

PETRU ȘTEȚCU

BOOK SYNOPSIS

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

**A Warning to the World's Decision-Makers for the Peace of Humanity
and the Salvation of the Planet**

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BOOK SYNOPSIS
PEACE OR THE LAST WAR
A Manifesto Summary Addressed to the World's Decision-Makers and
Peoples for the Prevention of Global Conflagration, the Avoidance of
Nuclear Catastrophe, and the Salvation of the Earth
AN ADDRESS TO THE CONSCIENCE OF THE WORLD

This manifesto summary was not written to spread panic, to turn the anxieties of the present into an inevitable prophecy of destruction, or to add yet another alarmist voice to the chorus of warnings which, when repeated without measure and without solutions, risk exhausting society and driving it toward resignation, but rather to state, with lucidity, responsibility, and respect for truth, that humanity is approaching one of those rare historical crossroads at which numerous conflicts, rivalries, frustrations, geopolitical ambitions, technological revolutions, economic imbalances, ecological crises, and forms of armament may converge at a single critical point, while apparently limited decisions, taken separately by governments each pursuing what it considers to be its own legitimate interest, may together form the mechanism of a catastrophe that no one has openly desired, but that no one has possessed the wisdom, courage, or power to stop in time.

The world is not in danger merely because wars exist, for wars have unfortunately accompanied the whole of human history, but above all because today's conflicts can no longer be easily isolated from one another, since states are connected through military alliances, energy dependencies, supply chains, financial systems, digital infrastructures, communications networks, satellites, food markets, and strategic technologies that transform every blow struck in one region into a shock wave transmitted almost instantaneously to other continents; thus, an incident in a maritime strait may cause energy prices to rise throughout the world, the obstruction of a trade route may reduce distant populations' access to food and fertilizer, the depletion of weapons stocks in one theater of operations may weaken deterrence in another, while a cyber confrontation, an algorithmic error, a false report, or a wrongly attributed attack may compel leaders to make, within only a few minutes, decisions whose consequences will be measured

not in political terms, territories, or strategic advantages, but in millions of human lives.

The greatest danger does not necessarily arise from the existence of a leader who consciously intends to unleash a world war, for history shows that great conflagrations have not always resulted from a single, rigorous plan of general destruction, but from the possibility that numerous leaders, generals, strategists, and officials, each acting within a logic of security, prestige, alliance obligations, or political survival, may successively adopt measures they regard as prudent, defensive, and proportionate, yet which the adversary perceives as provocations, offensive preparations, or signs of weakness to be exploited; under such conditions, the mobilization of one army prompts the mobilization of another, the strengthening of one alliance draws the rival camp closer together, the deployment of a defensive weapon is interpreted as preparation for attack, and each reaction justifies the next, until diplomacy runs out of time, leaders become prisoners of their own public promises, and frightened, manipulated societies come to regard war not only as inevitable, but even as necessary.

In Eastern Europe, the war in Ukraine keeps open the possibility of a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO states; in the Persian Gulf, the rivalry among the United States, Iran, and the regional powers may affect one of the world's principal energy arteries; in Yemen and the Red Sea, attacks on maritime transport may disrupt trade between Europe and Asia; in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, state actors and armed organizations are entangled in a network of conflicts, reprisals, and loyalties capable of rapidly expanding any incident; around Taiwan, competition between China and the United States may transform a historical and territorial dispute into a confrontation for strategic predominance in the Indo-Pacific; and on the Korean Peninsula, the accumulation of weapons, political tensions, and military cooperation among states opposed to the Western order add yet another mechanism of escalation to a world that possesses ever more weapons, but ever fewer instruments of trust, communication, and control.

If these flashpoints began to influence one another, the world would face not merely several regional wars taking place at the same time, but the emergence of a single system of confrontation in which the success or failure of a power in one area would immediately alter the balance of forces in another, prompting the redirection of troops, ammunition, industrial resources, intelligence, and diplomatic support, while this gradual fusion could divide the planet into hostile blocs, transform civilian economies into war economies, militarize scientific research, outer space, artificial intelligence, and digital infrastructure, and cause the distinction between the front line and ordinary life to disappear, because hospitals, ports, banks, power stations, water networks, communications systems, and even the citizen's mind, subjected to propaganda and manipulation, would become components of the same global battlefield.

More serious than all of this is the fact that humanity has entered an era in which war between the great powers can no longer be conceived according to the models of the past, because the existing nuclear arsenals possess the capacity to destroy the fundamental centers of civilization, while the combination of atomic weapons with hypersonic missiles, automated warning systems, artificial intelligence, cyberattacks, and ever-shorter decision times may create circumstances in which a technical error, a mistaken interpretation, or a reaction triggered under the pressure of fear can no longer be corrected before retaliation becomes inevitable; the expression "limited nuclear war," sometimes used with disturbing ease, conceals the reality that no power can guarantee an end to escalation after the first detonation, no border can stop radiation, no army can defend the planet's climate, and no military victory can compensate for the destruction of cities, the collapse of agriculture, environmental contamination, the disorganization of healthcare systems, and the onset of a famine that could affect people living thousands of kilometers from the place of confrontation.

A twenty-first-century world war would destroy not only people, armies, and cities, but would strike a planet already weakened by climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, soil degradation, resource depletion, and growing inequality, so that fires, bombardment, the destruction of industrial facilities,

water contamination, the interruption of agricultural production, and the displacement of millions of people would be added to drought, extreme weather events, and food insecurity, creating a planetary crisis in which war would accelerate environmental degradation, while environmental degradation would fuel new wars; from this perspective, peace can no longer be understood merely as the temporary absence of fighting among states, but must be recognized as an indispensable condition for protecting the climate, food, water, health, economic development, and the continuity of civilized life on Earth.

This book is addressed, first and foremost, to heads of state and government, parliamentarians, diplomats, military commanders, leaders of international organizations, and those who control the world's great economic and technological resources, because their power cannot be measured solely by their capacity to mobilize armies, impose sanctions, control markets, or influence public opinion, but above all by their ability to prevent force from becoming destruction; the truly powerful leader is not the one who pushes the world to the edge of the abyss in order to prove an absence of fear, but the one who, without abandoning justice, security, or the dignity of his or her own people, finds a path by which the adversary can step back without humiliation, negotiations can begin without dialogue being mistaken for surrender, and peace can be achieved without sacrificing the weak in the name of the interests of the powerful.

The message is also addressed, however, to the scientists who design the technologies of the future, the corporate leaders who can transform discoveries into instruments of life or death, the journalists who can illuminate the truth or amplify hatred, the intellectuals and teachers who shape the conscience of generations, the religious leaders who must reject every sacred justification of violence, and ordinary citizens, because no great conflagration can be prepared without the acceptance, silence, fear, or manipulation of societies; humanity needs a culture of peace that is not reduced to ceremonial declarations, but teaches people to recognize propaganda, reject the dehumanization of the adversary, demand transparency in military decisions, and understand that love of one's

neighbor, the commandment not to kill, the defense of human dignity, and the blessing bestowed upon peacemakers are not merely religious formulas or ideals without practical force, but principles without which power, intelligence, and technological progress may turn against humankind.

The warning of this work is severe, but its conclusion must not be despair, because world war is not a law of nature, and the destruction of humanity is not inscribed in the destiny of the planet, but can result only from human decisions which, precisely because they are human, can be stopped, revised, and replaced; diplomacy, international law, historical memory, science, solidarity, global organizations, civil society, and moral conscience still exist, as does the possibility of restoring channels of communication, limiting armaments, establishing rules for artificial intelligence and cyberwarfare, protecting civilian infrastructure, negotiating solutions to conflicts, and building common security, but all of these will become effective only if the world's leaders understand that peace is neither a pause granted between two wars nor a sign of weakness, but the highest expression of lucidity, courage, and political responsibility.

The question addressed to the world, therefore, is not who might win the next great war, who would control certain territories, straits, resources, or centers of power, or which alliance might outlast its adversary, but whether, after all the accumulated means of destruction had been used, there would still be a world in which victory could be celebrated, functioning cities, ecosystems capable of sustaining life, institutions able to preserve humanity's memory, and children to whom the result of that victory could be entrusted; before this question, all geopolitical pride becomes insignificant, all borders become fragile, and all peoples discover that they are united by the same fundamental vulnerability, for although we have different ideologies, different histories, different faiths, and often opposing interests, we have only one planet, one human civilization, and one future that we can save or lose together.

PART I
THE WORLD AT THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS
How Regional Conflicts Can Become a Single World War

The world stands at the edge of the abyss not because world war has already been decided in a secret chamber, not because the great powers necessarily seek one another's destruction, and not because diplomacy and reason have definitively lost all influence over the course of history, but because the international system has become so tense, fragmented, militarized, and interdependent that a growing number of regional conflicts, treated by each government as separate problems, may begin to feed one another, consume the same strategic resources, activate alliance obligations, alter power relations in distant regions, and create, through the accumulation of apparently prudent decisions, a situation that no leader can control alone; the abyss should therefore be understood not as a precise place into which humanity will inevitably fall on a known date, but as a succession of political, military, economic, technological, and psychological thresholds, each of which appears tolerable when considered in isolation, but which, crossed one after another, may carry the world beyond the point at which retreat remains possible without enormous losses, public humiliation, or the risk that regimes will collapse.

Great wars are rarely born at the moment when the first weapon is used, because the fire that becomes visible on the battlefield is preceded by years of mistrust, propaganda, armament, treaty violations, sanctions, military exercises, threats, territorial claims, indirect interventions, and the demonization of the adversary, and when this material and psychological preparation reaches maturity, an incident that might once have been settled through negotiation becomes the evidence each camp has awaited to confirm that the enemy understands only the language of force; leaders fear appearing weak, military commanders warn that failing to use an immediate advantage may cause it to be lost, the press demands rapid reactions, citizens are convinced that national honor has been attacked, allies demand solidarity, and diplomats, who would need time, discretion, and the freedom to formulate compromises, are compelled to work in a climate in which every

concession is presented as capitulation, every hesitation as cowardice, and every attempt to understand the adversary as treason.

The comparison with 1914 must be used cautiously, because today's world is not identical to Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, while the existence of the United Nations, the experience of two world wars, international institutions, economic integration, instant communications, and the memory of nuclear catastrophe provide instruments of prevention that did not then exist in the same form, yet the underlying mechanism of escalation remains disturbingly similar: states arm themselves in order to feel more secure, adversaries perceive that armament as a threat, alliances are strengthened to deter aggression, the opposing camp responds through partnerships of its own, military plans are developed for situations regarded as improbable, but their very existence creates pressure for rapid implementation when a crisis erupts, and decisions that appear rational from the perspective of each capital produce, in combination, an irrational outcome for humanity as a whole.

The first major flashpoint of this possible conflagration is the war in Ukraine, which is not merely a territorial conflict or simply a confrontation between two states, but a point of intersection among Russia's security, Ukraine's right to sovereignty, the credibility of Western commitments, the future of NATO, the European order, and the principle that borders may not be changed by force, while its continuation magnifies year after year the risk that the distinction between supporting an attacked state and participating directly in the war will become increasingly difficult to establish; as weapons grow more sophisticated and their striking range expands, instructors, specialists, intelligence systems, and military infrastructures belonging to several states contribute to the conduct of operations, while the possibility of a misdirected strike, a border incident, or a mistaken interpretation acquires a gravity that reassuring political statements cannot eliminate, which is why the United Nations' repeated calls for the protection of civilians and the resumption of diplomatic efforts are not mere protocol formulas, but warnings that the war cannot be allowed to evolve according to the logic of weapons alone.

The danger in Europe increases especially when the conflict in Ukraine is viewed in connection with other theaters of operations, because the United States and its allies do not possess unlimited resources, while air-defense systems, precision munitions, missiles, satellites, logistical capacities, surveillance assets, and political attention must be divided among Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific; if a major crisis erupted in the Persian Gulf or around Taiwan, every military system redirected toward a new front would alter the balance on the European front, and the Russian leadership might interpret this dispersal as an opportunity to intensify pressure, while European governments, fearing the weakening of Ukraine and the approach of danger toward their own borders, might gradually move from supplying weapons to involvement through specialized units, air defense, intelligence, logistics, and ultimately troops, without either side ever having made, on a single day, an explicit decision to begin a war between Russia and NATO.

The second major center of danger lies in the Persian Gulf, where rivalry among Iran, the United States, Israel, and the regional powers intersects with the world's energy security, Iran's nuclear program, the activity of externally supported organizations, and freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, while the explosive character of this region arises precisely from the overlap of problems that cannot be resolved exclusively through military superiority; a power may destroy facilities, occupy positions, intercept missiles, and strike bases, but it cannot eliminate through bombardment geography, historical memory, political identities, mutual fear, and accumulated resentment, just as it cannot guarantee that strikes against nuclear or energy targets will not produce radiological, economic, and political effects beyond the territory of the attacked state, which is why the International Atomic Energy Agency has called for maximum restraint, warned of the possible consequences of attacks on nuclear facilities, and stated unequivocally that a lasting solution must be sought at the table of diplomacy and negotiation.

Any major disruption of the Strait of Hormuz would immediately extend beyond the limits of the regional confrontation, because energy flows upon which economies thousands of kilometers away depend pass through this

area, while a reduction in oil and gas transport would cause prices to rise, affect industrial production, air and land transport, agriculture, food prices, and currency stability, and transform military confrontation into a global social crisis; energy-dependent states would be compelled to protect their supplies, the great naval powers would face pressure to intervene in order to maintain navigation, alternative producers would acquire greater influence, and populations already affected by inflation and inequality might react through protest, political instability, and radicalization, demonstrating that, in an interdependent world, a seemingly distant strait may become the point at which military security, the global economy, and the daily survival of millions of families converge; the analysis published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development concerning disruptions in Hormuz emphasizes precisely the transmission of these effects beyond the region.

The third flashpoint, closely connected to Iran, extends along Yemen, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Red Sea, where a prolonged internal conflict, regional rivalries, and the ability of armed actors to attack merchant ships have transformed one of the principal routes connecting Asia and Europe into a space of insecurity, while vessels diverted around Africa travel longer distances, consume more fuel, pay higher insurance costs, and delay deliveries, so that the effects of an attack occurring in a restricted area appear in the prices paid by citizens of countries that are not participating in the conflict; the persistence of this vulnerability has also been documented by UNCTAD assessments of maritime transport, which showed that vessels continued to avoid the Suez Canal, confirming that modern war can strike the world economy without conquering a single kilometer of territory outside the region in which it is being waged.

The fourth flashpoint encompasses Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, a space in which the sovereignty of states is frequently weakened by the presence of armed formations, external interventions, sectarian rivalries, fragile borders, and the legacy of wars that ended not through genuine reconciliation, but were instead suspended, fragmented, or transformed; here, a strike against one group may be interpreted as an attack on the state that supports it, an operation presented as a defensive measure may provoke reprisals against the

bases of another power, and those reprisals may draw in allies, so that responsibility becomes unclear, the front shifts rapidly, and the distinction among internal war, regional conflict, and international confrontation gradually disappears, leaving the civilian population trapped among actors each of whom justifies its own violence through the violence that preceded it.

The fifth flashpoint lies around Taiwan and the western Pacific, where China's interest in achieving territorial unification meets the will of the island's population to preserve its own political system, the interest of the United States in preventing a forcible alteration of the regional balance, the security concerns of Japan and Australia, and the economic importance of maritime routes and Taiwan's technology industry; a blockade, a naval incident, an aerial collision, a military exercise interpreted as preparation for invasion, or a political statement perceived as a unilateral alteration of the existing status could trigger a succession of reactions in which every party claimed to be responding to a provocation, while the mobilization of American naval and air forces in the Pacific would reduce Washington's ability to act in Europe and the Middle East, giving other powers the impression that a temporary window had opened in which they might achieve their objectives before the adversary recovered its freedom of action.

At this point the true fusion of conflicts begins, because Russia would have an interest in seeing the United States occupied in the Middle East and the Pacific, China would benefit from the consumption of American and European resources in other regions, Iran might consider that pressure applied to energy and trade routes would force its adversaries to disperse their forces, North Korea might provide military support in exchange for technology, resources, and political protection, and Western states would be compelled simultaneously to support European security, freedom of navigation, the protection of allies in the Middle East, and the balance of the Indo-Pacific; what would represent, for each actor, a limited opportunity to improve its position would produce, at the level of the international system, a spiral of actions and reactions that would unite the fronts without requiring the signature of a formal treaty among all participating states.

