is where the nearly 180-plus nations that have abjured nuclear weapons can—and should—dictate terms. It is time to call the shots.

Borrowed Time

The dominant impulse sweeping humanity today is the overwhelming desire for peace. Yet, it is peace that eludes the world. Is it not a contradiction in terms? That we are unable to mobilize this groundswell for peace can no longer be used as an excuse—by putting the blame on warmongers. Call them what you will—the military-industrial complex, capitalist lobbies, backers of terror or any other group that is bent upon waging war, instigating war or profiting from war. No matter how many groups, big or small, known and unknown, are added to this category they still do not add up to more than a fraction of one percentage point of the human mass on the planet. Movements, entities and hopefully leaders seeking global harmony must address this paradox.

The large economies pushing towards very high growth do not seem to be concerned about future generations. The world is heading towards planetary destruction here and now. China and India still want gross domestic product (GDP) increases in double digits when most of this growth is predicated on higher energy consumption levels based largely on abundant coal reserves, the burning of which is most conducive for global warming. In fact, the consequences of very high GDP growth in the case of countries with large populations are such that this high digit growth can be termed as obscene. China, as the world's largest car producer, saw its passenger car vehicle sales zoom 47.5 per cent, from 5.7 million units in 2008 to 8.4 million units in 2009, in just one year. India registered a 24.5 per cent jump in passenger car vehicle sales from 1.5 million units in 2009 to about 1.9 million units in 2010 in the domestic market. Should this trend, egged on by the rest of the world for greater consumption to underpin the global economy continue for just 10 to 15 more years, these two countries, without even counting the United States, Brazil, South Africa and Nigeria would be able to incinerate the planet by their scorching pace of growth, with attendant environmental destruction on a scale not witnessed earlier on the planet, well before the next nuclear-related mishap. It is time to take stock. Time is not running out for critical decisions that should have been in place by now; it has already run out. The human race is now running on borrowed time.

References:

For more information about *Third Millennium Equipoise*, see www.vinodsaighal.com (<http://www.vinodsaighal.com/>).

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE
