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The demise of our postwar ideals.

When he looked back much later on the first postwar years—mournfully, a little nostalgically—Arthur Miller, the noted American playwright, wrote of “the beautifully moral and rational world” that seemed in prospect after the 1945 victories. I suppose one has to be of a certain age personally to recall the hope that lent that time its special character, although one can find accounts of it easily enough in the better histories. A unity of spirit and purpose would rank among its fundamental features. Internationalism and a dedication to peaceful co-existence would, too. The atomic bombs the United States dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 had sobered all of humanity. The shared project—East and West, North and South—was to go forward differently so that the future would mark a departure from the past.

Certain institutions and certain nations stood as pillars of the world as humanity aspired it to be. One can count numerous of these, but I will name two.

The most obvious was the United Nations, whose Charter was signed by 26 nations in June 1945 and which went formally into effect the following October. The right to self-determination and “political independence,” the principles of “international peace and security, and justice,” the repudiation of any nation’s use of force against another, the expulsion of any member in violation of these principles: It is all there in the text of the Charter, which can be read [here](#).

There is also the Japan that came into being after the surrender of 15 August 1945. I do not know whether the Japanese were the first in history to disavow war as a

matter of national principle, but their commitment to pacifism has been a kind of model, an ideal all its own, since they adopted their “peace constitution” in 1947. Here was a nation that showed the world it was possible to live differently. Article 9 of the constitution, wherein Japan renounced war as a sovereign right, was something new under the sun. This was the contribution *Shin Nippon*, the New Japan, would make to that beautifully moral and rational world for which Miller ached.

The time comes, all these years later, to ache along with him. A shocking vote at the United Nations that defeats its founding purpose, a new Japanese premier who enlists her nation in the American imperium’s remilitarization of the Pacific: I suppose I may be alone in seeing any connection between these apparently disparate developments, but I read in them the not-so-gradual collapse of the postwar ideals humanity once shared. “An era can be said to end when its basic illusions are exhausted,” Miller observed in the essay he titled “[The Year It Came Apart](#).” We live in an era of exhaustion. What humanity once hoped for now seems illusory. Miller wrote of an earlier time, but as so much of what we wanted the world to be comes apart, we can count him now as prescient.

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I cannot possibly be the only one stunned and chagrined all at once by the proceedings at the United Nations on 17 November, when the Security Council adopted Resolution 2803, which incorporates the Netanyahu–Trump “peace plan” for Gaza in its entirety and, so, gives this 20–point program the legitimacy of international law. Of the Council’s 15 members, 13 voted in favor of 2803; China and Russia, permanent members of the U.N.S.C., abstained.

This is neither a peace plan nor the “Trump peace plan,” as commonly named in the mainstream press. By all available evidence the Israeli prime minister dictated the terms of this document and President Trump, thoroughly under the control of the Zionist lobbies and wealthy Zionist donors, merely put America’s name to it. It calls for a “Board of Peace” and an “International Stabilization Force.” The former has already begun to form some kind of transitional system of governance and plan the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip; the latter is to be composed of multinational troops and provide security as the Strip—meaning Hamas—is “disarmed.”

Much has been written about the Netanyahu–Trump plan. One need not be an Eric Hobsbawm or a Bertrand Russell or a Zhou Enlai to recognize this document as a grossly unlawful assertion of power by the perpetrators of genocide over the victims of their brutality. Those in the United States and the Zionist terror regime who planned and executed these past two years of atrocities would, in any kind of rational and moral world, be on the way to punishment for crimes against humanity and—if the long, unrelenting assault on Gaza can be considered a war, which we must count an “if”—their war crimes. Instead, they claim the right, by way of their post-“war” plan, to determine every aspect of the future for Gaza’s two million Palestinians.

And for these two million, Washington and Tel Aviv offer a flimsy possibility—well short of a promise or commitment—of self-determination and sovereignty at some distant point. The Netanyahu–Trump plan, made public with great flourish on 29 September, does not even mention the right of Palestinians under international law to armed opposition against an occupying power.