A contemporary world war would not therefore have to resemble the classical image of two perfectly defined alliances formally declaring war upon one another on a given day and mobilizing all their forces under unified commands, because it could emerge as a network of conflicts that remain legally separate but are strategically interdependent, in which some states fight directly, others supply weapons, intelligence, and funding, some attack digital infrastructure without acknowledging their involvement, while others employ sanctions, blockades, sabotage, commercial pressure, information campaigns, and proxy organizations, and populations may continue for a time to believe that their countries are not truly at war even though the economy, industry, technology, administration, and information space have already been mobilized for confrontation.

Alliances, created to deter aggression and protect states that could not defend themselves alone, may in such circumstances become both instruments of stability and mechanisms for transmitting conflict, because a member state may feel compelled to respond in order to preserve the credibility of the entire alliance even when the initial incident is ambiguous, while the adversary, fearing that delayed reaction will reduce its prospects, may decide to strike preemptively at bases, ports, radar systems, or logistics centers situated on the territory of other states; war thus expands not only through the ambition of conquest, but also through fear of abandonment, the obligation of solidarity, the pressure of reputation, and the belief that a rapid reaction will prevent a greater evil, although that very reaction may produce the evil it claims to prevent.

To these mechanisms is added the psychological fragility of political leadership in times of crisis, because decision-makers do not act in an abstract space of perfect rationality, but are influenced by pride, exhaustion, incomplete information, internal rivalries, approaching elections, pressure from generals, fear of losing power, the memory of historical humiliations, and the desire not to be accused of yielding; a leader who has publicly promised total victory restricts his or her own freedom to negotiate, a government that has portrayed the adversary as absolute evil can no longer easily explain to citizens why it is speaking with that adversary, and a society

bombarded daily with images of atrocities may come to demand unlimited retaliation without continuing to distinguish between the guilt of the opposing leadership and the existence of ordinary people living under its authority.

Information warfare may accelerate this loss of control, since a falsified recording, an image removed from context, a message attributed to a leader, or a cyberattack prematurely presented as the act of a particular state may provoke reactions before the truth is established, while artificial intelligence, which can analyze data and support threat detection, can at the same time multiply disinformation, automate propaganda, and provide decision-makers with recommendations constructed from incomplete or manipulated information; if verification time is reduced while the pressure to respond increases, technological advantage no longer guarantees wisdom, but may allow an error to travel faster than human beings can correct it.

Above all these risks stands the nuclear threat, because every confrontation involving nuclear powers, directly or indirectly, contains the possibility that a conventional defeat, a threat to the political regime, the destruction of strategic capabilities, or the misinterpretation of an attack may cause alert levels to be raised and options previously considered unthinkable to be prepared; SIPRI's 2026 assessment shows that states are relying increasingly upon nuclear weapons as instruments of national power, while the risks of miscalculation and escalation are rising, transparency is declining, strategic dialogue is weakening, and arsenals are being modernized, which means that humanity is not moving away from the edge of the nuclear abyss, but risks becoming dangerously accustomed to its proximity.

The moment at which several conflicts become a single war will not necessarily be announced through a solemn declaration and may not be easily identified even by the historians of the future, because fusion can occur gradually, when weapons intended for one front are moved to another, when states begin to strike the economic infrastructure of their adversary's supporters, when sanctions are accompanied by blockades, when cyberattacks interrupt civilian services, when the armed forces of rival alliances confront one another directly, even if only briefly, and when leaders

conclude that they can no longer afford defeat in one region without compromising their position in all the others; from that moment, negotiating each crisis separately becomes increasingly difficult, because every concession made in one theater is assessed according to its possible effects upon global credibility, while local peace is sacrificed to the maintenance of a general position of strength.

Precisely for this reason, preventing conflagration must begin before wars fuse, through the preservation of direct channels between adversaries, the deliberate separation of regional issues, the establishment of clear limits upon allied intervention, the protection of trade routes without transforming that protection into a pretext for regime change, the resumption of arms-control negotiations, the creation of protocols for cyber, air, and maritime incidents, and acceptance of the principle that no state can achieve absolute security in a world in which all others feel threatened; lasting peace can be built neither through the unconditional capitulation of the weak, nor through the humiliation of the powerful, nor through the freezing of injustices, but through a difficult process in which the rights of peoples, the sovereignty of states, legitimate security needs, the protection of civilians, and responsibility for violations of law are placed within a negotiated, verifiable, and internationally supported order.

The world has not yet inevitably passed the point of no return, but every day on which the language of force replaces dialogue, every treaty abandoned, every diplomatic channel closed, every new weapon presented as the supreme guarantee of safety, and every people taught to see another people as a faceless enemy without rights brings us closer to that moment, which is why true realism does not consist in resigned preparation for the last war, but in understanding that no great power will be able to administer alone the ruins of an interdependent world, that no alliance will be able to defend the climate and ecosystems against the effects of a planetary conflagration, and that no victory will retain meaning if its price is the destruction of the place in which victors and vanquished were meant to live together.

PART II
THE FIVE FIRES OF THE WORLD
Ukraine, the Persian Gulf, Yemen and the Red Sea, the Greater Middle
East, and Taiwan

The five fires of the world must not be regarded as identical conflicts: they do not have the same historical origins, they do not involve the same forms of responsibility, and they cannot be resolved through the mechanical application of a single diplomatic formula, yet they are united by the fact that they are unfolding in regions of exceptional strategic importance, directly or indirectly involve major military powers, activate alliances, consume shared resources, influence energy and commercial markets, and can transform a local incident into an international crisis; analyzing the risk of their expansion does not mean relativizing international law, confusing the aggressor with the victim, or abandoning the obligation to defend threatened populations, but lucidly understanding that justice, if pursued by means that destroy the world in which it ought to be restored, risks being left without people, institutions, and societies capable of benefiting from it.

The First Fire: Ukraine and the Future of European Security

The war in Ukraine represents one of the most serious ruptures in the contemporary European order, because it has returned invasion, occupation, the destruction of cities, the displacement of populations, attacks on infrastructure, and indirect confrontation among states possessing the planet's largest nuclear arsenals to the center of the continent, and its gravity cannot be reduced to a dispute between spheres of influence, since at the heart of the conflict lies the right of a people to preserve its political existence, sovereignty, territory, and freedom to determine its own orientation; at the same time, preventing the expansion of the war requires an understanding of the strategic perceptions that influence the conduct of all parties, without allowing understanding to become justification, because Russia invokes its own security, its historical relationship with the post-Soviet space, and the approach of NATO infrastructure, Ukraine regards its very national survival

as being endangered, while Western states view Ukrainian resistance as a defense of the principle that borders may not be changed by force.

The danger that this war will become a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO increases as its duration blurs the boundaries between support and participation, because the provision of ammunition and equipment is followed by training, maintenance, intelligence, technological coordination, and the use of systems with an ever-longer range, while each stage is justified by the need to respond to the preceding escalation, so that the parties may gradually advance toward an involvement they would have rejected had it been proposed in its entirety at the outset; a missile that accidentally strikes the territory of a NATO member state, an aircraft shot down in a disputed area, an attack on logistics infrastructure beyond the Ukrainian border, the sabotage of a submarine cable, or the mistaken attribution of a cyberattack may create pressure for a rapid response, and leaders could find themselves making decisions under the force of emotion and political credibility before the true circumstances have been clarified.

The prolongation of the war also produces a profound transformation in the societies involved, since human losses, destruction, mobilization, propaganda, sanctions, and economic sacrifices gradually reinforce the conviction that any compromise would render the suffering already endured meaningless, while each camp becomes a prisoner of its own recent past, believing that it must continue fighting in order to justify the lives lost; this moral mechanism is among the most dangerous, because it turns the memory of victims, which ought to compel an end to suffering, into an argument for its continuation, while political objectives become ever more ambitious and the space for an acceptable solution contracts until peace appears possible only through the total capitulation of one of the parties.

A lasting peace cannot be built merely by imposing silence upon the guns if that leaves the causes of the conflict untouched, the territorial issue unresolved, populations unprotected, and the future of European security undefined, but neither can peace be postponed until the achievement of a perfect victory whose costs may become incompatible with the survival of

those in whose name the war is being waged; a gradual process is required, beginning with the protection of civilian infrastructure, exchanges of prisoners, the return of deported persons, the establishment of safety zones, the reduction of long-range attacks, the creation of international verification mechanisms, and the opening of negotiations on security guarantees, without confusing an armistice with a final settlement and without turning negotiations into automatic legitimization of the accomplished fact. In June 2026, United Nations representatives warned that the war had reached its deadliest point in four years and called for a ceasefire and a return to diplomacy, demonstrating that a political solution can no longer be treated as a concession to be granted after military victory, but must be regarded as the instrument through which the victory of death over both peoples is to be prevented.

The Second Fire: The Persian Gulf, Iran, and the Struggle for Energy and Security

The Persian Gulf concentrates within a relatively confined space some of the most dangerous tensions in the world, because it is here that rivalry between Iran and the United States, confrontation between Iran and Israel, competition for influence among the regional powers, the question of Iran's nuclear program, the presence of foreign military bases, the activity of externally supported armed formations, and the world economy's dependence upon the circulation of energy resources converge, so that any conflict risks immediately exceeding the objectives declared by its participants; an operation presented as a limited strike against a facility, retaliation against a base, an attack upon an oil tanker, or the temporary closure of a strait may invite reprisals, and those reprisals may transform an action intended to restore deterrence into a war for the survival of regimes and the reconfiguration of the entire Middle East.

The Strait of Hormuz is not merely a geographical point between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, but one of the arteries through which the energy required for the operation of the world economy flows, and its closure, mining, obstruction, or transformation into a permanently unsafe space would

produce effects transmitted from ports to refineries, from refineries to industry and transport, from the price of fuel to agriculture and food, and from there to living standards and the political stability of states; in such a situation, governments with no direct connection to the origins of the conflict would come under pressure to participate in protecting navigation, importing states would compete for resources, prices would rise, fragile economies would bear the heaviest consequences, and social discontent could produce further crises, demonstrating that a war in the Persian Gulf would not remain a Gulf war, but would enter the daily life of the entire world through costs, shortages, and instability.

The nuclear question magnifies all the other dangers, because mistrust between Iran and its adversaries creates a logic in which each party believes that time is working against it, leading to the temptation of a preemptive strike, the dispersal and protection of facilities, reduced transparency, and weakened inspections, although international verification is precisely the means through which fears may be transformed into manageable information; attacking nuclear facilities does not guarantee the elimination of knowledge, materials, and technical capabilities, but may lead to accelerated clandestine programs, withdrawal from non-proliferation commitments, the emergence of radiological risks, and the beginning of a regional race in which other states will conclude that their own security depends upon acquiring the same capability.

The solution can consist neither in accepting proliferation nor in endlessly repeating military strikes and sanctions that fail to produce a verifiable agreement, but in a regional architecture built gradually through the return of inspectors, the definition of technical limits, guarantees for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, the phased and reversible lifting of sanctions in exchange for compliance with obligations, the establishment of non-aggression mechanisms, and the inclusion of all regional powers in a dialogue on Gulf security; the International Atomic Energy Agency has emphasized that attacks upon nuclear facilities may have serious consequences beyond national borders and that ensuring long-term non-proliferation requires a return to diplomacy and negotiations, reaffirming a truth that leaders have no

right to ignore: force may postpone a nuclear problem, but only a rigorous, verifiable, and respected agreement can resolve it.

The Third Fire: Yemen, the Red Sea, and the Commercial Gateway Between Continents

The war in Yemen demonstrates how easily an internal confrontation fueled by political, religious, tribal, and regional divisions can become an instrument of rivalry among greater powers, while behind strategic expressions concerning influence, maritime security, and regional balance lies a population that has endured years of bombardment, famine, epidemics, displacement, and the collapse of public services; the conflict cannot be understood solely by reference to the Houthi movement, the internationally recognized government, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or the United States, because any solution aimed exclusively at the military neutralization of one actor, without rebuilding the state, establishing a legitimate distribution of power, integrating communities, and restoring the economy, will reproduce the conditions that made the emergence and consolidation of armed formations possible.

Yemen's global importance arises from its proximity to Bab el-Mandeb, the strait connecting the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean, while the capacity to threaten commercial vessels transforms a regional actor into a force capable of affecting economic flows among Asia, Africa, and Europe; every vessel diverted around the Cape of Good Hope means a longer voyage, more fuel, higher costs, delays, and additional environmental pressure, and those costs are borne not only by major corporations but are transferred to producers, shops, and consumers, allowing a conflict remote from the great capitals to enter into the price of food, energy, and basic goods.

A military response to attacks upon navigation may be justified by the need to protect crews, international law, and commerce, but repeated strikes, if not accompanied by a political process, may strengthen the discourse of armed organizations, turn external intervention into a recruitment instrument, and

expand the list of targets, so that every operation intended to restore security produces a new stage of insecurity; in July 2026, the Security Council extended the reporting mechanism on Houthi attacks against merchant vessels, and the debates demonstrated that different interpretations existed concerning both the causes and the means of response, but also that there was recognition of the need to preserve the Red Sea as a space of navigation and international cooperation.

Peace in the Red Sea cannot be separated from peace in Yemen, nor can peace in Yemen be detached from an end to the broader confrontations in the Middle East, because securing a strait without resolving the conflict on shore may protect vessels temporarily but does not remove the source of violence, just as negotiations among the great powers without the participation of Yemeni communities may produce a geopolitical understanding that lacks internal legitimacy; the solution must encompass an end to attacks upon civilian shipping, guarantees for freedom of navigation, a verifiable armistice, the distribution of humanitarian aid, the payment of salaries, the restoration of institutions, and a political process in which power is no longer won exclusively through force of arms.

The Fourth Fire: Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq - A Single Space of Overlapping Confrontations

Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq form a geopolitical space in which local conflicts have been superimposed upon rivalries among Iran, Israel, the United States, Russia, Turkey, the Arab states, and numerous armed organizations, and the result of this accumulation is a region in which official sovereignty coexists with alternative centers of power, borders are crossed by weapons, combatants, and logistics networks, and a strike in one state may be answered in another; this structure makes it possible to conduct a prolonged indirect war, but also creates the risk that the principal actors will enter into direct confrontation when losses, prestige, or internal pressures no longer allow them to limit their reprisals.

Lebanon occupies an especially fragile position, because state institutions, its pluralistic society, economic difficulties, the presence of Hezbollah, and proximity to Israel turn any escalation into a danger to the country's very continuity, while the Lebanese population is made to bear the consequences of decisions taken both within its borders and in foreign capitals; Syria, devastated by prolonged conflict, remains vulnerable to interventions, territorial tensions, and the activity of external forces, while Iraq attempts to preserve a balance among its relations with the United States, its ties to Iran, its own institutions, and armed groups that enjoy political and military autonomy, so that each of these states may become, against the will of most of its citizens, an extension of wars waged by others.

The human cost of this architecture is often concealed behind language about targets, capabilities, corridors, and deterrence, although in reality strikes upon infrastructure, population displacement, the loss of homes, and interruptions to education and medical services weaken societies for generations; following the escalation of the conflict in Lebanon in March 2026, more than one million people were forced to leave their homes, according to information published by United Nations bodies, demonstrating that the seemingly technical phrase "regional expansion" means for ordinary people the loss of home, the separation of families, and the repetition of an exile many had already endured.

The solution cannot be found by keeping states permanently weak, accepting parallel armies, or turning sovereignty into a mere diplomatic formula, but neither can it be found through military operations that destroy the very institutions later expected to restore order; instead, it requires a regional process in which Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq are no longer treated as chessboards, the withdrawal or limitation of foreign forces is negotiated and verified, armed organizations are integrated or disarmed within legitimate political agreements, borders are secured without isolating populations, and economic reconstruction offers citizens an alternative to dependence upon military and patronage networks, because true sovereignty is achieved not only by removing foreign influence, but also by building a state capable of protecting, representing, and serving its entire population.

The Fifth Fire: Taiwan and the Struggle for the Indo-Pacific

Taiwan may represent the most dangerous example of a dispute in which history, identity, law, national prestige, competition among great powers, and the global technology economy converge within a confined geographical space, because Beijing considers reunification a historical objective and maintains that Taiwan is part of China, while the authorities in Taipei defend their democratic system, way of life, and the population's capacity to decide its future, and the United States, although following its own one-China policy, maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan and attaches major strategic importance to peace and stability across the strait; the risk arises from the fact that each party defines the status quo differently and may regard the defensive actions of the other as steps toward changing it.

