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## Editorial: The Old Order Changeth....

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### **The Old Order Changeth....**

International politics is passing through a disturbing churn. As old norms are discarded and new ones struggle to gain universal acceptance, state behaviour increasingly lacks oversight or restraint. A new generation of leaders—often propelled to power by a public desperate for change—is steering this shift. National interests are being redefined and held sacrosanct to the extent that they are regarded as above what was so far being deemed as universal humanitarian values.

This era is characterised by *aggressive nationalism*—fixated on national identity and selective reimagining of history; redefinition of identity—backed by an enthusiasm for reshaping cultural identities based on new, often contradictory, interpretations of facts; and *systemic disillusionment*—marked by a pervasive scepticism toward established truths. The cumulative result is a sense of “careless restlessness”—a volatile desire to usher in change at any cost, regardless of the form it takes.

Tennyson’s rendering of Arthur’s words in his famous poem “From Morte d’Arthur” comes ringing in one’s ears: “*The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.*”

While disruptive change looks apocryphal and disconcerting, there is a precipitate hope in some quarters that once the dust settles down, there will be a new dawn reiterating the eternal values that bind humankind and celebrate life; the systems may change; the actors may change; the values will remain. The current decade has witnessed mindless violence orchestrated by the states or non-state entities using religion, ethnicity or nationalism to counter and replace the state. The existing state and governance systems have either proved incapable of addressing the needs and fulfilling genuine aspirations of the people or been overtaken by promise of wholesale rehauling for their betterment.

The wars raging in Ukraine, the Middle East and the violence unleashed by non state actors across Asia and Africa reveal a grim truth: a world increasingly desensitised to human suffering, where lives are discounted and indiscriminate attacks become routine. Advanced weaponry—drones, missiles, remote piloted aircraft etc.—has made killing both easier and more impersonal, violating the very international norms meant to restrain the behaviour of states and non state actors. The result is a landscape of shattered cities, mass civilian casualties, displacement and grief without borders.

These remote-controlled wars are no less harrowing than the brutal campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Tamerlane, Hulagu Khan or Chenghiz Khan, whose armies once swept across continents with fiery zeal to kill and plunder. Then, as now,

the powerful operated beyond any moral code— only today's war mongers do so despite the existence of codified conventions designed to prevent such excesses.

In this new, technology-driven battlespace, every side has crossed red lines, often with chilling ease. One wonders whether even a new Vienna Convention could compel nations to recommit themselves to humane conduct in the wars they will inevitably fight.

But what are we to do with the innocent lives already lost? Were they deemed expendable— sacrificed to the fear-psychosis-driven survival instincts of one actor or the misguided revolutionary fervour of another? Perhaps most disturbing is how humanity has grown inured to the naked display of destructive state power, as though devastation were merely another spectacle in an age of relentless conflict.

Following the World Wars, the concept of a global government captured the public imagination. The prospect of humanity transcending national borders to unite as one seemed, for a moment, within reach. This optimism peaked at the end of the Cold War; as the liberal world order triumphed over communism, many heralded the "end of history." It was envisioned as a new era that would unify continents under the universal principles of liberty, democracy, and human rights.

However, these lofty expectations ignored the inherent frailties of human nature—which Thomas Hobbes once famously described as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Today's world bears a striking resemblance to Hobbesian England. While Hobbes proposed a social contract that yielded power to a "Leviathan" to secure life and property, a global version of such an authority feels unlikely today. For a global Leviathan to exist, nations would have to willingly surrender their sovereignty in exchange for collective security. Modern wars remain localised in territory despite their global impact, and states are hesitant to relinquish such power.

A more probable path lies in the social contracts of Locke or Rousseau. This would look less like an all-powerful autocrat and more like a reimagined United Nations—an institution reinvented with the mechanisms necessary to discipline errant state and non-state actors. The priority, at the moment, must be to invest our intellectual energy and capital into remaking a world order that renders international wars impossible while making domestic systems more responsive to the people, addressing the root causes of inter- and intra-state conflicts among regions and groups. Only then can we secure a peaceful tomorrow. ■

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# Journal of Peace Studies

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