ENDING DEADLY CONFLICT: DREAM OR DELUSION?

Second Sir Zelman Cowen Oration by the Hon. Gareth Evans AO QC, Director, International Crisis Group, Australian Institute of International Affairs, Melbourne, 22 August 2007

I

Sir Zelman Cowen is an inspirational figure for a great many Australians, and I feel very privileged to have known him throughout most of the latter part of his career: as the Dean of the Law Faculty at Melbourne University under whom I studied and tutored in the 1960s, and learnt most of what I can remember about public law; as Vice-Chancellor of New England and Queensland Universities and later Provost of Oriel College, Oxford; and of course, as a dignified and healing Governor-General from 1977 to 1982 – one, moreover, with moderately republican sympathies that became delightfully apparent during the great debate of 1999 on the future of the monarchy in this country. Throughout his public life Zelman, supported wonderfully by his wife Anna, has been an indefatigably lucid speaker and writer on public affairs, domestic and international, and I am deeply honoured to have been invited to give this Second Oration in the series so appropriately initiated by the AIIA to recognize that contribution.

One of my most enduring personal memories of the man is his role in the case of a perennial law student who ambled his way through the Melbourne course some five decades ago failing more subjects than he passed each year – universities were more forgiving in those days -   until finally just one compulsory subject stood between him and his degree, Australian constitutional law. That was a subject, however, in respect to which this student's ignorance seemed to remain impenetrably boundless. Contemplating yet another dismal examination performance, the lecturer asked the Dean of the Faculty how might it be possible to temper justice with mercy and get the laggard out of everyone's hair once and for all. After pondering a moment, Zelman came up with a solution of unimpeachable simplicity and elegance: 'Give him a supplementary oral examination and ask him just one question: Is there a Section 92 in the Australian Constitution?' 'But', said the lecturer, whose lack of confidence in his student's grasp of the mass of case-law on this subject, as everything else, knew no limits, 'what on earth do I then do if he says No?'. 'Well then', said the great man, 'you must *reason* with him'.

II

It is on the virtue of reasoning, of diplomatic persuasion – hopefully in more propitious circumstances -- that I want to focus in part in this talk on deadly conflict and how to end it.   Is it a dream, or just a delusion, to think that we *can* once and for all end war,

civil war, and mass atrocities, with all the death and destruction and sheer human misery that they entail? Would a concerted effort to create better institutional arrangements, better policy and better performance really make a difference?

I come to this question after more than two decades now of working these issues from both sides of the fence, both as a foreign minister (I used to be able to say 'long-serving foreign minister' until my successor, with a tenure giving new meaning to the concept of eternity, made me look like a fly-by-night), and now as head of a major international NGO trying to influence policymakers of the kind I used to be. And my strong belief is that ending such conflict, or at least reducing it to an irreducible minimum, *is* an achievable dream, and one for whose achievability we already have some good evidence, which I will come to in a moment. In working to create better institutional machinery, better policy and better practice of the kind I will spell out, we are not simply wasting our time.

I of course acknowledge at the outset that this view has to contest, in a sense, centuries of historical experience – as brilliantly analysed, for example, by Geoffrey Blainey (who will be working me over in his commentary later this evening) in his seminal book on *The Causes of War*. It runs up against, in a sense, what we read every day in our newspapers, about the apparently never ending cascade of violence in the Middle East, many parts of Africa and elsewhere. And it also runs up against what we are learning, with ever more clarity, about some of the deeper currents of the human psyche, which again plays into the argument that there is something endemic and irreducible about the instinct to violence.

There is a great deal of published research in this respect which is really quite disconcerting. For example the study summarized in the *New York Times* in July last year [1]which makes it clear just how easy it is for violence to rapidly escalate from small beginnings. Measured pressure was applied to volunteers' fingers, and they were then asked to apply precisely the same amount of pressure to their partners, with the partners then responding in turn: the typical response was 40 per cent more force than actually experienced, with the result that within a couple of minutes what began as a game of soft touches quickly moved to moderate pokes and then hard prods. Each partner believed that the other was escalating: neither realized that what was really involved was a neurological quirk by which the pain we receive almost invariably seems worse than that which we inflict.