The official position of the People's Republic of China states that peaceful reunification is the preferred option, but preserves the possibility of using other means against separation and external intervention, while Taiwan's leadership declares that it seeks to maintain the status quo, strengthen self-defense, and resume dialogue on the basis of equality and dignity; these positions still contain space for peace, because both invoke stability and dialogue, but that space may contract if military exercises, incursions, sanctions, political statements, arms sales, and competition between China and the United States are interpreted exclusively through the logic of preparing for war.

A conflict around Taiwan would have consequences incomparably greater than the island's size, because it would involve two of the world's most powerful states, affect Japan and other countries in the region, disrupt Indo-Pacific shipping routes, strike the semiconductor industry, and compel the United States to transfer toward the Pacific naval, air, logistics, and intelligence forces also needed in Europe or the Middle East; even a blockade without invasion could cause a global economic crisis, while an attempt to break it would create circumstances in which ships and aircraft belonging to nuclear powers confronted one another directly, in an environment where

decision time would be extremely short and withdrawal might be portrayed by each government as a strategic humiliation.

Peace in the Taiwan Strait cannot be guaranteed through armament alone, although deterrence may prevent the temptation of rapid action, because the unlimited accumulation of forces also creates the risk of accident, misinterpretation, and the conviction that the adversary is preparing an inevitable strike, which is why military channels of communication must be restored, protocols for naval and aerial encounters established, economic, scientific, and cultural exchanges resumed, declarations that unilaterally alter the balance avoided, and a dialogue supported that requires no population to renounce its identity, freedom, or dignity under coercion; any future formula can be legitimate only if it is peaceful, negotiated, and acceptable to the people who will live under it, because reunification achieved through destruction or separation imposed through a war among the great powers would turn the declared political objective into a tragedy for all parties.

The five fires are different, but they are fed by the same atmosphere of mistrust, armament, pride, rigid alliances, propaganda, and the conviction that the adversary understands only force, and unless this atmosphere is replaced by communication, rules, verification, cooperation, and respect for international law, extinguishing one fire may be followed by the ignition of another, until the world's resources are absorbed by war and leaders can no longer negotiate one crisis without calculating the effect of compromise upon all the others; precisely for this reason, humanity needs firewalls between conflicts, agreements that prevent their transmission, direct lines among the great powers, the shielding of civilian and nuclear infrastructure from attack, and the political determination not to exploit an adversary's temporary difficulties as an opportunity to begin a new confrontation.

The fires of the world will not be extinguished by ignoring injustice, abandoning attacked peoples, or equating all forms of responsibility, but neither can they be put out by continuously pouring weapons, hatred, and promises of total victory upon societies already devastated, because true peace is neither silence imposed upon the victim nor the unlimited triumph of

the strongest, but the result of an order in which justice is defended without extermination, security is shared without domination, and leaders understand that they have been entrusted with the power to govern states, not the right to endanger the existence of all humankind.

PART III

WHEN WARS BEGIN TO MERGE

Alliances, Multiple Fronts, and the Mechanism of Chain Escalation

The merging of wars does not mean that all the world's armies will receive orders on a particular morning to enter battle simultaneously, that states will immediately divide into two perfectly delineated camps, or that every local conflict will lose its own causes and objectives, but that initially separate wars will begin to depend upon one another, consume the same weapons stocks, use the same logistics and technology networks, activate the same alliances, influence the same energy markets, and compel the great powers to calculate every decision not only by its effects upon the immediate front, but also by the consequences it may have in every other region; the moment the withdrawal of an air-defense battery from Europe alters security in the Middle East, the obstruction of a Gulf strait reduces states' economic capacity to support Ukraine, and the mobilization of a fleet in the Pacific gives another power the impression that its adversary is temporarily vulnerable, the conflicts have already begun to merge, even if official statements continue to present them as independent issues.

In an interdependent world, wars unite first through resources, because modern military systems depend upon electronic components, semiconductors, satellites, fuel, guided munitions, interceptors, transport capacity, intelligence, and specialized personnel that cannot be multiplied immediately when several crises arise, and leaders are compelled to decide which front will receive priority, which ally can wait, which stocks may be reduced, and which risks must be assumed; these decisions, inevitable from a logistical standpoint, become political signals to adversaries, who may interpret a temporary reduction in support not as a supply difficulty, but as a

weakening of will, a rupture within the alliance, or a window of opportunity to be exploited before industrial production and political unity are restored.

The United States stands at the center of this mechanism because its security commitments extend across Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific, while American capacity, although enormous, is not unlimited, especially when several theaters simultaneously demand ships, aircraft, defense systems, intelligence, ammunition, and financial support; Europe may consider its security dependent upon continued American support for Ukraine and the credibility of NATO, Israel and Arab partners may request the protection of energy routes and the countering of regional threats, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan may seek an American presence sufficient to deter a forcible alteration of the Asian balance, and each of these obligations is justifiable when considered separately, although taken together they may produce strategic overextension, political exhaustion, and the temptation among adversaries to create new crises precisely in order to disperse Washington's capacity to respond.

Military alliances are constructed to prevent war through deterrence, because a potential aggressor must know that attacking one state will confront it not only with the forces of the victim, but also with the support of its partners, yet the same solidarity that may prevent an attack can transmit conflict if deterrence fails and an incident is classified as aggression against the entire alliance; Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty establishes that an armed attack against one member is considered an attack against them all, but does not transform the response into a completely automatic and identical mechanism for every state, because each ally takes such action as it deems necessary, which may or may not include the use of force, meaning that even in a grave crisis leaders retain responsibility for their choice and cannot hide behind the assertion that the treaty has decided in their place.

This freedom of decision is essential to peace, but becomes difficult to exercise when the alliance's credibility is called into question, because governments fear that an excessively restrained response to the first incident will encourage adversaries to test other borders, weaken the confidence of

allies, and turn promises of defense into mere declarations, while an overly forceful response may expand the war beyond its original intent; the true problem, therefore, is not the existence of defensive solidarity, without which smaller states would become vulnerable to pressure and aggression, but the absence of sufficiently clear intermediate steps between inaction and general war, steps that permit the investigation of the incident, consultation among allies, the communication of warnings, the application of proportionate measures, and the preservation of a diplomatic exit for the adversary.

Alongside formal alliances, less rigid strategic partnerships are developing that are nevertheless capable of profoundly influencing conflicts, because states can provide ammunition, drones, electronic systems, intelligence, financial support, and diplomatic protection without signing a treaty obliging them to enter directly into war, while this flexibility allows them to weaken the adversary at apparently limited risk; Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea do not need to form an alliance identical to NATO for their actions to produce coordinated effects, just as Western support for Ukraine, cooperation among the United States, Japan, and Australia, or partnerships with Middle Eastern states need not be brought under a single command in order to be perceived by adversaries as parts of the same system of power.

The danger of these informal partnerships lies in ambiguity, because it is not always clear how far a state is prepared to go to protect its partner, what action would trigger direct involvement, where the limits of support lie, and whether attacking supplies or instructors will be regarded as an act of war; ambiguity may serve deterrence by forcing the adversary to calculate an unknown risk, but it may also produce grave errors, because one party may assume that support will not exceed a certain threshold while the other considers prestige, security, or credibility to require a response, and war begins precisely in the space between those two assumptions.

The merging of conflicts accelerates when one power attempts to exploit its adversary's difficulties in another theater, because military history has always encouraged an attack upon an opponent compelled to divide its forces, but in the nuclear age and an era of global alliances this logic may produce

catastrophic results; if the United States is heavily engaged in the Gulf, Russia may believe that support for Ukraine will weaken, China may judge that attention devoted to Europe and the Middle East reduces American capacity to respond in the Pacific, North Korea may intensify pressure upon its neighbors, and every action will compel Washington and its allies to redistribute resources, offering another adversary a new opportunity, until the international system comes to resemble a structure in which too many supporting points have been weakened simultaneously.

At the same time, Western states may be tempted to use the economic or military difficulties of their adversaries to obtain results more ambitious than the original defense, and this expansion of objectives may transform a war to protect a territory into a project for the lasting weakening of a great power, a conflict over freedom of navigation into a campaign for regime change, or a deterrent measure into an attempt to alter the regional balance; when the adversary comes to believe that it is being asked not merely to end a particular action, but to renounce its status, influence, or even the continuity of its political system, the possibility of compromise diminishes and its leadership may regard escalation as the only path to survival.

Wars also merge through the economy, because sanctions, embargoes, export controls, the freezing of reserves, restrictions on technology, the obstruction of maritime transport, and competition for energy transform world trade into an instrument of confrontation, while states begin to reorganize supply chains not according to efficiency, but according to geopolitical affiliation; companies are compelled to choose markets, payment systems fragment, raw materials are redirected, strategic technologies are protected, and the interdependence once regarded as a guarantee of peace becomes both vulnerability and weapon, so that military conflict and economic warfare reinforce one another and the separation of the world into blocs risks becoming permanent even after the fighting ends.

Once formed, this economy of confrontation creates its own interest groups, investments, and inertia, because factories are adapted to military production, public budgets are redistributed, companies obtain long-term contracts, jobs

come to depend upon weapons orders, and politicians fear that reducing tensions will be presented as a weakening of security or will cause economic losses; militarization is then no longer merely a response to threat, but becomes a system that needs threat in order to justify its expansion, while peace must confront not only mistrust among states, but also the material interests established around permanent preparation for war.

Another mechanism of fusion is the extension of confrontation into cyberspace, outer space, and the information domain, where borders are more difficult to identify, the author of an attack can be concealed, and the effects upon civilian life may be enormous, because an operation against a military system may affect power grids, hospitals, communications, transport, or financial services, while the destruction or disruption of a satellite may simultaneously affect military and civilian users in several states; if a government attributes an attack incorrectly, if a proxy organization acts without clear authorization from the state supporting it, or if an algorithm interprets unusual activity as preparation for an offensive, leaders may react to an incomplete image of reality and turn a technical error into an irreversible strategic decision.

Hybrid attacks also complicate the application of alliance obligations, because states must decide whether sabotage, a cyberattack, a space operation, electoral manipulation, or damage to subsea infrastructure constitutes a criminal incident, a clandestine action, a form of pressure, or an armed attack justifying collective defense; NATO specifies that significant cyber or hybrid attacks may be assessed on a case-by-case basis as armed attacks, which is necessary in order not to give adversaries the opportunity to cause grave destruction below the threshold of response, but this makes the existence of rapid and independent attribution mechanisms all the more important, because an error of identification could involve numerous states in a confrontation begun from a false premise.

The most dangerous fusion is that between conventional war and nuclear deterrence, because the same missiles, radar systems, command centers, satellites, and communications networks may serve both ordinary operations

and nuclear forces, while attacking them to obtain a conventional advantage may be interpreted by the adversary as preparation to neutralize its retaliatory capacity; in a crisis unfolding simultaneously in several regions, the leadership of a nuclear power may have difficulty determining whether the attacks are part of separate conflicts or a coordinated plan for strategic disarmament, while fear of losing weapons before they can be used may create pressure toward the most terrible of all decisions - launching them before the adversary's intent is known with certainty.

SIPRI's 2026 assessment warns that states are assigning nuclear weapons an increasingly important role, that strategic dialogue and transparency are diminishing, and that the risk of miscalculation and escalation is growing, making the merging of conflicts all the more dangerous, because a conventional war waged in one region may alter the level of nuclear alert in another, while leaders may interpret the accumulation of several forms of pressure as an existential threat even if no adversary has explicitly formulated such an objective.

The mechanism of chain escalation may begin with a relatively limited incident, continue with a response intended to restore deterrence, provoke a counterstrike designed to demonstrate that the first response failed, draw in the support of allies, extend the list of targets to logistics and economic infrastructure, move confrontation into cyberspace and the maritime domain, stimulate attacks through proxies, and finally arrive at nuclear threats, without any leader having decided at a single moment to travel the entire distance; every step is presented as the final measure necessary to compel the adversary to stop, but the adversary employs the same justification, and the two parties climb the escalation ladder together, each waiting for the other to step back first.

The pressure of public opinion may block withdrawal, because societies that have been told the adversary is devoid of reason, morality, and legitimacy will not understand why their government is negotiating with it, while leaders who have built their authority upon the promise of total victory will regard compromise as a threat to their own power; propaganda initially intended to

mobilize the population thus becomes a prison for leaders who can no longer acknowledge the limits of their strategy without admitting that they simplified the truth, exaggerated the prospects of victory, or demanded sacrifices for objectives that could not be attained.

Stopping the merging of wars does not mean abolishing alliances, denying states the right to self-defense, or asking victims to accept aggression, because the Charter of the United Nations recognizes the individual and collective right of defense in the event of an armed attack, while also preserving the responsibility of the Security Council and the general obligation of states to settle disputes by peaceful means; defense and diplomacy must not be presented as incompatible choices, because defense can prevent the victory of aggression, while diplomacy can prevent the expansion of defense into general destruction.

The first necessary measure is the deliberate separation of conflicts through political commitments by which the great powers renounce exploiting one regional crisis to obtain an offensive advantage in another region, maintain communication even when diplomatic relations deteriorate, and establish clear limits on the types of weapons, targets, and operations that might draw allies into direct involvement; such limits must not remain only in ambiguous declarations, but must be communicated to adversaries through military and diplomatic channels so that each party knows which actions are considered intolerable and which paths remain open for withdrawal.

The second measure consists in creating permanent mechanisms for the rapid investigation of incidents, composed of experts accepted by the rival parties and capable of analyzing cyberattacks, explosions, maritime accidents, airspace violations, and strikes upon infrastructure before governments undertake reprisals, because a few hours gained for verification may save millions of lives; for the same purpose, major military exercises must be announced in advance, communications systems among commands must be tested periodically, and agreements for avoiding incidents in the air and at sea must be extended to outer space and digital infrastructure.

The third measure is to protect by international agreement certain categories of targets whose attack could trigger disproportionate effects, including nuclear facilities, strategic warning systems, medical infrastructure, water networks, civilian power plants, food corridors, and the principal communications required for crisis management, because war must not be allowed to destroy the very means through which it can be stopped; the prohibition will not eliminate all violations, but it will create a clear norm, enable responsibility to be attributed, and reduce the risk that attacks upon dual-use targets will be interpreted as the beginning of an operation of total destruction.

The fourth measure is to preserve compromise within the vocabulary of political dignity, because no negotiation can succeed if every leader believes that walking away from the table will bring more support than signing an imperfect agreement; in July 2026, the Secretary-General of the United Nations called for more determined use of the instruments of peaceful settlement and the recovery of the spirit of compromise, implicitly reminding the world that peace is not achieved by the complete confirmation of one camp's narrative, but by identifying the space in which essential justice can be defended and further destruction stopped.

Wars begin to merge when leaders accept the idea that all crises are part of a single confrontation for domination of the world and that any advantage gained by the adversary, wherever it occurs, automatically represents their own loss, because this way of thinking eliminates neutrality, turns cooperation into evidence of weakness, compels states to choose sides, and makes the separate resolution of conflicts impossible; they can be prevented from merging only if the great powers recognize that beyond competition they share interests that cannot be sacrificed - avoiding nuclear war, maintaining the operation of the world economy, protecting the environment, combating epidemics, preserving communications, and ensuring the survival of civilization.

Faced with this danger, the world's decision-makers must understand that the greatest proof of power is not the capacity to open several fronts

simultaneously, but the wisdom to keep them separate, to close one before another is ignited, to refuse a temporary advantage capable of causing permanent catastrophe, and to tell their own citizens the difficult truth that the absolute security of one camp, obtained by threatening the existence of the other, is impossible; in a world of nuclear weapons, an interdependent economy, and ecological vulnerability, peace is no longer only the relationship among friends, but the art by which adversaries learn to limit their confrontation before it destroys what neither of them can rebuild.

PART IV

THE AXES OF POWER AND THE NEW DIVISION OF THE WORLD

The United States, Russia, China, Europe, and Emerging Strategic Coalitions

The new division of the world does not reproduce the bipolar order of the Cold War exactly, because the contemporary planet is no longer organized around two blocs completely separated in economic, technological, financial, and informational terms, but around several centers of power that compete, cooperate, and depend upon one another at the same time, so that a state may be the military ally of one power, the commercial partner of another, an energy importer from a third, and a member of an organization in which it participates alongside states with opposing geopolitical interests; this complex network may impede the emergence of rigid camps by preserving numerous bridges among adversaries, but it can also produce profound instability, since every government attempts to use relations with several powers to maximize its autonomy, while major states frequently interpret such flexibility as disloyalty, opportunism, or an attempt to obtain advantages from every side.

