

Building a culture and movement for peace and security

Saturday 19 August 2006, by [VANAIAK Achin](#) (Date first published: 6 September 2004).

Paper presented at the fifth Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), "People's Action for Human Security", which took place in Hanoi (Vietnam) from 6th to 9th September 2004. This contribution was given at the opening session of Cluster 1 on "Peace and Security".

1. Building a culture and movement for peace and security? What does this mean? First let us be clear about the kind of peace we are not working for. We are not for:

(i) peace by equilibrium, i.e the kind provided by that favourite mechanism of conventional politicians-balance of power.

(ii) peace by imperial order.

(iii) peace by hegemony.

(iv) peace by terror, i.e., the kind supposedly provided by nuclear weapons.

The security and peace we want is the one that will endure and be strongest because it is the peace of

satisfaction and contentment, because it is connected to the achievement of social justice in all its various forms. Struggling for peace and security today means struggling for precisely this kind of positive change related to the achievement of justice and dignity for all.

2. While we can all agree in general terms on what we want and on what we are against - namely those forces that today and in the future seek to deny justice and contentment for all. We have much greater difficulty in agreeing on what forms that future of a more just world order should take. But we can at least start from where we agree. Today our two interconnected struggles are against neoliberal economic globalisation and against Empire; both driven above all by the United States, its government, its corporate elite, and its other dominant classes.

There is a remarkable paradox confronting us today - never before in centuries is there less likelihood of major powers or countries militarily fighting each other, and yet the levels of arms production, trade and preparations are greater than ever before and continue to rise! We can only understand why this is so if we recognize that the US is not just acting to establish its own informal global empire, above all through military means and threats, but that it is also the principal, indeed only, candidate for playing the role of global enforcer/protector of a worldwide system of capitalism that must routinely and safely reproduce itself and expand on just such a global scale. The US cannot

play this role alone. It must do so through a system of multiple states because this system of multiple states is going to be around for a long time and will accompany the process of worldwide expansion and consolidation of capitalist social relations. But the US remains the main propellant, which also seeks to gain advantages at the expense of other countries, creating its own tensions and problems

within this system of multiple states.

The US has prepared its hardware for this global imperial role through its structure of military bases (over 730 in over 140 countries); the incredible level of expenditure on defence (its 2005 budget will be over \$500 billion or more than the rest of the world together); its militarization-nuclearization efforts in the new theatre of space itself; its effort to establish a global imperial army headed by Washington but involving forces from as many other countries as possible. Hence the military and also political-diplomatic value of creating a “coalition of the willing”, better named as a ‘coalition of the bribed and coerced’. As far as the software of justifications for its imperialist behaviour is concerned, in the last ten to twelve years the US has promoted five ideological banners behind which

it can disguise its Empire project - the need for humanitarian intervention, the danger of certain countries having weapons of mass destruction, the war ‘on global terrorism’, the need sometimes for ‘regime change’, and the need to replace ‘failed states’.

3. We want to defeat this imperialist project. What does this require us to do? It means:

(i) Opposing participation of our governments in this US-led, constructed, and promoted ‘Coalition’, and therefore all forms of military collaboration between our governments and the US.

(ii) Identifying the crucial weak spots of the Empire project of the US and building international solidarity campaigns to intervene at precisely these points. Today, the crucible of world politics is Iraq and the stakes of US political defeat or victory there has the most profound implications for the next decade and more. Iraq today is what Vietnam represented for the anti-imperialist struggle in the decade from the mid-sixties to the midseventies.

Apart from Iraq, there is the issue of Palestine where the heroic struggle of the Palestinians - the most remarkable and strongest national-popular liberation movement anywhere in the world - creates an enduring weak spot and problem for US and Israel.

(iii) Opposing the neoliberal policies of governments and international institutions, for neoliberalism represents the most pernicious, rapacious and brutal form of capitalism that is ravaging the environment and greatly worsening the inequalities of income, wealth and power among peoples and countries.

4. But now come the problems and differences. We are not all agreed on what we want in place of existing structures or even what our precise positive goals are. We are against nuclear arms and want

a world free of such weapons. But what about militarization and other kinds of military equipment — do we want to get rid of them completely? We may no longer believe a single world government is possible or feasible but are we reconciled to ‘having a states system plus’, i.e., a world basically of sovereign nation-states but with some additional importance given to international law and its application and enforcement? Or do we want much more such as radical forms of global governance with much greater erosion of national sovereignty and rights and powers to cope with our global problems and needs? What about capitalism? Do we believe there can be a stable and humane form of capitalism other than neoliberalism? Can there be a green capitalism respectful of the world environment? Or do we have to be even more radical and think of alternatives to capitalism’s inexorable accumulation drives and compulsions, and therefore work for its replacement - what used to be called the socialist alternative?

5. Building a culture and movement for peace and security does not mean that we have to have all

the answers to these problems. It does, however, mean at least two other things

- a) building a

process where we raise relevant questions, explore the complex connections between peace and justice, set up structures of education and research into matters of peace, truly human security and justice; and

- b) practicing a progressive politics to defeat our enemies. So let us understand clearly what political struggle and therefore progressive political activity is all about. Political struggle is not, above all, a contest of arms or of economic strength. It is above all, a contest of wills where one side seeks to impose its will on the other. But what has sometimes happened in modern times, during the last century for example, is that there has been mass political struggle by the side far weaker in arms and economic strength but armed with an indomitable and unshakable will on a mass

scale to resist no matter what; to never give in, and therefore, to keep alive the prospect that the other

side will eventually be politically defeated because it cannot succeed in imposing its will. That is what we must do today and tomorrow. And progressive politics is about creating, sustaining, deepening, spreading and expressing in a myriad ways - culturally, socially, politically, organizationally, sometimes militarily — that indomitable will to resist injustice and oppression no matter what. When enough people do this for a long enough time then indeed they can defeat the forces opposed to them no matter how militarily or economically strong their opponents seem to be.

From decolonization to Vietnam to the fall of Apartheid to the overthrow of Stalinist regimes to so many other successful examples of mass struggle, this is what the last century has so often been about. We can create a better and more just world. It is up to us and to our collective will and determination.

P.S.

* Political commentator and former journalist, Achin Vanaik is currently Visiting Lecturer at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He co-founded the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament (MIND), and South Asians Against Nukes. Some of his books: "New Nukes: India, Pakistan, and Global Disarmament" (2000); "South Asia on a Short Fuse (Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament" (2001); "Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization (2004).