Then there are the long series of research findings, stretching back over 40 years, summarized in the article in *Foreign Policy* magazine early this year entitled 'Why Hawks Win',[2] which suggest that when it comes to basic psychological impulses, there are built in biases which incline decision makers to make at least four basic errors:

- o first, to exaggerate the evil intentions of adversaries: even when people are aware of the context and possible constraints on another's behaviour, they tend not to

[1] Daniel Gilbert, 'He Who Cast the First Stone Probably Didn't', *New York Times*, 24 July 2006
[2] Daniel Kahneman & Jonathan Renshon, 'Why Hawks Win', *Foreign Policy,* January-February 2007

factor that in when assessing the other's motives, while at the same time assuming that others grasp the constraints on their own behaviour;

- o second, to be overly optimistic when assessing the case for going to war: a large majority of people not only believe themselves to be smarter, more attractive and more talented than average, which commonly leads them to their overestimate future success; they are also subject to the 'illusion of control', consistently exaggerating the amount of control they have over outcomes important to them, even when these are random or determined by other forces;

- o third, to be unduly pessimistic when evaluating the chances of peace: here there cuts in the phenomenon of 'reactive devaluation', the reluctance to accept concessions on the intuition that they must be worth less simply because the other side has offered them. Scepticism can be, of course, the rational product of past experience, but as often as not this kind of response is largely unconscious and irrational; and

- o fourth, to be deeply reluctant to cut losses, even when the chances of success are extremely slight, and the risks of further loss by going on are very high: psychologists don't need a fancy name for this response – it's just plain old 'wishful thinking' – but it clearly helps many conflicts to endure long beyond the point they should.

It doesn't need much imagination to see how these various factors might conceivably have had more than a little to do with the policy mistakes and roadblocks with which we are all too unhappily familiar in the current context, in particular, of Iraq, Iran and the Arab-Israeli conflict – just as we can see most of them clearly recurring in the conflicts of decades and centuries past as analysed by Geoffrey Blainey.

It certainly requires a considerable feat of optimism to believe that these kinds of reflex reactions buried deep in the human psyche - not to mention all the rest of the mental furniture that plays a part in human conflict, including hatred, intolerance and greed - are ever going to be able to be sufficiently neutralized. But on these matters, as on many others, I remain a congenital optimist, believing that the more we understand these instinctive impulses and bring them into the open, the better we are at dealing with them. Provided, that is, that we accompany that understanding with major ongoing efforts to put in place the institutions and policies and practices that will make a difference. When it comes to ending deadly conflict, you don't change the world merely by observing it.

III

We now have some very good evidence that ending deadly conflict may not just be a cause for the deluded. It comes in the form of some compelling statistics assembled over the last few years in reports of the Human Security Centre in Canada, led by Andrew Mack, a previous head of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Strategic Planning Unit

who will be remembered in Australia from his early days as head of the Peace Research Centre at the ANU. [3]

 Contrary to conventional wisdom, and perhaps all our intuitions, there has been a very significant trend decline – after a high point in the late 1980s and very early 1990s - in the number of wars taking place, both between and within states, in the number of genocidal and other mass atrocities, and the number of people dying violent deaths as a result of them. There are now 40 per cent fewer conflicts taking place than there were in 1992: in simple terms because many more old conflicts have stopped than new ones started. In the case of serious conflicts (defined as those with 1000 or more battle deaths in a year) and political mass murders (of the kind we associate with Cambodia and Rwanda) there has been an 80 per cent decline since the early 1990s.

There has been an even more striking decrease in the number of battle deaths. Whereas most years from the 1940s through to the 1990s had over 100,000 such reported deaths – and sometimes as many as 500,000 – the average for the first years of this new century has been more like 20,000. Of course violent battle deaths are only a small part of the whole story of the misery of war: 90 per cent or more of war-related deaths are due to disease and malnutrition rather than direct violence, as we have seen, for example, in the Congo and Darfur. But the trend decline in battle deaths is significant, and highly encouraging.