The expression "axes of power" must be used cautiously, because it may create the impression of homogeneous alliances guided by a single strategy and prepared to begin a world war together, although reality is far more contradictory, since the United States and Europe share common interests but also have economic and political differences, Russia and China cooperate strategically without holding identical objectives in every region, Iran and

Russia support one another while pursuing their own priorities, North Korea seeks guarantees for the survival of its regime, India cooperates in certain fields with the West and in others with Russia and the BRICS states, while Arab powers simultaneously develop relations with Washington, Beijing, and Moscow; the danger therefore arises not from the existence of a secret and unified world leadership, but from the gradual convergence of states that feel threatened by the same camp and the transformation of limited cooperation into a system of mutual support fueled by sanctions, wars, and exclusion.

The United States and the Dilemma of Indispensable Power

The United States remains the center of the world's most extensive network of military, economic, and technological alliances, possesses armed force with global reach, extraordinary naval and air capabilities, a dominant technology sector, financial and monetary influence, prestigious universities and research institutions, and partnerships extending from Europe to the Indo-Pacific, yet this very position creates a fundamental contradiction, because almost every major crisis prompts allies to request American involvement, while a part of American society asks with growing insistence why it must bear the costs of protecting an international order whose benefits are not always felt in the life of the ordinary citizen; Washington's leadership must therefore reconcile its role as guarantor of alliances with the pressure to concentrate upon immediate national interests, while oscillation between interventionism and withdrawal may produce insecurity among both partners and adversaries.

American strategy may be understood through the idea of "peace through strength," according to which a powerful military, a capable defense industry, credible alliances, and technological superiority convince adversaries that aggression would carry an unacceptable cost, and this conception contains a genuine logic of deterrence because evident weakness may encourage opportunistic action, yet it becomes dangerous when force ceases to be the instrument protecting negotiation and instead replaces negotiation, when every problem is viewed through military superiority, when sanctions become permanent, and when the objective is no longer to change a

particular behavior but to weaken the adversary without limit; the 2025 American national security document describes the world in terms of great-power competition and emphasizes the advantages of American alliances and position, reflecting the way Washington defines its role within a contested global order.

American military and economic power can protect freedom of navigation, deter aggression, support threatened states, and create conditions for negotiation, but its use without limits or consistent criteria fuels accusations of double standards, because peoples observe that the principles of sovereignty, human rights, and international law are invoked with differing intensity according to the identity of ally or adversary; if the United States wishes to preserve the legitimacy of global leadership, it is not enough to demonstrate that it can win military confrontations, but it must show that it accepts rules applying even to its own actions, that it does not confuse international order with exclusive domination, and that it can support the security of its allies without turning every regional rivalry into a confrontation between democracy and tyranny from which neither side can exit through compromise.

Washington bears a special responsibility for preventing strategic overextension, because attempting to maintain decisive superiority simultaneously in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia may lead to the permanent growth of military budgets, the militarization of technology and commerce, and demands for increasingly rigid discipline from allies, while adversaries will respond through convergence, armament, and the construction of alternative systems; a secure, prosperous, and engaged America can be a pillar of global equilibrium, but an America preoccupied with preventing the emergence of any autonomous center of power risks producing precisely the global coalition it seeks to avoid, because very different states will discover a common interest in limiting American pressure.

Russia Between Fear of Encirclement and the Ambition to Restore Influence

Russia perceives itself as the heir to a great historical, nuclear, territorial, and cultural power, considers that its security cannot be separated from developments in its immediate neighborhood, and regards the expansion of Western institutions toward its borders as a diminution of its strategic depth and international status, yet these perceptions, although they must be understood in order to build a solution, cannot grant one state the right to decide the political orientation of its neighbors, alter borders by force, or turn the independence of other peoples into a variable of its own security; the geopolitical tragedy emerges when Russia regards NATO enlargement as a threat, while the states of Central and Eastern Europe seek NATO's protection precisely because they fear Russia, so that the actions of each side confirm the other's fear and feed a cycle that appears increasingly difficult to break.

The Russian conception of multipolarity maintains that the world must not be led by a single center and that states with different histories, civilizations, and political systems must participate in establishing the rules, yet in practical application this discourse encounters its own contradictions, because defending global pluralism is incompatible with denying the freedom of smaller neighbors, just as challenging the dominance of one power does not justify establishing a regional sphere in which the sovereignty of others becomes conditional; representatives of Russian diplomacy continue to invoke the Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2023 and the perspective of a multipolar order, showing that Moscow views the current confrontation not solely through the prism of a single war, but as a dispute over the future structure of the world.

Russia's isolation by Western states has produced economic, technological, and political costs, but has also accelerated cooperation with China, Iran, North Korea, and numerous non-Western states, while sanctions designed to limit Moscow's capacity may have the long-term effect of building alternative trade routes, payment mechanisms, and military partnerships; this does not

mean that sanctions have no effect or that violations of international law must be accepted, but that every pressure measure must be accompanied by an explicit path through which the targeted state can obtain its reduction if it changes its actions, because a sanction without a negotiable objective ceases to be a diplomatic instrument and becomes evidence that the adversary seeks permanent weakening, which stimulates resistance, convergence with other powers, and the militarization of the economy.

Russia possesses a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying civilization, important energy and mineral resources, vast territory, military experience, influence in numerous regions, and a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, which is why the idea of a European peace built through Russia's permanent exclusion is unrealistic, just as a return to an order in which Moscow decides the destiny of its neighbors is unacceptable; the solution must simultaneously encompass credible guarantees for the states of Eastern Europe, verifiable limits upon military deployments, arms control, transparency of exercises, respect for sovereignty, and Russia's gradual reintegration into a system in which its legitimate security is recognized but cannot be obtained through the insecurity of others.

China and the Rise of a Power That Can Change the Century

Within a relatively short historical period, China has achieved one of the most impressive economic and technological transformations, becoming a center of global production, a major financial actor, a space, nuclear, and naval power, and the principal strategic competitor of the United States, while its rise alters the international balance not only through the size of its military, but also through infrastructure, trade, investment, technology, access to raw materials, and the capacity to offer states alternatives to Western-dominated institutions; for numerous developing countries, China represents a source of financing and modernization, while for Washington and some of China's Asian neighbors, the growth of Chinese power raises the question of whether Beijing will accept common constraints or transform economic advantage into strategic domination.

The Chinese leadership presents the country's development as a peaceful rise and advances a conception of common, comprehensive, and cooperative security based upon respect for sovereignty, consideration of the legitimate concerns of all states, and the settlement of disputes through dialogue, principles that, if applied consistently, could contribute substantially to reducing global tensions; the documents of the Global Security Initiative formulate precisely these commitments, but their credibility will depend upon how China applies them in its relations with smaller states, in maritime disputes, regarding Taiwan, and in responding to wars involving its partners, because no great power can ask others to respect its vital interests if it does not demonstrate the same concern for the fears and rights of its neighbors.

The relationship between China and Russia is one of the central elements of the new order, because both states challenge Western dominance, support multipolarity, cooperate economically and militarily, and provide each other with diplomatic support, yet their partnership does not eliminate differences in power, distinct interests in Central Asia, differing relationships with the Western economy, or each country's concern to preserve its autonomy; if the West treats every form of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow as proof of an inevitable military axis, it may contribute to strengthening that axis, while China, if it offers Russia unlimited support without using its influence to help end the war, risks turning its discourse about peace into a formula without substance.

China bears a distinctive historical responsibility because it can choose whether its ascent will repeat the model of confrontation through which rising powers have sought to replace dominant powers, or whether it will demonstrate that influence can grow without war, while this choice does not belong to Beijing alone, because the United States must also decide whether it can accept the existence of a powerful competitor without attempting to obstruct all of its development; world peace depends to a great extent upon the capacity of the two states to separate economic competition from military war, preserve cooperation on climate, health, and financial stability, establish limits for artificial intelligence and outer space, and prevent Taiwan from becoming the place where a global rivalry is decided by force.

Europe Between Dependence, Rearmament, and the Possibility of Becoming a Power for Peace

Europe possesses extraordinary economic, technological, diplomatic, and cultural strength, but remains politically fragmented and largely dependent upon the United States for strategic deterrence, intelligence, military transport, and nuclear protection, while the war in Ukraine has compelled European governments to rediscover vulnerabilities that decades of peace had concealed, including insufficient stocks, fragmented defense industries, energy dependencies, and difficulty in rapidly adopting a common position; the natural response has been to increase military investment and strengthen NATO, but if rearmament is not accompanied by a diplomatic strategy, Europe risks becoming a continent stronger in weapons and poorer in possibilities for negotiation.

The European "Readiness 2030" initiative seeks to restore and develop defense capabilities and mobilize substantial financial resources for the military industry, reflecting the conviction that Europe must be capable of protecting its citizens and responding to threats even when American support is uncertain, and such strengthening may contribute to equilibrium if it deters aggression and reduces the temptation to test European unity; it may, however, fuel a new arms race if presented as preparation for an inevitable confrontation, if it fails to establish clear defensive objectives, and if every increase in capacity is followed by an adversarial deployment, in a cycle in which all states declare themselves individually more secure while the continent as a whole becomes less secure.

European strategic autonomy must not be understood as a rupture with the United States, the weakening of NATO, or the emergence of a new aggressive superpower, but as the acquisition of a capacity to act responsibly, protect its territory, support partners, and formulate diplomatic initiatives without depending entirely upon political change in Washington; a Europe capable of defending itself can become a more credible ally, but also a freer mediator if it uses its economic power, experience of integration, and

institutions to build security agreements, relaunch arms control, and offer a prospect of cooperation to states that respect common rules.

Europe's great historical contribution is not the invention of a new weapon, but the demonstration that peoples who killed one another for centuries can renounce war, pool resources, transform borders into spaces of cooperation, and build institutions in which conflicts are resolved through negotiations, courts, and compromises, and if the European Union abandons this identity and defines itself exclusively through military preparation, the world will lose one of the most important proofs that reconciliation is possible; the defense of Europe is necessary, but the ultimate purpose of defense must remain the restoration of a continental order in which armies are no longer used, not the permanent administration of a militarized frontier between two hostile worlds.

Emerging Coalitions and the Rejection of a World Divided in Two

The convergence among Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea is sometimes described as the emergence of a new axis, and cooperation in armaments, energy, technology, intelligence, and diplomatic support justifies examining this possibility, yet these states do not form a perfect political unity, do not possess the same economic interests, ideology, or level of power, and are not all bound by an automatic defense obligation; what draws them together is the belief that strategic pressure, sanctions, and Western influence threaten the autonomy or survival of each, and if this perception grows stronger, internal differences may be suspended in favor of a common interest: preventing the United States and its allies from obtaining decisive results at an acceptable cost.

The construction of this coalition is not the exclusive product of Western policy, because each participating state bears responsibility for its own actions, violations of law, threats, and choices through which it has turned isolation into a justification for militarization, yet strategies of total exclusion may contribute to bringing them together, especially when they offer no path to reintegration; responsible diplomacy must sanction violations without

creating self-fulfilling prophecies, preserve the differences among adversaries, and avoid treating them as an indivisible bloc, because a system that simultaneously declares several great powers to be irreconcilable enemies risks driving them to become what it already fears they are.

BRICS and similar organizations must not automatically be confused with anti-Western military alliances, because their members have very different relations and interests, while numerous states participate in order to gain economic access, reform financial institutions, and obtain a stronger voice, not to join a war against the West; India, Brazil, South Africa, and other powers of the Global South do not wish to replace one dependence with another and do not readily accept an obligation to choose among Washington, Beijing, and Moscow, while this independence may become a resource for peace, because states that preserve relations with every camp can mediate, transmit messages, and propose solutions when direct channels are blocked.

The new order is being built not only through tanks, missiles, and fleets, but through currencies, payment systems, trade corridors, ports, energy networks, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, access to semiconductors, and control of critical minerals, while competition for these resources turns the economy into an extension of military strategy; states seek to reduce dependencies, relocate production to partners considered safe, control exports, and protect technologies, but a complete separation of economies would create autarkic blocs, reduce prosperity, encourage costly duplication, and eliminate the very connections that give governments an additional reason to avoid war.

A multipolar world can be more equitable if it gives representation to states that have been marginalized, distributes responsibility, limits the dominance of a single center, and permits the existence of several models of development, but it may also be more unstable if it lacks common rules, because the existence of several powers does not automatically produce equilibrium, as demonstrated by the history of systems in which shifting alliances, mistrust, and miscalculation prepared great wars; multipolarity must therefore be institutionalized through reform of the Security Council,

stronger regional representation, equally applied rules, mechanisms for dispute settlement, and recognition that no civilization, alliance, or great power can claim a superior right over the destiny of humanity.

The new division of the world can be stopped only if states reject the idea that security is a good that must be taken from others, because the unlimited accumulation of advantage by one camp produces fear and armament in the opposing camp, while strategic victory becomes temporary and illusory; the United States must accept that its power does not grant it a right to uncontested supremacy, Russia must understand that its status cannot be restored by limiting the sovereignty of its neighbors, China must demonstrate that its rise will not transform economic dependence into coercion, Europe must develop its defense without abandoning its vocation for reconciliation, and emerging powers must use their newly acquired autonomy to build bridges rather than reproduce old forms of domination under different names.

The true alternative to hegemony is neither chaos nor the replacement of one world leader with another, but a plural order in which the great powers accept limits, small states are not compelled to become satellites, alliances remain defensive, commerce is not transformed into an absolute weapon, and international institutions give every people the opportunity to be heard; without this transformation, the axes of power will strengthen, each camp will interpret the adversary's preparations as proof of an intention to attack, and humanity will repeat the error of attempting to build peace through the accumulation of the means of its own destruction.

The world's decision-makers must understand that no one can definitively win the struggle for domination of a planet armed with nuclear weapons, weakened by climate change, and connected through an economy that war would disorganize, because even the power that emerged militarily victorious would inherit destroyed markets, degraded ecosystems, radicalized societies, millions of refugees, and a civilization devoid of trust; the great political mission of the century is not to determine which state will lead the world, but to build a world that no longer has to be governed through fear, coercion, and

the threat of extermination, and this requires power to be transformed from the privilege of domination into responsibility for the survival of all.

PART V
WAR WITHOUT VISIBLE BORDERS
Cyberattacks, Propaganda, Artificial Intelligence, Outer Space, and
Global Sabotage

Twenty-first-century war no longer necessarily begins when an army crosses a border, hostilities are officially declared, or a city is visibly bombed, because confrontation may penetrate computer networks, financial systems, energy infrastructure, satellites, communications platforms, and the consciousness of the population long beforehand, while the attacked state may suffer economic losses, the paralysis of services, and the disorganization of institutions without being able to demonstrate immediately who the aggressor is or whether the action was ordered by a government, executed by a proxy organization, carried out by a criminal group, or caused by a malfunction; it is precisely this ambiguity that makes invisible war an exceptional danger, because the victim may react against the wrong actor, the aggressor may deny involvement, allies may hold different views concerning responsibility, and escalation may begin before the technical truth has been established.

The boundary between peace and war is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to identify, because states can conduct years of espionage, influence operations, economic pressure, cyber sabotage, and manipulation without clearly crossing the threshold that would trigger a military response, while each camp develops similar capabilities in order not to remain vulnerable, justifies them by the necessity of defense, and preserves the possibility of using them offensively; the result is the emergence of a gray zone in which confrontation becomes permanent, peace no longer means the absence of hostility, and the ordinary citizen may be transformed unknowingly into a target, a source of data, a transmitter of propaganda, or the victim of an attack initially directed against a military system.

Cyberattack and the Possibility of Paralyzing Society

A modern society depends upon digital systems for producing and distributing energy, managing water, operating hospitals, controlling transport, making payments, maintaining public records, providing emergency communications, and coordinating institutions, and this dependence, which has brought efficiency and prosperity, has at the same time created an enormous surface of vulnerability, because the disruption of interconnected networks can produce cascading effects far beyond the original target; an attack upon a component used by several institutions may simultaneously affect civilian services, an operation directed against military logistics may interrupt ordinary transport, while the compromise of a technology supplier may transmit vulnerability to numerous states and companies using the same systems.

The power of a cyberattack lies not only in destroying equipment, but also in the invisible alteration of data, because a society may find it easier to repair a destroyed computer than to restore confidence in a database when it does not know which information has been changed; if hospital personnel can no longer verify treatments, the operators of a power grid can no longer be certain that the parameters displayed are genuine, banks can no longer confirm balances, and military leaders can no longer distinguish an authentic signal from information introduced by the adversary, the attack strikes at the very capacity of institutions to make decisions, turning uncertainty into a weapon.

