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## War and Decline

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Which Future Are We Living In?](#)

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Unprecedented wealth and devastating social and environmental consequences, new realms of freedom and the expansion of repression (from torture to digital control and global policing of the information world), celebration of common values and the “ethical cleansing” of the global order by the erosion of the rule of law (i.e., the practice of self-exemption and double standards), accumulated knowledge and expanding ignorance—all coexist in a reality whose intricate interactions and distances are far from being deciphered. Practices of resistance are disconnected and limited in reach, and often face defeat. This was the case, for instance, when 40 million citizens around the globe protested the planned intervention in Iraq in 2003, to no avail. Thus, a question looms: can a major transformative shift toward a [Great Transition future](#) be made by a “thousand cuts” (to quote sociologist Wolfgang Streeck), or does it require a different strategy?<sup>1</sup>

To facilitate such a shift, we need to refocus on the exceptionally threatening issue of war. Reaffirming peace as the prime imperative of the human species—in other words, respecting Life as the highest value—has to become a central global cultural and political priority. Dismantling war as practice, instrument, and institution is the necessary precondition for departing securely from the present and reaching a desirable future. Since the end of World War II, instead of upholding the uttered promise “Never again,” and above all getting rid of nuclear weapons, humankind opted for investing increasing cognitive and material efforts to produce and perfect the weapons of mass destruction that are capable of eliminating the very idea of a future.

This practice of preparing for war has continued despite the end of the Cold War and a long series of arms treaties. The apocalyptic logic of the arms race, increased military expenditure, and production of ever more sophisticated lethal arms has not been suspended as the military interventions and the display of weapons in ensuing conflicts in the post-Cold-War world testify. Economic interdependence has been proven to have no preventive capacity, the United Nations has dissolved into an ineffective preventive and peacemaking institution, and the pain of previous sufferings and destructions has not had a lasting self-restraining, moderating effect. And here we are now, amidst the prospect of a new Cold War, a conflict deadlier than the previous one, with numerous military interventions, the highest military expenditure ever, and, alongside other conflicts, a war in Ukraine that is generating a global economic, energy, food crisis, and bringing the world closer, with each passing day, to a nuclear option.

This is the context within which we are deliberating on a path toward a Great Transition in the twenty-first century—amidst the shame and mystery of war, amidst the possibility of an apocalypse.

To conclude, somewhat paraphrasing Antonio Gramsci, we are leaving the present but without reaching the future. In order to reach it, two major conditions are required. First is a major transformative shift in the US, the most powerful state in human history. This means abandoning its ahistorical project of eternal hegemony and restraining the power of the military industrial complex and financial centers beyond democratic control. It also entails abandoning the project of maintaining by any means available the capacity to outcompete other nations in all domains. Internally, it requires transforming the neoliberal capitalist paradigm that has for decades assaulted American society, polarizing it, angering it, silencing it, de-democratizing it, and rendering it less equal. Second is the emergence of a new South, the alliance of victims who are able to think through a paradigm shift by understanding the workings of the global system, one's own society, historical traumas, structural hurdles, and internal missteps.

In other words, a Great Transition requires an end to the hegemony of a militaristic United States and the re-emergence of the voice and alternative practice of the Global South. These two directions may bring a new "Never again," a chance for the future.

## Endnotes

1. Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (London: Verso, 2016), 13.

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## About the Author



Radmila Nakarada is a sociologist and Professor Emeritus at the University of Belgrade, where she created the first undergraduate and graduate program in peace studies in Serbia. She researches global challenges, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and political transition. She served as a member and first spokesperson of the Yugoslav Truth and Reconciliation Committee, as well as the co-editor of *The Nobel Prize for Peace: Between Idealism and Political Cynicism*. She holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Belgrade.

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