About the only statistic running the other way is that for international terrorist incidents and fatalities, which – mainly associated with the war in Iraq - have significantly increased in recent years, although the overall death toll remains low by comparison with other conflicts.

A number of reasons contributed to the turnarounds on conflicts, including the end of the era of colonialism, which generated two-thirds or more of all wars from the 1950s to the 1980s; and of course the end of the Cold War, which meant no more proxy wars being fuelled by Washington or Moscow, and also the end of the road for a number of authoritarian governments propped up by each side who had been provoking internal resistance.

But, as argued by Andrew Mack and his team, the best explanation is the one that stares us in the face, even if a great many don't want to acknowledge it. And that is the huge upsurge in activity in conflict prevention, conflict management, negotiated peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding activity that has occurred over the last decade and a half, with most of this being spearheaded by the much maligned UN, although with a lot of additional input from governments and other organizations, including – if you'll forgive me saying so – my own International Crisis Group, which from very small beginnings in 1995 has become a major source of information and advice on all these matters.

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[3] *Human Security Report 2005*, Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia, Oxford University Press, 2005. and *Human Security Brief* 2006, which updates the original figures from 2002 to 2005, and basically confirms all these trends: see www.humansecurityreport.info

We *are* doing better at diplomatic peacemaking, with successes from Cambodia to the Balkans to Northern Ireland to West Africa to Nepal and Aceh well outnumbering in recent years what remain so far the failures, eg in Sri Lanka and Darfur. In the Cold War years, by contrast, more wars were decided on the battlefield than ended in negotiation.

We *are* becoming ever more professional at peacekeeping, with more than 90,000 personnel now in the field, and for the most part doing an excellent job. The Rand Corporation - that quintessential US institution, which you would not expect to have any great enthusiasm for the multilateral system – told us in a recent report that, for all that has gone wrong from time to time, the UN actually manages these kind of transitional operations much better than the U.S. And it certainly does it infinitely more cheaply, with the current cost of those 90,000 plus around $7bn, as compared with the hundreds of billions consumed by the Iraq operation alone.

And we *are* certainly now doing much better at post-conflict peacebuilding, having finally learned – after the horrendous experiences of Angola, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Haiti – that the best single predictor of future conflict is past conflict in the same place, and that there is an absolutely critical need to put in sustained resources and commitment during the years that follow peace agreements to stop the whole horrible cycle of violence starting again.

So, for everything that is still going wrong we *have* been learning, slowly and painfully, how to do things better. But we can, as an international community, do better still in preventing and resolving deadly conflict, in particular if we pay close attention to four big lessons that the post Cold War years should have taught us: that the best way to stop wars is not to start them; that the most effective foreign policy blends idealism and realism; that in preventing and resolving conflict grand theory matters less than detailed attention to context; and that there is no substitute for leadership.

IV

It takes a long time for some things to sink into the heads of some policymakers. But– with the continuing catastrophe in Iraq, the lesser but still painful one of Israel's confrontation with Hizbollah last year and, by contrast, the progress now being made after the return to the negotiating table in North Korea - the message does seem to be finally getting through that military force has profound limits as a policy instrument, that – in Churchill's immortal phrase -- 'jaw-jaw is better than war-war'. Life is a learning experience, even for neo-cons.

There *is* a great deal to be said for good old fashioned diplomacy, containment and deterrence – not least in trying to solve the interlocking Middle East problems of Israel-Palestine, Lebanon-Syria, Iran and Iraq.

In the case of *Iraq* the penny seems to have at last dropped in the U.S., after as usual exhausting all less rational alternatives (some of my colleagues have taken, rather unkindly, to describing Washington DC these days as a 'failed state'), that the only game in town really is the set of recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report -- premised on the deeply suspicious notion that diplomacy is all about finding common ground with

your opponents, not just your friends. Certainly the only way forward in a desolate situation seems to be a major effort, working with Iran among others, to internationalise and regionalize the conflict resolution process, and to use the broad-based pressure applied by an international contact group to create a new internal political settlement with a broader group of players than those now dominating the government.

