



From caveman to greenland: The hunger that never left

From 1945 to today, consumption drives war beneath peace globally.

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The president of the United States has spoken of “taking back” the Panama Canal, absorbing Greenland, and turning Canada into the fifty-first state. In recent public remarks, he has pressed for negotiations on Greenland and warned that refusal will carry consequences. He has threatened tariffs on NATO allies: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium. Commentators are alarmed. They speak of a new wave of imperialism, of liberal values collapsing, of international norms under siege. They assume something has changed.

But in reality, nothing has changed. We are the same people we were in 1945, when the curtains fell on the various theatres of war. That war happened because the various powers wanted to consume. Japan wanted the resources of Southeast Asia and China. The United States coveted those same resources. Germany resented that Britain controlled so many colonies while Germany had virtually none after Versailles. These nations had little against each other in principle. Their consumptive interests simply collided, and collision among the hungry always ends in blood.

Then they looked at the millions of dead, spread across continents, across fronts, across civilian streets and battlefields. And they made a calculation: no point killing each other when there is enough to go around. Live and let live. This accommodation we call liberalism. This pause we remember as peace.

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But what was the human being doing during this so-called peace? Look at the unit, not the system. Per capita consumption, carbon emissions, and animal kills kept rising continuously, even through the decades we remember as stable. The superficial learning from World War II remained: do not collide with each other, pile more on your own plate, but buy it from the market rather than snatching it from the neighbour. This was not a transformation. This was traffic management among predators. The hunger never diminished. Only the hunting strategy changed.



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But this arrangement had to reach its limit, because the earth cannot endlessly give. Much of what we call libertarian values are about consuming as much as you wish. Much of what we call liberal values are about distributing the consumption, letting everybody have at least a minimum level. Neither can continue beyond a point.

The United States has immense energy reserves and still it needs Venezuela. It has one of the largest nuclear arsenals ever assembled and still it needs Greenland. And still i ^ s: we are insecure, Russia and China will dominate us, therefore we need missile defence, therefore we need Greenland. This is the militarily most powerful country on the planet presenting an argument for imperial expansion dressed as victimhood: we are so weak that we must swallow our neighbours.

What we call a period of peace was nothing but a blink. Compared to the sixty or eighty years of a human life, it looks long. But in the larger arc of history, it was nothing. Inwardly, we have continued to be exactly the same as we were on the day of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Have we changed internally? If not, how can there be peace?

The United Nations appeared like a benevolent peacemaker for a few decades. There were relatively fewer wars. But even as wars became fewer, the nuclear stockpile kept amassing. The rise in nuclear weapons, the rise in carbon dioxide, the rise in animal deaths, the rise in forests cleared, the rise in species extinct: all these curves run dramatically parallel and exponential. All these have to do with the core of man, which remained ignorant and violent.

Now that the planet has reached the edge of its capacity, these countries will clash again. They are clashing for everything: land, water, fuel, space, and food. So do not let the fifties, sixties, or eighties deceive you, or even the two decades of the current century. They were relatively peaceful compared to the first half of the last century, but only superficially so. We did not have our ears to the ground, so we failed to hear the rumblings. And now we act surprised. How did this president suddenly appear?

There is nothing sudden in this. He represents the average American. Were the average American truly done with him, he would not command the sustained public support he does. He is not some dictator. This is his second term, his third election. The public knows very well what he stands for, and yet he was voted to power. Because that is the way the public has always been.

In fact, if something should surprise us, it is the peace that we experienced. Where did that peace come from, when we continued to be aggressive and violent? This is what we refuse to admit: no peace treaty will work, no League of Nations will work, no United Nations will work, no G7 or G20 will work, no global summit will work, as long as the human being remains who he is.

Why do we not admit this? Because if we do, our power structures crumble. Our parliaments, our legislatures, even our religious structures will be seen as worthless. We will have to step into a totally new world. That is why we are afraid. That is why we will never admit that none of this institutional gymnastics is going to succeed. The moment we accept that, the structures show up as totally needless, and that scares us.

The human being is the same. Therefore, Hiroshima and Nagasaki can be revisited, in new forms, at new scales, with new justifications. Do not mistake the effect for the cause. This president or that president, this prime minister or that prime minister: they are not the cause. They are the product of the societies we have built. They are duly elected representatives. They are us. Why blame the president? The president is simply a common American.

Was the common American terribly sad in August 1945? Was the common German terribly sad at the Holocaust? Was the common Brit terribly guilty at colonial massacres? China suffered more casualties in World War II than any European nation except the USSR. The Rape of Nanking, the years of brutal occupation. Were the Japanese ever feeling guilty? Only recently was there some word of reconciliation. Even in India, do the so-called upper castes acknowledge what has happened to the so-called lower castes?

That is who we are, the homo sapiens. We are not really kind people at the core; let us not flatter ourselves. We do not grieve what we do to others. We grieve only what is done to us.

What do we mean by friendship? The US-Canada border was supposed to be the most peaceful in the world, and now one side speaks of gobbling the entire country alive. World War II itself started with great friendship between Germany and the USSR: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in which the two powers agreed to devour Eastern Europe between them. Stalin sat paralysed for a week when Hitler betrayed the pact. Such was the quality of international relations then, and such is the quality now.

The entire world bent over backwards to please Hitler in the second half of the 1930s. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, even British athletes were instructed to offer the Hitler salute so that Hitler would not get annoyed. Just as the world accommodated Hitler then, the world accommodates today whoever commands the largest economy and the largest arsenal. We are much, much the same.

History repeating itself does not mean that 2025 is a repeat of 1939. It means that 1939 was a repeat of something older, and that was a repeat of something older still, all the way back

to the caveman trying to occupy the neighbour's cave. Call it Darwinian if you want. call it evolutionary: the pattern is older than our flags and grander than our excuses. ^

Do we remember Tibet? When Saddam Hussein captured Kuwait, he was hunted down and executed. The world united in outrage. But how many speak of Tibet? The calculus has never been ethical. Tibet has ice, not oil. That is who we are: might is right.

The problem is not in the structures of thought or governance. The problem is within. And our social systems, our education systems, do nothing to turn the individual inward.

And that is why the only durable intervention is not another treaty, not another summit, not another rearrangement of institutions, but the inward turning of the one who wants to consume without end. Until that centre is questioned, politics will keep changing its slogans while staying loyal to the same appetite.

- *Acharya Prashant is a teacher, author, and founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation. He offers an original articulation of non-dual philosophy, grounded in self-enquiry and applied to contemporary life.*

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