Attribution is one of the most difficult problems, because attackers may use infrastructure located in other states, imitate the techniques of known groups, leave false clues, and employ intermediaries retaining a degree of autonomy, while governments cannot always publish, for security reasons, all the evidence upon which they base their accusations; this situation creates the risk that a political conclusion will be announced before the technical investigation has been completed and that public opinion, already prepared to believe in the adversary's guilt, will demand reprisals that make the subsequent correction of an error impossible.

International humanitarian law does not disappear when the weapon is a computer program, while the principles of distinction between military and civilian objectives, proportionality, and precaution continue to protect the population, hospitals, and goods indispensable to survival, although their application in the digital environment is complicated by interconnected systems and the possibility that effects will spread uncontrollably; the International Committee of the Red Cross emphasizes that cyber operations can cause real harm to people and that civilian infrastructure must be protected, meaning that states cannot treat the digital domain as a territory without rules merely because destruction is not always visible.

Preventing a global cyberwar requires the creation of a permanent international mechanism for investigation and attribution, the protection by agreement of hospitals, nuclear power plants, water systems, humanitarian services, and essential financial infrastructure, the reporting of vulnerabilities capable of affecting the entire world, and the establishment of direct channels through which states can clarify incidents before responding; the report of the United Nations group on the security of information and communications technologies confirms the continuation of international efforts to formulate norms of responsible conduct, but their effectiveness will depend upon transforming voluntary recommendations into verifiable practices and, wherever possible, legal obligations.

Propaganda, Disinformation, and the Conquest of Collective Consciousness

Information warfare seeks not only to persuade the domestic population and demoralize the adversary, as propaganda has done throughout history, but to alter the environment in which people determine what is true, whom they can trust, and whether a shared reality still exists, while digital platforms allow emotional messages, shocking images, and unverified accusations to circulate at a speed that journalistic, legal, and scientific institutions cannot match; the objective is not always to impose one lie, but to spread such a multitude of contradictory versions that citizens conclude nothing can be known, all

sources are manipulated, and the only possible attitude is withdrawal from public life or unconditional loyalty to their own camp.

In a polarized society, propaganda need not invent every resentment, but only identify, amplify, and direct existing resentments against the institutions, communities, and groups regarded as responsible, while platform algorithms designed to retain attention may favor content that provokes outrage, fear, and hatred because it produces faster reactions than balanced explanations; the commercial infrastructure of communication may thus become, without every company pursuing a military objective, a multiplier of influence operations, while democratic societies, precisely because they protect freedom of expression, face the difficulty of combating manipulation without establishing censorship.

Artificially generated images, synthetic voices, and falsified videos may attribute to leaders statements they never made, simulate atrocities, create the impression that an army has capitulated, or cause panic during a crisis, while verification carried out a few hours later may come too late if orders have already been transmitted, the population has mobilized, markets have collapsed, or the government has undertaken reprisals; in this context, artificial intelligence not only creates more convincing false content, but can adapt the message to the fears, beliefs, and vulnerabilities of each group, transforming mass propaganda into individualized influence.

Nevertheless, the struggle against disinformation must not become a justification for political control over truth, because a government given the power to define legitimate information without challenge may use that authority to conceal its own errors, eliminate critics, and portray all opposition as a foreign operation; defense of the information space must be built through institutional transparency, access to verifiable data, independent journalism, critical education, the clear identification of artificial content, pluralism, and platform accountability, not through establishing a monopoly of official truth.

Peace requires an ethics of communication in which the press refuses to turn war into spectacle, leaders do not dehumanize adversary peoples, technology companies provide researchers with access to the data necessary for understanding manipulation campaigns, and citizens acquire the discipline not to distribute immediately information that confirms their anger; SIPRI's 2025 report on civilian artificial intelligence shows that apparently non-military applications can affect peace through political disinformation, cyberattacks, and support for violent operations, demonstrating that responsibility for security no longer belongs only to armies, but also to the creators, distributors, and administrators of technology.

Artificial Intelligence and the Delegation of Decisions of Life and Death

Artificial intelligence can contribute to protecting life through the rapid analysis of information, detection of threats, improvement of defense, reduction of human error, coordination of evacuations, and delivery of aid, yet its integration into military systems may produce an acceleration of confrontation that political and legal institutions are not prepared to control, because algorithms can identify patterns and formulate recommendations in a time incomparably shorter than human beings, while decision-makers confronted with enormous volumes of data and the pressure for an immediate response may come to confirm the system's conclusion without truly understanding it.

An algorithm does not see a person, a family, a village, or an ambulance in the moral sense in which a human being sees them, but processes characteristics, probabilities, behaviors, and correlations, and if the data are incomplete, biased, outdated, or manipulated, the system may formulate a conclusion that is mathematically precise but false in relation to reality; the danger increases when probability is treated as certainty, when presence in a particular place is confused with participation in hostilities, when unusual behavior is automatically interpreted as a threat, and when operational speed becomes more important than verifying identity and protecting civilians.

Legal and moral responsibility cannot be transferred to a machine, because an algorithm cannot be judged, feel remorse, understand the dignity of the victim, or answer before society, while the formula "the system decided" risks becoming the means by which the designer, commander, operator, and political leader each frees himself or herself from part of the responsibility; even when a human being formally remains within the decision loop, control may become illusory if the operator has only a few seconds to confirm, cannot examine the data, and has been trained to assume that the system is more accurate than personal judgment.

Autonomous weapons capable of selecting and engaging targets without meaningful human intervention raise the question of a limit civilization must establish before technology creates an irreversible reality, because delegating killing to machines would lower the threshold for using force, permit operations on a very large scale, stimulate a race for speed and autonomy, and might lead to unforeseen interactions among systems belonging to adversaries; in July 2026 the Secretary-General of the United Nations warned about lethal autonomous systems and called for the preservation of human control, while international debates demonstrate that the issue can no longer be postponed until all the great powers believe they have obtained a sufficient advantage.

The supreme risk appears at the intersection of artificial intelligence and nuclear weapons, because algorithms may be used to analyze warnings, monitor adversaries, protect command systems, and support planning, but must not be granted authority to decide upon launch, target selection, or the final interpretation of an attack, since an error, manipulation, or inexplicable conclusion could produce an irreversible catastrophe; in 2025, United Nations disarmament representatives supported the need for a binding instrument guaranteeing that authorization for the use of nuclear weapons remains under human control, a principle that should become a universal norm before competitive pressure prompts states to automate what no machine must ever decide.

Regulation must seek not to halt research or eliminate the benefits of artificial intelligence, but to establish clear limits: prohibiting systems that operate without meaningful human control over lethal use, requiring independent testing, preserving decision logs, assessing risks before deployment, protecting systems against manipulation, ensuring the possibility of immediate interruption, and identifying the persons responsible for every stage; military procurement itself can become an instrument of accountability if states refuse to purchase systems that cannot be audited, explained, and controlled, an idea also developed by SIPRI research on the responsible procurement of military artificial intelligence.

Outer Space and the War for Orbital Infrastructure

Contemporary life depends upon satellites for navigation, communications, weather forecasting, climate monitoring, disaster management, the synchronization of financial systems, agriculture, transport, and the operation of armed forces, while this overlap between civilian and military uses makes orbital infrastructure one of the most sensitive components of global security; attacking a satellite used by an army may simultaneously affect civilian services in several countries, disruption of navigation may cause accidents, while the physical destruction of an orbital object can create fragments that threaten unrelated systems for years or decades.

The militarization of space did not begin with the appearance of weapons placed in orbit, because satellites have long been used for reconnaissance, warning, communications, and guidance, but the present danger arises from increasing dependence and the development of means by which these capabilities may be neutralized, disrupted, or manipulated; in a confrontation among the great powers, an attack upon space systems may be interpreted as preparation for a broader offensive, especially if nuclear-warning capabilities are affected, while the leadership of the targeted state may conclude that it must react before losing the ability to understand what is happening.

The Outer Space Treaty establishes fundamental principles, including the peaceful use of celestial bodies, the prohibition on placing weapons of mass

destruction in orbit, and state responsibility for national space activities, but technological development has surpassed many of the situations envisioned when it was drafted, while the dual-use character of satellites and intervention capabilities makes it difficult to distinguish protection, inspection, and repair from offensive preparation; precisely for this reason, the existing principles must be supplemented through transparency, notification, consultation, and the prohibition of activities producing indiscriminate or long-lasting effects.

A modern agreement for space security should prohibit deliberate destruction that creates dangerous quantities of orbital debris, protect satellites indispensable to civilian services, establish distances and rules of conduct for the approach of space objects, require notification of risky maneuvers, and create an international mechanism for investigating interference, because space cannot become a new frontier of war without all humanity losing secure access to the infrastructure upon which it depends; no power can control Earth orbit alone, while debris produced by conflict will respect neither alliances and borders nor the identity of the satellites it strikes.

Sabotage, Clandestine Operations, and the War That Does Not Acknowledge Its Author

Global sabotage occupies the space between espionage and declared military attack, because it may target infrastructure, transport, communications, industry, or logistics capabilities, may be carried out through intermediaries, and may permit the author to deny involvement, while its strategic advantage lies in imposing costs upon the adversary without immediately assuming the risk of open war; the very possibility of denial makes it attractive, but the same characteristic turns it into a source of instability, because the attacked state may suspect several adversaries, while choosing the wrong target for retaliation may open a conflict the true author did not anticipate.

Subsea infrastructure, pipelines, cables, ports, railways, warehouses, and industrial facilities are vulnerable not only because of their economic value, but also because they are frequently used simultaneously by civilian society

and defense systems, while attacking them may be presented as a legitimate strike upon logistics even though the consequences fall upon the population and states not participating in the conflict; clandestine war may also encompass assassinations, the recruitment of criminal groups, influence operations, provocations, and acts intended to be attributed to another actor, while the absence of transparency makes democratic control difficult because citizens do not always know what actions are being conducted in their name or the risks of retaliation those actions create.

The danger increases when states use private actors, groups of digital volunteers, military companies, ideological organizations, or criminal networks, because the distance between political authority and the executor permits responsibility to be denied but also reduces the capacity for control, while the intermediary may exceed instructions, pursue its own interests, or deliberately provoke escalation in order to prevent rapprochement among states; the involvement of civilians in cyber operations also creates the risk that they will lose their protection and that the battlefield will expand into society, which is why the ICRC calls upon states to prevent or reduce the harmful effects of civilian participation and to ensure respect for humanitarian law.

Controlling sabotage requires states to assume responsibility for actors they finance, coordinate, or protect, cooperate in investigating incidents affecting international infrastructure, and accept neutral mechanisms of examination before undertaking reprisals, while clandestine operations carrying a risk of civilian casualties, ecological catastrophe, or confrontation among nuclear powers must be subjected to legal and political limits far stricter than mere secret authorization within a government.

War without visible borders becomes truly dangerous when all these domains unite, because a disinformation campaign may prepare public opinion for attribution of a cyberattack, the attack may interrupt communications and affect satellites, artificial intelligence may interpret incomplete data as evidence of an offensive, a clandestine operation may produce the incident required to justify reprisals, and leaders, fearing that delay will reduce their

capacity to respond, may take the military decision before specialists establish the truth; at that moment, technology no longer serves knowledge and human protection, but accelerates fear, confusion, and violence beyond the speed at which political reason can stop them.

Humanity therefore needs a pact to protect the digital and space infrastructure of civilian life, a binding instrument governing human control over autonomous weapons, a prohibition on delegating nuclear decisions to algorithms, rules for identifying artificial content, independent mechanisms for attributing cyberattacks and acts of sabotage, protection for satellites indispensable to humanitarian services, and direct lines among the technological command centers of the great powers; these measures will not eliminate competition and espionage, but can build limits where their absence allows an invisible operation to trigger a visible war.

The world's decision-makers must understand that technological advantage is not synonymous with moral superiority, that processing speed does not replace wisdom, that abundant information does not guarantee truth, and that an invisible weapon can cause suffering as real as bombardment, while scientists and companies must reject the idea that their responsibility ends when technology is sold to a state; every system capable of influencing a decision for war, selecting a target, disrupting a hospital, manipulating millions of citizens, or affecting the shared infrastructure of space must be designed, used, and controlled according to the fundamental principle that human life and dignity cannot be reduced to variables within a strategic calculation.

Invisible war can be prevented only if the world refuses to regard everything technically possible as politically legitimate and morally acceptable, because civilization is defined not only by the weapons it can build, but also by the limits it has the wisdom to impose upon itself; if human beings retain control over technology, it can protect peace, warn of dangers, reduce suffering, and unite peoples, but if technology is allowed to serve fear, domination, and the speed of destruction without limits, the next world war may begin without

sound, within a network, an algorithm, or a false signal, and the world will hear the explosion only after the decision can no longer be reversed.

PART VI
THE WORLD ECONOMY TURNED INTO A WEAPON
Energy, Maritime Straits, Food, Sanctions, and the Collapse of Supply Chains

The economy is no longer merely the background against which military confrontations unfold, the source from which states finance their armies, or the domain that must be protected so that society can endure, but has itself become a battlefield on which energy, currency, technology, transport, market access, raw materials, infrastructure, insurance, credit, and food are used to coerce the adversary, while the distinction among a legitimate economic measure, a sanction intended to defend international law, and an act of war becomes increasingly difficult to establish; in a world in which the production of a single object depends upon components manufactured on several continents, transported through vulnerable straits, financed in particular currencies, and processed with technologies controlled by a small number of states, no economy is truly isolated, while a blow struck against one link can travel throughout the chain, reaching countries, companies, and populations that had no part in the original decision.

Energy stands at the center of this confrontation because almost every economic activity depends upon continuous access to oil, natural gas, electricity, and fuel, while the price of energy enters into the cost of transport, heating, industrial production, agriculture, medicine, and consumer goods, so that the disruption of a route or an attack upon a facility produces not merely the temporary shortage of a raw material, but a wave of price increases that crosses the whole of society; exporting states may use production and deliveries to obtain political influence, importing states may seek to limit the revenues of adversaries through sanctions and price caps, and every camp searches for alternative routes, reserves, suppliers, and payment systems, transforming the energy map into a map of alliances and strategic vulnerabilities.

The Strait of Hormuz demonstrates the enormous disproportion between the geographical dimensions of a passage point and its effects upon the world economy, because a disruption within a narrow maritime corridor can reduce deliveries, raise prices, intensify competition for liquefied natural gas, and affect poor economies most severely, since they lack reserves, favorable contracts, or the financial power to compete with large buyers; UNCTAD's March 2026 assessment showed that shocks in Hormuz spread into energy, fertilizer, transport, and finance, while the World Bank estimated in its April scenario a 24 percent increase in energy prices in 2026, emphasizing that the first consequences are borne by consumers, but the most serious emerge later through higher food prices, accelerating inflation, rising interest rates, and worsening debt in vulnerable states.

The Red Sea, the Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Black Sea, and other maritime corridors are not mere elements of commercial geography, but points at which such a significant portion of global transport is concentrated that attacking, blocking, or threatening them may compel vessels to follow longer routes, consume more fuel, pay higher insurance premiums, and delay the supply of factories and shops, while the resulting costs are gradually transferred to the population; a vessel diverted around a continent carries not only cargo, but also time, capital, energy, and confidence, and when delays become frequent, companies increase inventories, prices rise, production is reorganized, investments are postponed, and states begin to regard freedom of navigation not as a common good, but as a military responsibility to be guaranteed through escort, naval presence, and strategic control.

Global supply chains were constructed over decades of economic integration according to the principle of efficiency, with every stage of production moved to the location where cost, expertise, infrastructure, and access to resources offered the greatest advantages, but wars, pandemics, sanctions, and technological rivalries have demonstrated that efficiency without resilience can turn a local interruption into a global crisis, while states are now seeking to return production to their own territories or transfer it to partners considered secure; this reorganization may reduce certain dangerous

dependencies, but if guided exclusively by the logic of rival blocs, it will produce duplicated infrastructure, higher prices, reduced competition, and the gradual separation of the world economy into systems that communicate only through sanctions, threats, and clandestine markets.

Semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, energy technologies, medicines, aeronautical components, artificial-intelligence systems, and critical minerals have become matters of national security, while export controls are justified by the need to prevent military use, although the dual character of technology makes it difficult to draw a boundary between a civilian product and strategic capability; restricting the adversary's access may delay the development of certain weapons, but may also prompt massive investment in autonomy, the creation of alternative standards, and reduced dependence upon Western suppliers, so that the advantage provided by sanctions is temporary if not transformed into an agreement, while the world comes to pay the price of several incompatible ecosystems, each protected through economic barriers and political control.