Where the penny has not yet dropped is talking to Iran about *Iran*. While there is now a fairly complete understanding in Washington and Israel about the catastrophic impact of a preventive military strike on its nascent nuclear facilities, policymakers are still in denial on the other reality: that diplomatic confrontation and sanctions are *not* going to stop Tehran acquiring full nuclear fuel cycle capability, including the know-how to enrich uranium to weapons grade. What is needed is a completely different approach, which would seek – through a negotiated package of incentives and disincentives, with a very strong monitoring and enforcement mechanism – to hold Iran to the status of a breakout-capable state, not an actual nuclear weapons state. I am constantly told, as I move around the world talking to high officials on this and related issues, that holding a new red-line of this kind is almost certainly where the Western, and wider international, will have to end up by the end of this year, and that this approach will probably work – but there is no way the US can currently be persuaded to modify its position, so there's no alternative but to press on with confrontation. To which my standard response is when you are in a hole stop digging.

Similar considerations apply, although one runs the risk of even greater unpopularity in saying so, in relation to dealing with Hamas in the context of trying yet again to construct a viable and sustainable *Arab-Israeli* peace. I have never been more persuaded than I am now that an urgent effort to construct a workable two-state solution is crucially necessary for the security of Israel, the immediate region and to help defuse some of the wider tensions between the West and the Islamic world. But I have also been never more persuaded that I am now that this will be utterly unachievable without the recreation of significant Palestinian unity and the end of the attempt to boycott and isolate Hamas into submission.

The wider point that needs to be made is that an approach to the Middle East that combines attempted democratization with the isolation of all political Islamists has always been hopelessly unrealistic. Islamic activism is not a monolith, and those in the Muslim Brotherhood tradition, including Hamas, simply don't see the world through the same lens as al-Qaeda. 'Moderate' in the Arab-Islamic world, is not a synonym for 'secular', and groups like Hamas may in fact be much more effective than secular nationalists in preventing the spread of violent jihadism.[4]

What I would always argue should be the preference of rational policymakers for jawing rather than warring does not mean that we should swing to the opposite extreme and reject military responses in situations where this is both legal, as a matter of international law, and legitimate, as a matter of morality and decency. There are in fact two big problems with military force: not just using it when we shouldn't, but *not* using it when we *should* (as was obviously the case in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995). And

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[4] See Daniel Levy, 'Betting it all on the Maliki Government, 24 May 2007, www.prospect.org

in this context we need to be focusing much more intently, in the Security Council and everywhere else, on formulating agreed guidelines for the use of force, as the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on 21st century security threats (of which I was a member), and the Secretary-General himself, have been urged the Security Council to do since 2005, so far to no avail.

The point about introducing such agreed criteria, is not that their application will produce push-button consensus, but that they will necessarily concentrate everyone's attention, both decision makers' and publics', on not just one or two but *all* the critical issues: (1) whether the situation is prima facie serious enough to justify even the contemplation of force, (2) whether the primary reason for the proposed attack is really the stated one and defensible as such, (3) whether military action really is the last resort, with other remedial options that might be reasonably available having been exhausted, (4) whether the nature of the force proposed is proportional to the harm being stopped or averted, and (5) – often the real show stopper – the balance of consequences: whether the proposed coercive military intervention will in fact do more harm than good.

Getting agreement on such criteria of legitimacy – not only in cases of so-called humanitarian intervention but for any proposed use of force anywhere – remains for me one of the great pieces of unfinished international security business, and one on which those of us keen to live in a rule-based international order, and that should certainly include countries the size of Australia, should continue to campaign hard.

V

The second big lesson we should have learnt from the post Cold War years is that the most effective foreign policy for any country, whatever its weight, is one that balances realism and idealism, with cooperative internationalism at its core.

The debate between idealists and realists is one that recurs in many countries, but in few does it matter as much to the rest of the world as the debate in the United States. We have been through a period in which a particular brand of idealism has held sway and rather conspicuously failed – with bombing for democracy not proving to be very popular with those it has been designed to free, and the one visible achievement of the 'axis of evil' rhetoric being to bring rather more closely together three countries which previously had nothing in common at all.

