

# **BREXIT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL ORDER**

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## **Introduction**

It is an honour to be with you. I will start with a brief analysis of the roots of the current situation which underpins the challenges to global and regional peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> C. I will close with a brief comment about how we as peace researchers and civil society practitioners might respond.

In his famous book *Man, The State and War*, Kenneth Waltz suggested that the causes of wars lie at three levels – the individual, the state and the international system. We can see the sources of potential contemporary conflicts at all three levels. In response peace building must take place at the individual, local, regional and global levels. Inner and the outer peace building are interdependent, and the synergies between different peace building initiatives often become clear only after the event – as was the case in the transformations which ended the Cold War.

## **The state of the world**

The British referendum on Europe, the election of Trump and the rise of populism in Europe and nationalism in Asia all suggest a process of fragmentation in the world order whose roots go back beyond last year. These recent developments are not the cause of the current situation, but they have made it worse. Even before the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a growth in inequality, a decline in political trust, a weakening of international order, and continuing degradation of the natural environment.

It would need a a multi-volume book (and an author like Manuel Castells) to analyse in depth all the interlocking and underlying historical trends, but let me just briefly pick out a few important developments in economics, political systems and the international order which led to the present juncture. Some time before 2008 we reached the zenith of the neoliberal economic model, which had undermined the previous era of Keynesian economics, welfare governance, and the social compacts between industry and trade unions based on sustained economic growth. The neoliberal model accelerated global trade, reduced taxes and state intervention, weakened trade unions, led to casualisation of the workforce and created a gig economy. Companies became increasingly global, supply chains lengthened across national borders, new economic models, such as free distribution of digital products, spawned hugely profitable companies, sometimes around single apps with little of the traditional capital stock and

workforce. Rapid globalisation brought rising prosperity to some groups and regions, and decline to others. An increasingly financialised and credit-leveraged economy went from boom to bust, leading to austerity, slow growth, further decline in traditional areas, a faster rise in inequality, and a growing gulf between those with more social and geographical mobility, and those rooted in places, skills and industries that could not move with the times. The low-tax economy gutted welfare and redistribution, and competition for position and status in a low growth era become sharper, leading to resentments, alienation, disempowerment and stereotyping of outsiders and migrants which new populist politicians exploited.

This economic process was linked to changes in the social basis of political parties, a weakening of traditional social democratic parties, a widespread collapse of trust in the political class, combined with changes in the nature of public discourse brought on by changing media patterns and increasing political polarisation.

Related to these economic and political processes has been the developments in international order since the end of the Cold War. The potential peace dividend was squandered, Western leaders asserted the superiority of the liberal democratic order and made little attempt to include others on equal terms. Thus, while the Western security community continued to provide the largest area of peaceful international interactions between its members, it was flawed as a potential global order by the hegemony of its strongest powers, its insistence on its own norms, its exclusiveness and its tight linking of security with military security concepts and the neoliberal economic model. The 1990s and 2000s thus saw the development of what Kivimaki calls 'international protection wars' including interventions in Libya and Iraq, carried out without the authorisation of the UN. Meanwhile Russia and China both promoted different visions of international order, emphasising national sovereignty and non-interference, while also seeking to exert hegemony in their own near abroad. Thus, just when global governance was needed more than ever to cope with intensifying global challenges, the opportunity to construct an agreed basis for international order was lost.

Brexit, Trump, populism and nationalism have brought these developments to a dangerous turn. Brexit should perhaps not be put in quite the same category as Trump and the more extremist European populist movements. After all, Britain had been a reluctant partner in the EU for many years, and support for Brexit came from different parts of the political spectrum. Moreover, the EU project was already in difficulties before Brexit. It faced stresses created by the single currency between the richer core economies and the peripheral economies. It had made unsuccessful efforts in constitutional reform, which were rejected by the voters. It faced competing pressures between widening and deepening the Union. There was a sense of disconnect between a Europhile elite and national voters. This was thrown into sharp relief by the migration crisis. The EU's democratic deficit has come home to roost, with a vengeance. Now, for the first time, the EU has started to contract rather than to expand, and the protracted negotiations ahead over the terms of Brexit, will surely distract both

Britain and its EU partners from other matters. This does not augur well for a leading European role in global governance, peacebuilding, development and climate change.