Sanctions represent a legitimate instrument between diplomatic protest and the use of force, because they allow the international community to impose costs upon a state that violates fundamental rules without immediately resorting to bombardment, but their effectiveness depends upon clear objectives, coordinated application, protection of the population, and the existence of a path by which measures can be reduced when the targeted behavior changes; a sanction that does not specify what the state must do to obtain its removal becomes unlimited punishment, stimulates the clandestine economy, strengthens groups close to power, transfers costs to citizens, and allows the leadership to attribute every difficulty to the external adversary, while secondary sanctions imposed upon companies and states that continue relations with the primary target may be perceived as an extraterritorial expansion of power and may accelerate the formation of alternative economic mechanisms.

Freezing assets, restricting access to currencies, exclusion from payment systems, and the use of financial reserves in geopolitical confrontations may

exert rapid pressure, but they also raise the question of the trust upon which the world economy rests, because states fearing that access to their own reserves could be blocked will seek gold, alternative currencies, bilateral agreements, and financial institutions outside the control of rivals, while such diversification will not immediately eliminate the role of existing systems, but may gradually fragment the global market; currency is not only a means of payment, but a promise that rules will remain predictable, and transforming it into a weapon used without uniform criteria may diminish over the long term the influence of the power that controls it.

Goeconomic fragmentation produces losses that are not equally distributed, since the great powers possess domestic markets, resources, technology, and the ability to finance adaptation, while small states depend upon imports, a few export products, foreign investment, and access to credit, and the obligation to choose between blocs may close markets, raise financing costs, and restrict access to technology; the International Monetary Fund has warned that rapid fragmentation would make the adaptation of supply chains very costly and, under severe scenarios, could produce substantial losses for the global economy, demonstrating that separation is not merely a technical rearrangement, but a process that reduces the resources available for health, education, poverty reduction, and climate protection.

Food is the domain in which economic warfare reveals its most painful moral character, because the price of grain, oils, fertilizer, energy, and transport does not remain a figure on the screens of exchanges, but determines whether a family can purchase sufficient food, whether a farmer can cultivate the land, and whether a fragile government can prevent famine and social unrest; wars destroy fields, obstruct ports, reduce the labor force, interrupt irrigation, impede access to seed and fertilizer, and lead exporting states to restrict sales in order to protect their own populations, while these restrictions, rational at the national level, aggravate global shortages and strike people who contributed nothing to the conflict.

Energy and agriculture are more deeply connected than they appear, because fertilizer production, the operation of machinery, irrigation, processing,

refrigeration, and transport depend upon fuels and electricity, while higher gas prices and disruptions to fertilizer exports can reduce future harvests even when warehouses presently contain sufficient grain; this is one of the most dangerous delays in economic effect, because an energy crisis beginning today may diminish cultivated areas and productivity several months later, and the population will feel the consequences after political attention has shifted to another subject, making it necessary to analyze food security not only through the current harvest, but also through farmers' access to every means of future production.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations analyzed in March 2026 the effects of conflict in the Middle East upon energy, fertilizer, agricultural trade, and food security and identified additional pressure upon markets, while the rise in the food price index during the same period confirmed that the connection among war, energy, and food is not hypothetical; the poorest populations are affected disproportionately because they allocate a larger share of income to food and fuel, possess no savings, cannot easily substitute products, and frequently live in debt-burdened states unable to finance subsidies or protection programs.

Turning food into a weapon may take the form of deliberately blocking ports, destroying warehouses, confiscating harvests, restricting humanitarian aid, or using famine to force a population to move or accept imposed conditions, and such actions exceed the ordinary logic of sanctions and approach the threshold of crimes against human dignity; the international community must regard food corridors, water facilities, civilian warehouses, seed, and agricultural infrastructure as protected goods, because conflict gives no party the right to turn human survival into a means of negotiation.

Critical minerals add a new dimension to this confrontation, since the energy transition, electronics industry, electric vehicles, data centers, military systems, and communications depend upon raw materials whose extraction and processing are concentrated in a small number of countries, while competition for access may produce pressure upon poor states, environmental degradation, corruption, and new forms of dependence; the paradox is that

technologies needed to reduce vulnerability to oil and gas create dependencies upon other resources, and if the ecological transition is organized according to the same logic of domination, the world will change the object of confrontation without changing the behavior that produces it.

Economic war profoundly affects public finances, because high energy and food prices compel governments to provide assistance, while inflation prompts central banks to raise interest rates and borrowing becomes more expensive precisely when states need money to protect their populations, finance defense, and undertake reconstruction; indebted countries are compelled to choose among paying creditors, maintaining public services, and importing essential products, while discontent produced by austerity may fuel extremism, coups, and violence, turning the economic shock of a distant war into a local political crisis.

Transport companies, insurers, banks, commodity exchanges, and major traders become actors in global security without possessing a democratic mandate, because their decision to avoid a route, suspend risk coverage, refuse a payment, or halt a delivery may affect entire populations, while governments seek to influence them through regulations, sanctions, and guarantees; the private sector cannot be required to assume unlimited risks, but neither should it be allowed to pursue profit without responsibility during periods in which speculation, the artificial accumulation of stocks, and the transfer of every cost to consumers may aggravate suffering.

The war economy develops an inertia of its own, because investments are redirected toward armaments, industry is reorganized, jobs and profits come to depend upon military orders, and leaders present defense spending as an engine of development and a condition of survival, although every resource allocated to destruction is withheld from health, education, civilian infrastructure, and environmental protection; when millions of people depend economically upon continued military production, peace encounters not only geopolitical obstacles, but also resistance from powerful material interests, which is why the transition from war to peace must include industrial

transformation, the protection of jobs, and the redirection of expertise toward reconstruction, energy, climate, and infrastructure.

Preventing the collapse of the world economy does not require a return to a naive form of globalization in which states ignore the risks of dependency and leave production of essential goods concentrated in only a few places, but the construction of resilient interdependence with diversified suppliers, strategic reserves, alternative routes, regional capacities, and rules preventing the use of indispensable food, medicine, water, and energy as instruments of collective punishment; genuine resilience does not mean autarky, because no state can efficiently produce everything it needs, but rather ensuring that the interruption of a single source does not paralyze an entire society.

Sanctions must be proportionate, directed toward decision-makers and military capabilities, accompanied by functioning humanitarian exceptions and public criteria for suspension, maritime corridors must be protected through international mechanisms that do not become pretexts for conquest or regime change, exports of food and fertilizer must be maintained even among adversaries, and global organizations must possess reserves and funds capable of rapidly supporting states struck by rising prices; at the same time, the transition toward diversified and renewable energy must be accelerated not only for the climate, but also for peace, because every economy that reduces its dependence upon a single fuel, supplier, or corridor becomes less vulnerable to blackmail and conflict.

The world's decision-makers must understand that the economy is not an abstract reality composed of charts, indices, and percentages, but the network through which people receive food, warmth, medicine, jobs, and hope for the future, while using it without limits as a weapon can kill slowly and invisibly, without spectacular images but on a scale greater than many military operations; the child who no longer receives food, the patient for whom medicine has become inaccessible, the farmer who can no longer afford fertilizer, and the family whose income is destroyed by inflation are not faceless collateral damage, but people whose lives are affected by decisions adopted in distant capitals.

No power will prosper for long in a world divided into hostile markets and crossed by famine, debt, migration, and revolt, just as no economic victory can endure if it produces the collapse of partners, the radicalization of peoples, and the destruction of the trust upon which commerce rests; the economy can become the weapon that prepares the last war or the bridge that prevents it, and the choice depends upon leaders' capacity to use interdependence not for the permanent coercion of the adversary, but to build a common interest so powerful that the cost of war is understood before humanity is compelled to pay it.

PART VII

THE NUCLEAR THRESHOLD

The Illusion of Limited War and the Possible End of Civilization

Nuclear weapons are not merely a more powerful category of armament, a technological continuation of artillery, aviation, and conventional missiles, or an instrument reserved for the final stage of confrontation among states, but introduce into political history the possibility that a decision taken within minutes by a very small number of people may destroy cities, paralyze states, contaminate regions, destabilize the climate, and endanger the continuity of civilization, while this disproportion between the time required for the decision and the duration of its consequences means that the nuclear question belongs not exclusively to the states possessing such weapons, the armed forces administering them, or the alliances that build their security upon their protection, but to every human being who would suffer the effects without having been consulted, without having voted, and without being able to find genuine shelter from the collapse of the systems upon which modern life depends.

The nuclear order is founded upon the paradox of deterrence, according to which weapons are retained so that they will not be used, the threat of mutual destruction is presented as a guarantee of peace, and each power must demonstrate to its adversary a willingness to take a decision that, if it is rational and conscious of the consequences, it should wish never to take; this logic may explain why the great powers avoided direct military confrontation

during certain periods, but it cannot guarantee that such avoidance will continue forever, because the system depends upon accurate information, functioning communications, leaders capable of judging lucidly under pressure, the absence of accidents, control over all actors, and the mutual conviction that neither side is preparing a strike that would eliminate the other's capacity to respond, while history demonstrates that none of these conditions can be regarded as permanent.

Deterrence is not a mechanical construction in which every action produces a predictable response, but a psychological relationship among people, institutions, and systems that may interpret the same signals differently, while what one power presents as a defensive measure may be seen by its adversary as preparation for attack, what one leader regards as a controlled warning may be interpreted by another as the beginning of an operation, and silence intended to reduce tension may appear to be weakness or the concealment of an intention; during a crisis, decision-makers do not possess all the information and are influenced by historical experience, doctrine, fear, exhaustion, political pressure, and the recommendations of subordinates, so that the assumption that each will always act with perfect rationality represents one of the most dangerous hopes upon which the security of humanity can be built.

SIPRI's assessment published in June 2026 shows that states are assigning nuclear weapons a greater role in security strategies, that arsenals are being modernized, transparency and strategic dialogue are declining, and the risks of miscalculation and escalation are growing, while the global inventory was estimated at more than twelve thousand warheads, thousands of them deployed and a substantial number maintained at a high level of alert; the problem lies not only in quantity, because even a numerically smaller arsenal can produce catastrophe, but in the diversification of weapons, the emergence of systems with both nuclear and conventional uses, the reduction of warning time, and the integration of technologies that may make leaders believe they must decide before understanding the situation with certainty.

The expression "tactical nuclear weapon" may create the impression of a limited instrument intended for a confined battlefield and controllable through military planning, yet explosion, radiation, contamination, panic, and political consequences do not become tactical merely because the weapon has a lower yield or a shorter range, while its use would cross a threshold the world has not crossed in war since the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; after the first detonation, the adversary cannot know with certainty whether other strikes will follow, whether the objective is merely to halt an offensive or prepare a broader campaign, while its leadership will come under pressure to respond in order not to permit normalization of the attack, to preserve the credibility of deterrence, and to demonstrate that it cannot be compelled to capitulate through the limited use of a weapon that is morally unlimited.

The illusion of control rests upon the assumption that both parties will understand exactly the message transmitted through first use, calculate proportionality identically, and preserve sufficient communications for negotiation, although war destroys the very information systems, trust, and capacity to interpret intentions upon which these assumptions depend, while a leader approving a demonstrative strike does not control the adversary's reaction, the condition of the population, pressure from military commanders, the actions of allies, or the unforeseen effects of the explosion; what is conceived as a signal may be perceived as the beginning of extermination, and what was intended to compel the adversary to stop may convince it that it must respond immediately and far more forcefully, before other weapons destroy its capacity for retaliation.

The danger increases through the overlap between conventional and nuclear systems, because missiles, satellites, radar, communications, command centers, and launch platforms may perform multiple roles, while attacking them during a conventional operation may be interpreted as an attempt to neutralize nuclear forces; if a power loses contact with certain units, observes disruption of its satellites, and detects missile launches whose payloads cannot immediately be known, its leadership may believe that it faces a strategic strike even if the adversary was pursuing a limited objective, while

this ambiguity turns dual-use technologies into involuntary bridges between conventional and nuclear war.

Maintaining weapons on high alert is intended to guarantee retaliation before they can be destroyed, but reduces the time available for verification and compels decision-makers to assess incomplete signals under the pressure of possibly losing the entire arsenal, while false alarms caused by malfunctions, the interpretation of natural phenomena, software errors, military exercises, cyberattacks, or incorrect data may create for a few minutes the image of a war that has not begun; humanity has survived such moments partly because individuals refused to treat a technical signal as incontestable truth, but a security policy cannot depend forever upon the hope that at the next alarm the right person will have enough time, information, and courage to doubt.

Artificial intelligence can assist in processing data and identifying errors, but its integration into nuclear warning adds opacity and speed, because an algorithm may formulate conclusions based upon correlations the operator cannot explain, may be manipulated through data constructed by an adversary, and may amplify biases within its training material, while excessive confidence in its precision may diminish the very critical spirit that prevented previous catastrophes; no machine must be granted authority to make determinative recommendations, authorize, or execute the use of nuclear weapons, while the final decision must remain human, deliberate, and subject to multiple controls, although formally keeping a human in the loop is insufficient if that person has only a few seconds to confirm an automated conclusion.

A cyberattack upon a nuclear system represents a double risk, because it may seek to disrupt the adversary's capacity, but may produce errors, the loss of communications, and interpretations prompting a disproportionate reaction, while the mere suspicion that a network has been compromised may cause leaders to lose confidence in the information they receive; states must recognize nuclear command, control, warning, and communications systems as infrastructure that cannot be cyberattacked without endangering all humanity, while an international agreement on non-interference,

accompanied by technical dialogue and emergency channels, would represent one of the most urgent risk-reduction measures.

The consequences of the first explosion would exceed the response capacity of services functioning in peacetime, because blast, heat, fire, radiation, and the destruction of infrastructure would simultaneously produce an enormous number of casualties, while hospitals, access routes, communications, water networks, and medical personnel would themselves be affected, and external assistance could not quickly reach a contaminated area deprived of infrastructure; the International Committee of the Red Cross states that the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons exceed the capacity of any organization to respond effectively and regards it as extremely doubtful that they could be used in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law, meaning that the idea of preparing a sufficient response cannot replace the obligation to prevent their use.

Radiation does not stop at the border of the attacked state, does not distinguish between soldier and child, and does not cease producing effects when military operations end, while exposure may cause acute injuries, disease, and an increased risk of cancer, and contamination of water, soil, and food prolongs the consequences for communities not directly struck; the World Health Organization indicates that many states lack sufficient capacity even for ordinary radiological emergencies, while a nuclear confrontation would destroy part of the means of response at the very moment their need became incomparably greater.

The effects would not be confined to bombed areas, because urban and industrial fires could inject large quantities of smoke into the atmosphere, reducing sunlight, altering temperatures and precipitation, and affecting agriculture and marine ecosystems, while the exact scale depends upon the number and yield of weapons, the type of targets, the quantity of material burned, and the behavior of the atmosphere, which requires avoiding false precision but does not justify ignoring the risk; climate and food research has modeled several scenarios and shown that reductions in agricultural, livestock, and fisheries production could transform a war fought among a few

states into a global famine, striking populations far from the explosions and demonstrating that geographical neutrality offers no protection against the disruption of climate and food.

Economic destruction would continue long after the explosions ended, because ports, energy networks, financial centers, digital infrastructure, factories, transport systems, and public administrations would be paralyzed, markets would cease to function, currencies and contracts would lose their meaning, while states not struck directly would face interrupted imports, collapsing trade, mass migration, epidemics, and conflicts over resources; technological civilization is powerful through cooperation and specialization, but this strength becomes vulnerability when essential components are destroyed simultaneously, because no country can rebuild alone, within a contaminated and climatically unstable environment, all the systems upon which its survival depends.

Nuclear war would also destroy the moral and legal order upon which reconstruction would have to rest, because the deliberate use of a weapon incapable of confining its effects to military objectives, producing long-term suffering and harm to non-belligerent states and future generations, would undermine the principles of distinction, proportionality, and civilian protection; legal debate over extreme scenarios cannot conceal the fundamental humanitarian reality that no strategy can control radiation, climate, famine, and the collapse of medical systems, while legality must not be reduced to identifying a hypothetical situation in which use might be argued, but analyzed through the foreseeable consequences that no responsible authority has the right to ignore.

Defenders of deterrence argue that unilateral renunciation could expose states to attack and blackmail, that weapons cannot be eliminated without verification, that mistrust prevents rapid disarmament, and that the technology required to construct them cannot be forgotten, and these arguments must be taken seriously, because peace cannot be built through moral appeals that ignore the genuine fears of states, yet the impossibility of immediate abolition does not justify unlimited expansion of arsenals, reduced

transparency, the integration of new technologies, and the refusal of every intermediate measure; between uncontrolled retention and total disarmament lies an extensive space for risk reduction, while refusing to use it turns professed prudence into a form of irresponsibility.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was built upon a balance under which states without nuclear weapons renounce their acquisition, receive access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and the nuclear powers undertake to pursue disarmament, but if the final obligation is perceived as being postponed indefinitely, the legitimacy of the entire system weakens and threatened states may conclude that the only genuine guarantee is an arsenal of their own; the 2026 Review Conference took place in a climate of mistrust and competition, while the expiration of the New START Treaty without a successor agreement removed an essential limit upon American and Russian strategic forces, opening the prospect of a less transparent and more difficult-to-control arms race.