But if idealism has its limits, the alternative is not a crude and one-dimensional brand of foreign policy realism either. A foreign policy that is founded only on hard-headed realism is a policy that can all too readily descend into cynical indifference: the kind that enabled successive previous US administrations (both George Bush Senior's, whose foreign policy performance in many other ways was much to be admired, and Bill Clinton's) to shrug their shoulders about Saddam Hussein's genocidal assaults on the Kurds in the north in the late 80s and the Shiites in the south of Iraq in the early 90s, or to find reasons for ignoring the rapidly unfolding Rwandan genocide in 1994. There are unsettling signs that such sentiments are abroad again, with even the Democratic contenders for presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton most prominent among them, expressing indifference or worse at the potentially catastrophic humanitarian implications

of too early or too large a coalition troop pullout, and in the UK many articles now being written attacking the 'liberal interventionism' associated with Tony Blair.

What the US and the UK needs, like every other country including our own, and what the polling evidence suggests all our publics will support, is a foreign policy based on a principled and judicious mixture of both idealism *and* realism.

One crucial element in that mix is a willingness to accept and embrace - without ifs, buts and maybes - the principle of 'the responsibility to protect'. The concept - which had its birth in the Canadian-sponsored Commission that I co-chaired in 2001, is a simple one. It is that while the primary responsibility to protect its own people from genocide and other such man-made catastrophes is that of the state itself, when a state fails to meet that responsibility, either through incapacity or ill-will, then the responsibility to protect shifts to the international community – to be exercised by measures all the way up to, if absolutely necessary, military force.

Given the implications of this for traditional notions of state sovereignty, it was a huge breakthrough, within a remarkably short time as the history of ideas goes, for the 150 heads of state and government at the World Summit last year, followed by the Security Council itself, to adopt, in effect as a new international norm, this new 'R2P' principle (as 'responsibility to protect' has now come to be abbreviated in this age of acronymphomania). At least a toehold has now been cut, but as the recent history of Darfur makes all too clear, as does the looming new catastrophe in Iraq if the coalition gets it withdrawal as badly wrong as it did its arrival, there remains a long way to go in ensuring that in practice this principle actually means something.

We can, if we need to, always justify R2P on hard-headed, practical, realist, national interest grounds: states that can't or won't stop internal atrocity crimes are the kind of rogue states, or failed or failing states, that can't or wont stop terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug and people trafficking, the spread of health pandemics and other global risks.

But at the end of the day the case for R2P rests on our common humanity - the impossibility of ignoring the cries of pain and distress of our fellow human beings. For any of us in the international community - from individuals to NGOs to national governments to international organizations - to yet again ignore that distress and agony, to once again make 'never again' a cry that rings totally emptily, is to diminish that common humanity to the point of despair.

VI

The third big lesson we should have learned about conflict prevention and resolution is that it requires complex, context-specific strategies, effective institutional structures and the application of serious resources.

One of the products of the much enhanced focus on conflict prevention in recent years is much more academic and institutional analysis than we have ever had before on what generates conflict. There is a whole literature now, for example, on the economic causes

of war within, as well as between states, and the respective roles of greed and grievance in fostering and sustaining violence. But while such general analysis has become extremely helpful in getting us to ask the right *questions*, it is a mistake to think it can provide all the answers. Every conflict has its own dynamic, and there is no substitute for comprehensively understanding all the factors at work. Everything starts with having an accurate take on what is happening on the ground, the issues that are resonating and the personalities and local dynamics – political, economic, social, cultural and personal - that are driving them.

As with understanding causes, so with applying the right solutions. The crucial thing is to recognise not only that each situation has its own characteristics, and that one-size spanners don't fit all, but that each situation is likely to require a complex combination of measures, whether they be diplomatic and political, legal and constitutional, economic and social, or military. And the balance between them is bound to change, and to have to change, over time as circumstances evolve. Conflict prevention is a business for the fleet of foot, not the plodders – but unfortunately in international affairs, as in life itself, the latter usually have the numbers.

