

COMMENT

# Great power, little responsibility

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**The way the international system is structured poses enormous obstacles to peace**

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE  
21 SEPTEMBER 2020

# SHAPING PEACE TOGETHER



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SHAPING  
OUR  
FUTURE

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The **International Day of Peace** (September 21) is an occasion for deep reflection about the prevalence of war, violence and insecurity in many parts of the world. In the last calendar year, eight countries – Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Somalia, Iraq, Mexico and Libya – suffered at least 1,000 deaths each (mainly civilians) through militarised attacks and battles, according to the World Population Review. If one includes the Maghreb and Sahel regions of North and West Africa, over 25 countries are being ravaged by deadly wars today. To boot, 79.5 million were displaced at the end of 2019, due to armed conflicts, persecution and other reasons, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

The way the present international system is structured poses enormous obstacles to peace. The countries that are escalating violence are predominantly the great powers who have military and economic might.

## **Fuelling instability**

On paper, the U.S., Russia and China uphold peace and stability as the permanent members of the UN Security Council. But in practice, they fuel instability or have a finger in the pie of most ongoing wars.

For example, the tragedy in Yemen, which the UN has declared as the world's worst humanitarian disaster, is the outcome of indiscriminate attacks by the U.S.-backed coalition of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose geopolitical goal is to counterbalance Iran. Yet, undaunted by the moral burden, the Donald Trump administration is eagerly selling copious quantities of lethal weapons to its Gulf allies in the name of their 'security'.

War is at once a geopolitical game and big business. This holds true not only for the U.S. but also Russia. Libya's descent into chaos is the product of the active involvement of mercenaries and weapons pumped in by Russia and the U.S.-allied Gulf Arab monarchies to push back Turkey's influence.

Like the calamity in Syria, Yemen and Libya are victims of the conduct of great powers who arm and finance regional actors to prey upon weak states for counterbalancing rivals and sustaining profits of their military industrial complexes.

Not to be left behind the U.S. and Russia, China has catapulted into the ranks of top sellers of weapons. Chinese small arms enable ethnic violence and extreme human rights abuses from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo to Pakistan and Myanmar.

China also aims to tighten its grip over developing countries through 'internal security' aid, a code for technological tools of domestic surveillance and repression, which in turn build up

hegemonic expansionism against its neighbours and its ‘new Cold War’ with the U.S. have significantly raised risks of military clashes in Asia.

This year, the UN Secretary General is campaigning for a “global ceasefire” so that everyone’s attention shifts to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN as well as regional organisations like the African Union and the European Union are trying to negotiate cessation of hostilities in various war zones.

## The core problem

But targeted micro-level diplomatic initiatives cannot ameliorate the underlying macro-level problem of great powers and their allies acting with brazen impunity. On the International Day of Peace, we should diagnose the core problem – the unjust structure which privileges great powers and permits their ghastly machinations – and challenge it.

Altering the structure and nature of world politics is not child’s play. But we must strive for it. Remember that if one fire is doused in Afghanistan through a peace process, 10 more fires can be lit as long as the global ‘system’ that reproduces violence and aggression is in place.

Intellectuals, social movements and responsible states should prioritise struggling for an equitable world order. Nothing less will suffice to silence the guns.

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