A resumption of nuclear testing would signal that the great powers are preparing new weapons and could trigger similar responses, which is why the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty must enter into force and the norm against explosive testing must be defended by every state regardless of rivalry; the treaty prohibits all nuclear explosions, military or civilian, while the international monitoring system demonstrates that global verification is possible when investment, scientific cooperation, and political will exist.

Immediate risk reduction requires the adoption of no-first-use commitments, lower alert levels, the separation of warheads from delivery systems wherever possible, longer decision times, the restoration of direct lines among nuclear powers, notification of exercises, the prohibition of cyberattacks against command systems, clarification of doctrines, and the establishment of protocols for incidents involving missiles, aircraft, submarines, and satellites; these measures do not eliminate the weapons, but reduce the likelihood that they will be used through haste, error, or false interpretation, while every minute added to verification may represent the difference between a corrected alarm and the disappearance of cities.

In the medium term, the United States and Russia must negotiate a successor to New START, China, France, the United Kingdom, and the other nuclear powers must gradually be included in proportionate forms of transparency and limitation, fissile materials must be controlled, their production for weapons halted through a verifiable treaty, and nuclear-weapon-free zones expanded and accompanied by credible guarantees; verification must be regarded not as humiliation or loss of sovereignty, but as the means through which an adversary's promise becomes measurable fact, because disarmament without verification is fragile, while verification without political commitment remains a technical exercise without purpose.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons expresses the moral and humanitarian revolt of the majority of states that refuse to accept that the security of a few powers should rest upon the risk of exterminating everyone, and even if possessor states are not yet prepared to join, the treaty's existence strengthens the norm that the use, threat, production, and possession of these weapons cannot be regarded as normal and permanent conditions of civilization; total disarmament will require stages, verification, guarantees, institutions, and the resolution of conflicts that fuel dependence upon deterrence, but the direction must be established without ambiguity, because a system that does not advance toward reducing arsenals will inevitably move toward their modernization and expansion.

The world's decision-makers must abandon the illusion that nuclear war can be managed like a conventional operation, that the first strike will transmit exactly the intended message, that the adversary will respond proportionately, that the population will be protected, that the economy will continue to function, and that the victor will be able to rebuild what has been destroyed, because each of these assumptions depends upon control over factors no power can command; nuclear weapons can produce destruction, but cannot conquer radiation, compel the climate to respect borders, or feed the survivors, while the state using them might achieve a military victory devoid of all meaning in a world where the very concept of victory has been annulled.

The nuclear threshold is not only a military line, but the moral boundary between a civilization that, despite its conflicts, continues to believe in the future and a civilization that accepts the possibility of sacrificing that future for a temporary strategic advantage, while preserving this boundary depends upon leaders' determination to condemn every nuclear threat, including one made by an ally, the courage of military personnel to warn of the impossibility of control, the responsibility of scientists, and pressure from citizens who refuse to be turned into hostages of doctrines over which they have no power.

Humanity must not wait for the first detonation in order to rediscover the truth it already knows, because after the explosion no declaration, apology, investigation, or conference will suffice to restore those who have been lost, while if the weapons are used on a large scale there may no longer be institutions capable of judging responsibility; genuine nuclear peace cannot mean living forever with a finger above the button, but must be the process through which that button gradually loses its power, arsenals are reduced, conflicts are resolved, and humanity replaces the balance of fear with a security system that no longer demands the possibility of collective suicide as the guarantee of survival.

PART VIII

WAR AGAINST THE EARTH

Climate Change, Environmental Destruction, the Struggle for Resources, and the Migrations of the Future

The Earth is not an inert stage upon which human beings wage their wars and which, after the bombardments cease, they can clean, repair, and restore to its former condition without consequence, but a living, interdependent, and finite system within which water, air, soil, forests, climate, oceans, biodiversity, and human communities sustain one another, while the destruction of any one of these components is transmitted to the others, so that war waged for territory, resources, security, or prestige inevitably becomes a war against the conditions that make life possible; bridges and buildings can be rebuilt, armies can be demobilized, and agreements can

restore borders, but contaminated soil, a poisoned aquifer, a burned forest, an extinct species, or a region transformed by desertification cannot be restored through a single political decision, while the ecological costs continue to affect health, food, and the economy long after the leaders who began the conflict are no longer in power.

The relationship between climate and war operates in both directions, because climate change can amplify vulnerabilities, competition for water and food, the loss of livelihoods, migration, and institutional fragility, while war destroys the infrastructure required for adaptation, consumes resources that ought to be invested in environmental protection, generates pollution and emissions, impedes monitoring, and compels populations to exploit already weakened ecosystems in order to survive; climate does not automatically cause wars, and drought does not inevitably turn neighbors into enemies, because the effect depends upon inequality, governance, corruption, access to resources, institutions, the history of tensions, and the capacity of societies to cooperate, yet climate change can act as a multiplier that aggravates existing conflicts and reduces peaceful possibilities for their resolution. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that warming may increase susceptibility to violence by reinforcing the economic, social, and institutional factors that favor conflict, an essential formulation because it avoids climate determinism while recognizing the gravity of the risk.

Military operations affect the environment through massive fuel consumption, fires caused by explosions, the destruction of industrial facilities, land degradation, toxic contamination, abandoned munitions, damage to sewage networks, and the accumulation of enormous quantities of waste, while these effects are difficult to measure during hostilities because specialist access is limited, local institutions no longer function, information is used for propaganda, and the urgency of saving lives pushes ecological consequences to the margins of attention; precisely this invisibility allows the environment to become war's silent victim, although its deterioration will determine how much water survivors can drink, whether the land will continue to produce food, and whether the population can ever return.

Attacking refineries, pipelines, storage facilities, power stations, chemical plants, and energy infrastructure may seek to weaken the adversary's military and economic capacity, but the resulting fires and leaks do not distinguish between strategic objective and ecosystem, while pollutants may enter the air, rivers, groundwater, and crops, cross borders, and affect states not participating in the conflict; in industrialized areas, war strikes not only what is visible at the surface, but may release substances accumulated in facilities, warehouses, and soils, turning the destruction of one day into a public-health problem lasting decades, while hurried reconstruction, if it does not include an assessment of contamination, may erect homes and schools upon land that continues to endanger health.

Water is among the most fragile links among environment, security, and peace, because rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and underground aquifers cross borders, sustain cities, agriculture, industry, and energy, while control over a source may become a means of pressure upon the population and the adversary; the destruction of dams, pumping stations, pipelines, and treatment facilities may cause flooding, local drought, contamination, and epidemics, while interruption of water supplies forces people to leave their homes more rapidly than many direct attacks, making the protection of water infrastructure not only a humanitarian obligation, but also a condition of regional stability.

Climate change intensifies this vulnerability by altering precipitation, reducing snow and ice reserves, increasing evaporation, salinizing coastal waters, and increasing the frequency of severe droughts, while states within the same river basin may interpret construction of a dam, diversion of water, or expansion of irrigation as a threat to their own survival; nevertheless, water can also become a bridge for peace, because mutual dependence compels governments to exchange data, establish minimum flows, coordinate periods of accumulation, and protect sources, while joint-management treaties can preserve dialogue even among states that do not cooperate in other domains.

Drought does not mean merely the absence of rain, but reduced harvests, the loss of livestock, declining hydropower production, rising prices, household debt, interrupted education, and migration toward cities, and when the same communities are simultaneously affected by poverty, conflict, and weak governance, their adaptive capacity may collapse; the report of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification on drought hotspots during 2023-2025 shows how water scarcity, insecurity, famine, and displacement overlap in numerous regions, demonstrating that drought resilience must be understood as a policy of peace, not merely an agricultural problem.

Land degradation amplifies the same spiral, because erosion, deforestation, salinization, pollution, and unsustainable agriculture reduce productivity, compel farmers to use increasingly fragile areas, and stimulate competition among agriculture, pastoralism, industry, and urban development, while local disputes over land may acquire an ethnic, religious, or political dimension when institutions provide no equitable mechanisms of settlement; war accelerates degradation through the abandonment of maintenance work, the burning of crops, population displacement, and the concentration of people in areas unable to sustain them, while mines and unexploded ordnance prevent a return to agriculture and prolong dependence upon aid after the fighting ends.

Forests are destroyed through bombardment, fire, illegal exploitation, and the cutting required for the survival of populations deprived of energy, while their loss affects carbon storage, the water cycle, soil stability, biodiversity, and protection against disasters, meaning that forest restoration cannot be treated as a decorative element of reconstruction, but as indispensable natural infrastructure; the same is true of wetlands, reefs, mangroves, grasslands, and coastal ecosystems, which reduce flooding, sustain food, and provide livelihoods, but are rarely included among the objectives whose protection is regarded as essential in military planning.

Biodiversity is not a luxury that can be defended after human problems have been resolved, because pollination, soil fertility, water purification, disease regulation, coastal protection, and ecosystem stability depend upon the diversity of life, while the loss of species weakens nature's capacity to

recover after drought, fire, pollution, or war; when a conflict destroys a unique habitat, the world may permanently lose forms of life and biological knowledge that no victory, compensation, or technology can recreate, and this loss belongs to all humanity, not only to the state in whose territory it occurred.

The United Nations Environment Programme has shown that wars produce pollution, waste, ecosystem destruction, and long-lasting effects upon water, food, the economy, and health, while assessments conducted in conflict zones demonstrate that ecological damage continues to accumulate even when international attention is focused upon military operations and negotiations; in Gaza, for example, UNEP identified damage to soils, fresh water, coastal ecosystems, and agricultural land, while in Ukraine it drew attention to the scale of industrial destruction and the need for an extensive post-conflict assessment, without these examples exhausting the ecological suffering produced in other regions.

Natural resources can fuel war not only through scarcity, but also through abundance, because oil, gas, gold, diamonds, timber, and minerals can finance armed groups, corrupt institutions, attract foreign interventions, and transform territorial control into a source of revenue, while illegal exploitation prolongs conflict even after its original causes disappear; a peace negotiated without establishing ownership, management, and distribution of resource revenues remains fragile, because combatants retain a material interest in continued violence while the population watches as wealth extracted from its territory finances the weapons that destroy it.

The energy transition adds competition for lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, rare earths, and other minerals required for batteries, electrical grids, data centers, and renewable technologies, while the attempt to reduce dependence upon fossil fuels may create new forms of dependence if extraction and processing remain concentrated and rich states transfer ecological costs to poor communities; saving the climate cannot be achieved by destroying the lands and waters of other peoples, and green security must not reproduce the

old colonialism of resources in the form of technological competition presented as inevitable.

The Arctic offers a disturbing example of how environmental degradation can open new spaces of confrontation, because melting ice facilitates access to maritime routes and resources, prompting states to strengthen their strategic presence in an extremely sensitive region, while what constitutes a climatic loss for the planet becomes a commercial and military opportunity for powers; instead of the disappearance of ice being treated solely as a warning requiring cooperation, it risks stimulating a race for control, infrastructure, and extraction, accelerating the very phenomenon that made access possible.

Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, soil salinization, drought, and extreme disasters will cause growing numbers of people to move, but the expression "climate migrant" must not be used as though one cause alone explained every departure, because families decide to migrate through a combination of economic, political, ecological, social, and security factors, while climate change frequently aggravates conditions that are already fragile; migration can be a rational form of adaptation, allowing people to protect their lives and support the communities left behind, but becomes a tragedy when displacement is sudden, forced, without legal protection, and met with closed borders, exploitation, discrimination, and violence.

The International Organization for Migration estimates that weather events produced hundreds of millions of cumulative internal displacements during the past decade, without this figure representing the same number of distinct individuals or proving that all displacement became permanent, but the scale demonstrates the pressure imposed upon communities, cities, and states; most people initially move within their own countries, as close to home as possible, while the image of inevitable waves heading toward rich continents may be used politically to fuel fear, although the most effective response is to support adaptation and safe mobility where populations live.

Climate migration may destabilize societies if public services, housing, employment, and mechanisms of integration are unprepared and politicians turn newcomers into scapegoats for older problems, but conflict is not the automatic result of migrants' presence, but of the way institutions distribute resources, combat discrimination, and ensure community participation; cities that plan expansion, invest in infrastructure, and permit integration can turn migration into an economic and cultural resource, while permanent camps, exclusion, and the absence of rights create generations without prospects, vulnerable to radicalization and exploitation.

From a legal standpoint, persons displaced across borders exclusively or predominantly for climate-related reasons do not always fall within the classical categories of refugee protection, while this gap becomes more serious as certain territories gradually lose their habitability; the international community must build complementary forms of protection, humanitarian visas, regional mobility agreements, pathways for dignified relocation, and mechanisms ensuring that states bearing the least historical responsibility for warming do not bear the costs alone, because climate justice cannot mean only calculating emissions, but must also mean sharing responsibility for people whose homes and livelihoods are disappearing.

War reduces adaptive capacity precisely where it is most necessary, because it destroys weather stations, warning systems, irrigation, medical services, local administrations, and protective infrastructure, compels specialists to leave, and redirects budgets toward defense, while climate finance frequently avoids fragile states because of high risks; a circular injustice thus emerges in which countries affected simultaneously by conflict and climate receive less investment, become more vulnerable, suffer more serious disasters, and enter into a form of humanitarian dependence that does not rebuild their own capacity.

Global military expenditure and the investments required to combat climate change compete for the same financial, scientific, and industrial resources, while states declaring that they lack sufficient funds for adaptation find enormous sums when they perceive a military threat, although climate can

produce losses, instability, and displacement on a comparable scale; security must not be reduced to defending borders, because an armed state incapable of providing water, food, energy, and protection from disasters is not truly secure, while the military itself will increasingly be compelled to respond to crises that civilian investment could have prevented.

Protecting the environment during war requires stronger rules prohibiting widespread, severe, and long-term damage, clarification of responsibility for contamination and deliberate ecosystem destruction, the inclusion of environmental experts in ceasefire negotiations, and documentation of damage before evidence disappears, while the concept of ecocide, under legal and political development, expresses the need for ecological destruction of the greatest gravity not to be treated as an inevitable consequence without an author; responsibility must be applied cautiously, on the basis of evidence and clear definitions, but legal difficulty cannot justify impunity.

Postwar reconstruction must be ecological, transparent, and directed toward resilience, not a hurried restoration of the same vulnerable and polluting infrastructure, because buildings, energy networks, transport, water systems, and agriculture can be rebuilt to withstand drought, heat, flooding, and future crises more effectively; remediation of contamination, removal of ordnance, restoration of ecosystems, and reestablishment of land ownership must be included in peace agreements, while local communities must participate in decisions so that reconstruction does not become a new form of expropriation and conflict.

Climate cooperation can preserve bridges even among adversaries, because weather data, fires, pollution, water management, and the protection of migratory species cannot be managed effectively by a single state, while common institutions created for these problems can maintain communication when political dialogue is blocked; transboundary protected natural areas, river agreements, regional warning systems, and joint energy projects can become forms of diplomacy, demonstrating to populations that the benefits of cooperation are concrete and that security need not always be obtained against one's neighbor.

World peace and saving the Earth are the same project, because a degraded planet will produce greater insecurity, while a militarized world will be unable to mobilize the cooperation and resources required to limit warming and adapt to it, so that leaders no longer have the right to treat the environment as a secondary chapter that can be addressed after geopolitical disputes are resolved; the climate does not wait for peace treaties, ecosystems do not suspend their degradation during negotiations, and every year lost through conflict reduces the time and options available to future generations.

Destroying the land in order to conquer it, contaminating water in order to weaken the adversary, burning forests for a temporary advantage, and consuming the resources of the future to produce means of extermination represent the supreme expression of a power that has lost its purpose, because territory without fertile soil, a city without water, a state without a population, and victory achieved upon a planet made hostile to life no longer possess value; the world's decision-makers must understand that the Earth does not belong only to the generation administering it today and that no sovereignty confers the right to cause irreversible harm to the common heritage of humanity.