Just as the plan was announced, I cast it as a front in [the defining conflict of our time](#)—the confrontation of justice with power. In [a piece published in CounterPunch](#) a short time later, Jeff Cohen and Richard Eskow called it a war

crime in and of itself. This strikes me as at least a defensible position. *Mondoweiss*, *Middle East Eye*, *Al Jazeera*: These and numerous other independent and non-Western publications covered the plan well. *Strategic Culture*, citing Alfred de Zayas, an international law expert in Geneva, [called the plan an ultimatum](#) leveled at the people of Gaza and their leaders, “a whitewash of the genocide.”

We must count all such critiques thoroughly justified. But I do not think anyone leveling them these past weeks was ready for the U.N. Security Council vote that endorsed this abdominal travesty on 17 November. I certainly was not. It landed as a bombshell. Is it too much to say the world as we knew it changed that day. Reading into Resolution 2803 for its the larger implications, I do not think so.

The U.N.S.C. was rendered paralysed these past two years as the United States repeatedly vetoed one resolution after another calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. This has not been so surprising: The Americans have been subverting the U.N.’s authority in too many ways to count for too many years to count. But the institution’s place in the postwar order was never seriously at issue. The project was to restore the U.N. to its original purpose and promise. Richard Falk and Hans von Sponeck, two scholars with long experience in the Secretariat in Manhattan, published a book last year wherein they examined this prospect with technocratic precision in combination with a respect for the ideals that brought the U.N. into being. Its title goes to our point: [Liberating the United Nations: Realism and Hope](#) (Stanford, 2024).

Where lies the ground for hope now? As for realism, by any sound reading the Security Council has just voted away its own power and the legitimacy of the U.N. altogether.

A considerable period of diplomatic negotiation, proposals and counter-proposals, preceded the passage of Resolution 2803. Security Council members—five are permanent, with veto power, ten others rotate—could have voted to protect the victims of the Israeli–U.S. genocide. They could have insisted on the rights the U.N. Charter awards the Palestinians. And on the eminence of the International Court of Justice’s rulings last year, when it (provisionally) ordered Israel to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza (January 2024) and when it advanced an advisory opinion that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian Territories is illegal (July 2024). They could have cited the arrest warrants against Bibi Netanyahu and others, for war crimes and crimes against humanity, that the International Criminal Court issued a year ago this week.

Instead, Resolution 2803 effectively extends Israel’s illegal occupation and adds the United States as a co-occupant. It records that the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank have no rights. The International Stabilization Force now to be formed under 2803 will serve as a proxy for the I.D.F., whose actions remain unrestricted. The Israelis will never be held accountable for their crimes. The U.N. will never see to the justice Palestinians and the rest of us deserve.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of what happened on First Avenue and Forty–Second Street on 17 November. The U.N. Security Council voted to violate the very international statutes it is responsible for enforcing. It has been clear for a long time that the Israelis, and the Americans, reflecting their larger hegemonic ambitions, have sought to subvert the U.N., its Charter, and international law altogether. Now the Council has approved of this diabolic project. This is a turn of world-historical significance. Is there anything left of the world the U.N. was founded to realize—beautiful, moral, rational?

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Successive Japanese governments, led by the nearly uninterrupted rule of the Liberal Democratic Party—which, old saying among correspondents, is neither liberal nor democratic nor truly a party—have pressed for the repudiation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution more or less since it was promulgated in 1947. This reflects a strong nationalist streak that has lingered among Japanese rightist factions since the 1945 defeat. Noted advocates in this line include Nobusuke Kishi, who was released while awaiting trial for war crimes and who served as premier from 1957 to 1960, and Yasuhiro Nakasone, a great friend of Ronald Reagan during his premiership, 1982 to 1987.

But with the arrival in office of Shinzo Abe in 2006, the effort to overturn Japan's "no war" constitutional provision gained considerable strength, the persistent pacifist preferences of the Japanese public notwithstanding. Entrenched L.D.P. power has something to do with this; so does the incessant fear-mongering of the nation's power elites and conservative media. Abe, it is worth noting, had clear political bloodlines: He was the grandson of the infamously corrupt, infamously hawkish Kishi. In 2015, proceeding cautiously to avoid a public uproar, he, Abe, forced legislation through the Japanese Diet that expanded the role of the Self-Defense Forces, the S.D.F., beyond protection of the home islands. He provoked an uproar nonetheless.