Within Britain, whether or not the UK disintegrates in the long term, Brexit has widened the gulf between Westminster and the devolved administrations, and it may threaten the stability of the Northern Ireland peace agreement. It has emboldened a minority of opinion which rejects multiculturalism and favours xenophobic policies. In foreign policy terms, it is still unclear where Britain will go – offering traditional support to US policies even when they are Trump's, or sticking closer to its European partners even when Britain is no longer a member. Meanwhile Mr Trump has challenged many of the pillars on which the western security community has been based, and it is no longer clear that the US will exercise its traditional leadership role in the western order, or that this role would be accepted. Instead Trump proposes to pursue narrowly conceived US interests and xenophobic policies. And of course, if Marie Le Pen comes to power in France, the tide in favour of protectionism and against the EU will seem overwhelming. There is a risk that protectionist policies and competitive devaluations combined with weak regulation of banks and fresh growth in credit could then unleash a second financial crash, which governments would have few resources to contain.

These changes in domestic politics in the West and in the international order come at a time when four unresolved conflicts have the potential to turn into interstate conflicts. These are:

- (1) The Ukraine crisis, which has poisoned relations between Russia and the West, with both sides moving military forces into advanced positions in eastern Europe
- (2) The crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons
- (3) the disputes over island chains in the South and East China Seas, and the Taiwan issue
- (4) the dynamic between Islamophobia in the West and terrorism, and the ongoing wars in the Middle East, which have come close to putting Western and Russian forces on opposite sides.

These issues urgently require peacefully negotiated solutions but the will and capacity in the international system to handle them peacefully appears to be diminishing.

### **Responding to the dynamics of fear and unpredictability**

Against this background, what are the priorities for peace researchers and civil society organizations concerned with peace and justice?

I think we need to shift our focus a little from the concern with deadly violence in intra-state conflicts in the developing countries, to these new developments which threaten inter-state violence involving developed countries.

We need to give a high priority to developing better international capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management. For example, is there scope for some equivalent of the OSCE, a combination of common security principles and conflict prevention capacity, that could offer an anticipatory role in east Asian crises?

As citizens and representatives of NGOs, is there scope for recreating the type of social movements, exemplified by the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, which did so much to help with bringing the Cold War to an end? At a time when our European citizenship is threatened with abolition, can we re-assert regional and even global identities, and embark on a cosmopolitan citizens movement, embracing alternative globalist and humanitarian values? Can we find new frameworks for global governance that respect our common humanity?

At the same time, we have to develop new economic models, alternative living practices and new forms of association, that can begin to address the sources of structural violence and embed sustainable development in our day to day lives.

## **Conclusion**

These questions are of course not yet in the form of a strategy. As the former British foreign secretary David Milliband has said, 'Good politics starts with empathy, proceeds with analysis, then sets out values and establishes the vision, before getting to the nitty-gritty of policy solutions.'

We can only take initiatives in our own particular spheres, but we can be confident that well judged initiatives work synergistically and seed processes of change. Individual, social, regional and global initiatives are all important. We have to work at all these levels.

Transformative change is needed in Britain, Europe and across the world. We need to find ways to reconnect people to each other and to common institutions, and to realise our common destiny, even if these institutions and the scope for working together seems to be under threat. We need a new effort to construct mutual understanding between people in developed countries who have come to support drastically different futures.

We need to find ways of exercising 'alobha' – detachment from craving for particular goals, and a willingness to find new outcomes that meet different aspirations in plural and flexible ways; 'amoha' – clear-sightedness, and clear communication, unclouded by fears and negative perceptions of the other; 'adosa' – freedom from resentment, and compassion and respect for others. When this applies to a conflict in which one is now personally involved, we can begin to see how difficult it is, and yet how important, to apply Buddhist principles of conflict transformation.