The war against the Earth can be stopped only by transforming environmental protection into a central principle of security, recognizing water and food as goods that cannot be used to punish populations, prohibiting attacks upon essential ecological infrastructure, reducing the emissions and energy dependencies that finance conflicts, jointly managing resources, and guaranteeing dignified mobility for those compelled to leave, while peace will become lasting only when people are no longer content merely to silence the weapons, but also heal the land wounded by them.

PART IX

THE HUMAN BEING, THE FORGOTTEN VICTIM OF GRAND STRATEGIES

Behind military maps, security doctrines, geopolitical calculations, and impersonal expressions such as “strategic objective,” “acceptable losses,” or “collateral damage” stand real human beings whose lives are destroyed by bombings, hunger, shortages of water and electricity, the interruption of medical treatment, the separation of families, the loss of homes, and forced exile, which is why the protection of the human person must become the central criterion of every military decision rather than a secondary concern invoked only after tragedy has occurred. Children endure the consequences of conflicts they did not cause, losing their parents, health, education, security, and sometimes their entire childhood, while hospitals, medical personnel, older persons, the sick, refugees, prisoners, and missing persons become victims of a mechanism that reduces suffering to statistics and forgets that every number represents a unique and irreplaceable life. The trauma of war does not end with the signing of an armistice, because fear, loss, humiliation, hatred, and distrust can be transmitted to subsequent generations, while the memory of victims may be transformed either into a warning that prevents the repetition of violence or into an instrument used to justify revenge. Genuine peace therefore requires the protection of civilians, hospitals, and schools, the provision of humanitarian access, the search for missing persons, the reunification of families, individual accountability for crimes, assistance for refugees, and the healing of trauma, because true victory is not the conquest of a devastated territory but the return of children to school, the reopening of hospitals, the safe return of refugees, and the reconstruction of a society in which human dignity is no longer sacrificed to strategic interests.

PART X

WHY THE WORLD FAILS TO STOP WARS

The world does not fail to prevent wars because it lacks institutions, treaties, information, or diplomatic instruments, but because the great powers often apply the principles of international law according to their own interests, condemning aggression committed by their adversaries while justifying similar actions when they are carried out by themselves or their allies, and this selective use of law destroys trust, fuels propaganda, and leads smaller actors to believe that security can no longer be achieved through rules but only through military power and alliances. The United Nations remains indispensable, yet it is constrained by the will of its member states, by the absence of its own effective means of enforcement, by the insufficient representativeness of the Security Council, and especially by the right of veto, which can transform the privilege of the major powers into a mechanism for blocking ceasefires, investigations, sanctions, and measures intended to protect civilians. Nevertheless, abandoning the United Nations would mean losing the only universal framework within which nearly all states can communicate, negotiate, and cooperate, which is why the organization must be reformed, its representativeness broadened, the use of the veto restricted in situations involving mass atrocities, and international law applied consistently to both adversaries and allies. Diplomacy must be freed from the spectacle of aggressive declarations, insults, ultimatums, and promises of total victory, because dialogue with an adversary does not constitute approval of that adversary's actions but represents the means through which intentions can be verified, incidents controlled, and war stopped before it becomes a catastrophe. Peace does not demand the abandonment of justice, but justice cannot save human lives if it is invoked only after those lives have been destroyed, while genuine political strength is demonstrated through the ability to combine firmness with negotiation, accountability with reconciliation, and the defence of principles with the prevention of extermination.

PART XI

THE ARCHITECTURE FOR PREVENTING A WORLD WAR

The prevention of a global conflagration cannot be left to chance, to the precarious balance of fear, or to the assumption that every leader will act rationally in a moment of crisis, because wars can erupt not only through deliberate aggression but also through false alarms, incorrect information, local incidents, miscalculations, cyberattacks, fabricated images, the misinterpretation of a military mobilization, or the automatic activation of alliance obligations, while modern technologies continually shorten the time within which such an error can still be verified and corrected. A genuine architecture of prevention must include international early-warning systems, permanent direct lines of communication between the political and military leaders of rival states, advance notification of military exercises and missile launches, clear rules for aerial, maritime, space, and cyber incidents, the protection of diplomatic channels, professional mediation, arms control, transparency, and independent verification mechanisms. Nuclear weapons must gradually be removed from states of extreme alert, the decision to launch them must never be delegated to artificial intelligence, and autonomous weapons systems must be restricted through international rules before the speed of algorithms replaces human judgement at an irreversible moment. Peace processes must involve not only governments and armed groups but also affected communities, women, young people, minorities, refugees, and civil society, because agreements imposed exclusively by political elites may temporarily stop the fighting but cannot eliminate the deeper causes of conflict. Common security does not require states to abandon their defences or place complete trust in one another, but it does require the construction of a system in which distrust, rivalry, and competition can no longer automatically trigger war, while prevention must become a permanent responsibility, organized and financed with the same seriousness with which military operations are prepared.

PART XII

THE DUTY OF THE WORLD'S DECISION-MAKERS: A PACT FOR PEACE, DISARMAMENT, AND SURVIVAL

Warnings and solemn declarations must be transformed into a concrete, verifiable, and binding pact for peace, disarmament, and survival, through which states recognize that no national interest, strategic advantage, territory, ideology, or personal ambition can justify the risk of destroying civilization, and that political and military power is not a privilege but a responsibility towards all humanity and towards the generations that cannot defend themselves against the decisions made in the present. The first commitment must be the common recognition that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, followed by the restriction of doctrines governing nuclear use, the reduction of alert levels, the prohibition of delegating nuclear decisions to autonomous systems, and the resumption of negotiations concerning the limitation of warheads, missiles, hypersonic weapons, and fissile materials. States must maintain functional direct communication lines, provide notification of military exercises and strategic movements, establish permanent commissions for risk reduction, accept inspections and exchanges of information, restrict autonomous weapons, protect nuclear, medical, energy, and civilian infrastructure, and create mechanisms through which violations of their commitments can be investigated independently. The pact must also include reform of international institutions, prevention of cyberattacks against essential systems, reduction of the uncontrolled arms trade, environmental protection, and the gradual transfer of resources from preparations for destruction towards healthcare, education, climate protection, food security, and development. Decision-makers must be judged not by the severity of their speeches or by the number of weapons they have deployed, but by the wars they have prevented, the treaties they have preserved, the communication they have maintained, and the lives they have protected, because the true greatness of power consists in the ability to accept common limits before the limits of human survival are irreversibly exceeded.

PART XIII

THE TWO FUTURES OF HUMANITY

Humanity stands before two fundamentally different futures, the first of which continues the present logic of confrontation, militarization, propaganda, demonization of the adversary, and unlimited competition until regional wars merge, alliances are activated, technologies compress decision-making time, and an incident, error, or provocation triggers the final war, while the second future transforms interdependence, shared vulnerability, and scientific progress into a civilization of cooperation capable of managing rivalries without destroying the planet. The first path begins with the gradual normalization of violence, the acceptance of civilian deaths as ordinary daily information, the presentation of compromise as betrayal and prudence as cowardice, and then continues through the militarization of the economy, education, scientific research, outer space, and artificial intelligence, until every state increases its armaments while claiming that it is merely defending itself, whereas its adversary interprets those preparations as offensive and responds through an even greater accumulation of force. The second path does not require the disappearance of states, identities, or national interests, but the acceptance of common limits, the strengthening of institutions, the equal application of international law, the reduction of armaments, the protection of the environment, education for peace, and the use of science in the service of life. Neither of these futures is predetermined, because every treaty negotiated, every diplomatic channel preserved, every weapon restricted, and every conflict mediated brings the world closer to cooperation, just as every institution weakened, nuclear threat issued, propaganda lie disseminated, and negotiation abandoned brings it closer to collapse. The choice will not be made in a single day but through the cumulative decisions of the present, yet a moment may come when turning back is no longer possible, which is why humanity must choose peace before the final war makes the choice in its place.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

Peace cannot be preserved solely through government treaties, the orders of leaders, and the negotiations of diplomats, but requires the living conscience of peoples and the refusal of citizens to transform hatred into patriotism, propaganda into truth, and destruction into an inevitable destiny, because societies grant legitimacy to power, accept sacrifices, transmit collective memory, and ultimately determine whether the language of war will become the law of public life. People must verify information, reject the collective demonization of nations, defend the dignity of victims regardless of their nationality, demand dialogue, transparency, arms control, and the protection of civilians from their leaders, and refuse to accept the claim that peace represents weakness, because the true weakness lies in humanity's inability to stop a mechanism of destruction that it has itself created. Future generations have no voice in the decisions of the present, yet their very existence depends upon those decisions, while the destruction of the world would mean not only the killing of those who live today but also the cancellation of all the lives, families, books, discoveries, and acts of kindness that might otherwise have existed. The final appeal of this work is therefore clear: let us not surrender the future to fear, hatred, and war; let us not transform the Earth into a funerary monument to intelligence deprived of wisdom; and let us choose dialogue, justice, restraint, and cooperation while there are still cities to defend, treaties to negotiate, children to save, and a future that can be entrusted to those who will come after us.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

Let Us Not Surrender the Future to Fear, Hatred, and War

Peace cannot be preserved solely through the decisions of leaders, the treaties negotiated by diplomats, or the orders issued by military commanders, because it also depends upon the living conscience of peoples and upon the

refusal of ordinary citizens to transform hatred into patriotism, propaganda into official truth, and destruction into an inevitable destiny. Humanity is not being asked to ignore danger, abandon legitimate defence, or accept injustice in the name of a false peace, but to prevent the guilt of governments, armies, or political systems from being extended to entire populations, because no child is born an enemy and no people can be considered guilty by blood, language, religion, or origin. Citizens must reject collective demonization, verify information before spreading it, love their own countries without hating other nations, educate children without inherited hostility, and recognize that words which deprive other people of their humanity prepare the moral ground for unlimited violence. Parents, teachers, young people, journalists, scientists, engineers, soldiers, religious leaders, artists, workers, and representatives of civil society all share responsibility for resisting manipulation, preserving truth, protecting victims, maintaining human control over technology, and refusing to allow knowledge, faith, patriotism, or culture to become instruments of extermination. Solidarity must extend to civilians, refugees, prisoners, wounded people, children, older persons, and all victims regardless of the side of the border on which they live, while the protection of the Earth must be understood as inseparable from the protection of peace, because war destroys not only human lives but also water, soil, forests, climate, infrastructure, and the conditions upon which future generations depend. The peoples of the world must therefore establish a covenant of conscience: never to hate an entire nation for the actions of its leaders, never to justify a crime because it was committed by their own side, never knowingly to spread falsehood, and never to remain indifferent when human life and the future of the planet are threatened. Peace will not arrive by itself or be permanently secured by a single signature; it must be chosen by every generation, during every crisis and within every conscience, beginning with a fundamental refusal to allow the final achievement of human intelligence to become an order of destruction or the final monument of civilization to become its own ruins.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION FOR PEACE AND THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY

The Final Commitment of the Book-Manifesto

We, the people of this world, belonging to different nations, cultures, religions, traditions, and political systems, yet united by the same human dignity, the same vulnerability before war, and the same dependence upon the fragile balance of the Earth, proclaim that life, peace, freedom, justice, and the continuity of future generations are values superior to every ambition of domination, every temporary strategic advantage, and every ideology that claims the right to justify the mass destruction of human beings. Recognizing that scientific and technological progress has given humanity both an unprecedented capacity to heal, communicate, explore, and improve life and a destructive power capable of devastating civilization and irreversibly damaging the environment, we affirm that progress deprived of conscience, responsibility, and limits can become the instrument of humanity's collapse through its own intelligence. Alarmed by the convergence of regional wars, the accumulation of nuclear and conventional weapons, the weakening of treaties, the deterioration of diplomacy, the militarization of information, economics, outer space, cyberspace, and artificial intelligence, as well as by environmental degradation and the spread of collective hatred, we declare that no state can achieve lasting security by keeping other peoples in permanent fear, insecurity, poverty, and humiliation.

This Declaration affirms the supreme value of life and the survival of humanity, the right of every person and people to live in peace, and the obligation of states to prevent war through early warning, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, international law, and every peaceful means available. It calls upon nuclear-armed states to recognize that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, to end nuclear intimidation, reduce the role of such weapons in military doctrines, provide security guarantees to non-nuclear states, and negotiate reciprocal, verifiable, progressive, and irreversible reductions of their arsenals. No artificial intelligence, algorithm, or autonomous system must ever be authorized to initiate nuclear use, select

and attack human beings without meaningful human control, or make irreversible military decisions at a speed that excludes legal, moral, and political judgement. States, including those in conflict, must preserve diplomatic, political, and military communication channels, submit disputes to serious mediation before beginning or expanding military action, and protect civilians, children, wounded people, medical personnel, prisoners, refugees, schools, hospitals, water systems, energy networks, civilian nuclear installations, food supplies, and humanitarian corridors under all circumstances.

International law must be applied according to facts and evidence rather than the military strength, alliances, or strategic importance of the state involved, because double standards weaken every rule and provide future aggressors with excuses for their own violations. States must resume negotiations on nuclear, conventional, biological, chemical, cyber, space, and autonomous weapons, accept limits, exchanges of information, inspections, notification of exercises and launches, and transparent verification mechanisms, while outer space, cyberspace, early-warning systems, hospitals, energy networks, water infrastructure, emergency communications, and other vital civilian systems must be protected against attacks capable of causing mass suffering or uncontrolled escalation. Peoples have the right to accurate information concerning the causes, costs, and objectives of conflicts, and governments, media organizations, digital platforms, and opinion leaders must not deliberately manufacture or disseminate falsehoods intended to provoke hatred, panic, and violence, while measures against disinformation must never become a pretext for suppressing freedom of expression or legitimate criticism.

The protection of the Earth must become a foundation of peace, because the atmosphere, waters, soils, forests, oceans, biodiversity, and climate constitute the common heritage of present and future generations, and no government, organization, or leader has the moral right to inflict damage that compromises the long-term conditions of life. Lasting peace also requires human security, healthcare, education, food, water, housing, dignified work, climate adaptation, and the removal of the social conditions that make people

vulnerable to radicalization, manipulation, and violent recruitment. The United Nations and regional institutions must be made more representative, transparent, adequately financed, and capable of preventive action, while the use of the veto in situations involving genocide, mass atrocities, humanitarian catastrophe, or nuclear danger must be restricted and subjected to public justification and legal examination. Decisions concerning war must remain under constitutional, parliamentary, judicial, and democratic control, while leaders, governments, military commands, and intelligence services must be held personally accountable when they manipulate evidence, conceal costs, ignore warnings, or eliminate legitimate oversight.

Schools, universities, cultural institutions, and religious communities must cultivate respect for life, truth, dignity, and diversity, preserve the memory of victims without glorifying violence, and prevent patriotism, identity, faith, or historical suffering from being transformed into inherited hatred. Citizens, humanitarian organizations, professional communities, women, young people, academics, and representatives of victims must participate in peace processes, because agreements negotiated exclusively by political elites may temporarily stop the fighting but cannot rebuild trust or create the institutions through which former adversaries will live together. The commitments undertaken through this Declaration must be monitored through public reports, deadlines, independent evaluations, and periodic reviews, because promises without verification can remain empty words. Above all, the rights of future generations to existence, peace, a healthy environment, and the preservation of humanity's natural, cultural, and spiritual heritage must guide the decisions of the present.

FINAL COMMITMENT

We pledge not to hate entire peoples for the actions of their leaders, not to justify crimes when they are committed by our own side, not knowingly to spread falsehood, and not to transform faith, patriotism, science, or technology into instruments of destruction. We pledge to demand dialogue before attack, verification before accusation, mediation before escalation, the protection of civilians during every conflict, meaningful human control over

weapons, the limitation and reduction of arsenals, equal respect for international law, and cooperation in protecting the Earth. We pledge to transmit to future generations not the hatred we inherited but the wisdom drawn from past suffering, not fear of other peoples but the ability to understand them without abandoning truth, and not a planet transformed into a storehouse of weapons and ruins but a world in which intelligence is guided by conscience, power is limited by responsibility, and justice is defended without sacrificing life.

We declare that no leader, state, alliance, ideology, frontier, ambition, or promise of victory has the right to condemn humanity to its final war, because the Earth does not belong to a single generation, power, or civilization but constitutes the common home of life, which we are morally bound to protect and pass on. Before history, conscience, God for those who believe, and universal responsibility for all humanity, we choose peace not as an escape from danger but as an act of courage, dialogue not as the abandonment of justice but as the path through which justice can save rather than destroy, and life not because the world is free from evil but because evil must never be allowed to speak the final word of civilization.

**PEACE OR THE LAST WAR - THE CHOICE IS OURS, AND THE
TIME TO CHOOSE IS NOW.**

AUTHORS