Three years ago Fumio Kishida, among the more hopelessly subservient of Japan's very many premiers—subservient to Washington, this is—declared that Japan had reached a turning point in its postwar history and that China must be recognized as its principal "threat." Kishida's cabinet, the premier having been wined, dined, and coerced at the Biden White House, then voted to double Japan's defense spending. This was the first renovation of Japan's security posture in nine years; back then Japan had recognized the People's Republic as a "strategic partner."

To be clear about the constitutional question, I have long thought the Japanese should discard the 1947 document, as the Americans wrote it and imposed it, including Article 9, two years into the Occupation. It seemed to me that living by it encouraged a culture of irresponsibility among the Japanese and prolonged their consciousness of defeat. My argument was that Japan should shred the postwar constitution and vote on how to replace it. The basic law of the land would be theirs, even if it was a close variant of the American-written document. Their pacifism would be theirs, too, not somebody else's.

There is something else to note in this connection. While the Americans wrote and forced the peace constitution on the Japanese, with the onset of the Cold War—this the same year Japan adopted their postwar constitution—the Americans have been as persistent as the nation's conservatives and nationalists in urging Japan to rearm. This is a paradox in U.S.–Japanese relations it is important not to miss.

And so we come to Sanae Takaichi, who was elected premier last month and has in short order led Japan into a new and potentially dangerous confrontation with China. Takaichi is cut straight from the old nationalist mode and has taken over precisely where Fumio Kishida left off: She has effectively declared Japan a front-line soldier as Washington escalates its belligerence toward the mainland in the direction of what many of us think could lead to war.

A few weeks after assuming office, Takaichi was fielding questions in the Diet when an opposition legislator asked what she would consider circumstances that would warrant the deployment of S.D.F. forces. This has been a familiar question since the Article 9 restrictions have been disputed: It is intended to force a given leader to state his or her position on the constitution.

It was Takaichi's response that shocked not only Japan but also China, if not the hawkish-on-China constituencies that dominate debate in Washington. The new premier replied by saying that if China tried to take Taiwan, or blockade it, Japan would have to consider this grounds to attack. "If it involves the use of warships and the use of force," Takaichi said, "I believe this could constitute an existential threat, no matter how you look at it." It is a preposterous assertion, explained only by her desire to please the Americans.

To read the American press, Takaichi is an exciting new premier because she is Japan's first female leader, because she loved heavy metal drumming and Kawasaki motorcycles when younger, and because she carries a handbag similar to the one Margaret Thatcher favored when she was Britain's "Iron Lady" PM. When mainstream American reporting becomes this supercilious, it is a reliable sign of a development freighted with significance such that it must be obscured from the reading public.

China missed none of the implications in Takaichi's one-sentence assertion: She has committed Japan to Washington's incessant campaign of provocations on the Taiwan question, and if Beijing has a red line brighter than any other, it is its rightful claim to sovereignty to what has been, since the 1949 revolution, a breakaway province. Beijing is now embarked on a tear of anti-Japanese reprisals that threaten lasting damage to the Sino-Japanese relationship.

There is another, more historic casualty of Takaichi's reckless threat to deploy the Japanese military against the mainland. It is the ideal for which Japan has long stood. Conservatives and nationalists, as I have pencil-skipped here, have been trying to inch Japan back from its pacifism ever since this became the national ethos nearly 80 years ago. In the few weeks since she took office, Takaichi has taken these attacks on this honorable principle beyond the point of no return.

We have to read Takaichi's opening lines against the institutional momentum of recent past. In the fiscal year ending next 31 March Japan will spend ¥8.7 trillion, \$55 billion, on its military, an increase of 9.4 per cent and a record. This follows an increase of 26 per cent in FY 2024 and is part of a five-year plan to bring defense spending up to Western standards as a percentage of G.D.P. There is no turning back from this. Takaichi has merely announce the future, and what has distinguished Japan and its people as they emerged from World War II will not be part of it.

Who can say when humanity lost its way, and all sight of its best aspirations these past decades. The "why" of it—America's pursuit of global hegemony—is plain. It has been a gradual descent; it has a history, as the two measures of this I suggest indicate. The U.N.'s surrender to hegemonic power, Japan's abandonment of the place it took—unique? nearly unique?—in the postwar world: There are other cases. The Europeans, another obvious example and the topic of another commentary, now eschew diplomacy altogether in favor of an obsession with war—for the sake of war it sometimes seems.

How shall we find our way now to something rational and moral and beautiful?
How now do we find hope in any combination with realism?

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