Effective conflict prevention and resolution also requires effective institutional structures at the global, regional and national government levels. Globally, there are at least three major structural problems, only one of which was seriously tackled, and even then only partly, in the 2005 World Summit– that was the establishment of the new Peacebuilding Commission, to ensure that there would sustained and effective international focus on, and resource commitment for, the crucial post-conflict phase.

A second big problem is the Security Council, not just ensuring its commitment and effective delivery, both of which have often been problematic, but in ensuring its continued legitimacy, when its structure is so manifestly a reflection of the world of 1945, not the 21st century. The complacency of the Permanent Five veto-wielding members is misplaced: their powers will be a diminishing asset unless the credibility issue is seriously addressed before much longer, but following the collapse of the 2005 efforts there is little or no sign that it will be.

A third issue is Secretariat reform: getting more resources into the peace and security area, ensuring their quality, and enabling the Secretary-General to have available to him a large store of early warning and analysis capability – a function that has been largely denied it so far by member states anxious not to be seen as suitable cases for treatment.

Regionally, while significant progress has been made in recent years, especially by the African Union (although its doctrine and rhetoric remains a long way ahead of its operational capacity, as we have seen so acutely and alarmingly in Darfur), much more needs to be done to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution capability, which in many parts of the world is non-existent, or so deeply reluctant to become involved in the security problems of the neighbourhood that it might as well be.

In this respect, one of the key items I would like to see on the Asia-Pacific leaders' agenda at the forthcoming APEC summit - but no doubt won't - is how to inject new credibility and energy into our own wider region's security as well as economic

architecture. Since being involved in the birth of both APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum in the late 1980s, I have long envisaged the leaders' meeting becoming the capstone of an arch, in which the two supporting pillars - with largely but not completely overlapping memberships (reflecting, inter alia, sensitivities over Taiwan) -- are these two organizations, each with enhanced mandates and revitalized operational capability. On this model, the leaders themselves at their summits would work systematically and formally through regional security issues, rather than, as now, largely relegating these to private discussions in the margins of meetings that are supposed to be only about economic cooperation. With the tectonic plates beginning to shift as they are, sustained high-level attention to regional security cooperation issues is already long overdue.

 So far as national governments are concerned,   useful efforts have been made in a number of countries to develop structural arrangements both 'mainstreaming' conflict prevention – requiring all relevant policy officers to give attention to this dimension in developing aid and other external policies – and also specifically 'tasking' it by giving particular individuals or groups within the government the specific responsibility to think about prevention, and devise and recommend up the decision-making food chain appropriate policy responses. I am glad to be able to report that Australia – from my discussions last week with senior defence, foreign Affairs, aid and intelligence officials – seems to be quite well advanced by international standards at least in thinking about a 'whole of government' approach to conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict peacebuilding, and I hope very much that this commitment continues.

In addition to good strategies and institutional structures, conflict prevention - like everything else – requires the application of serious resources. Part of the problem is that it doesn't generate immediately visible returns: you succeed most in conflict prevention when nothing happens, and nobody notices. And for most people in public office performing good works without anyone noticing it is like having your teeth pulled.

It is not only additional money that is needed for conflict prevention and resolution, but a more intelligent application of money already being spent, not least on the armed forces themselves. A critical resource problem constantly facing planners is the availability of deployable military assets of the necessary quality for peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacebuilding tasks. A major part of the problem in the developed world, particularly in Europe, is the lingering on of Cold War configurations in force structures. For example in Germany, of around 250 000 men and women currently in uniform, only some 10, 000 are deployable at any given time on international peace operation tasks. One recent broader estimate is that of the 2.5 million personnel nominally under arms in Europe, at most 3 per cent are deployable. A good many of the rest are presumably still waiting by their tanks for the Russians to come. And even with Mr Putin becoming more adventurous by the month, that doesn't seem terribly likely.   Australia by contrast now has some 5,000 deployed out of a total uniformed complement of around 50,000, a high ratio by current international standards and is continuing to work assiduously, as it should, at further modernizing our force structure.

VII

The last of the lessons we should have learned from the post Cold War years, and indeed have been learning throughout history, is that nothing will happen without the mobilization of political will and effective leadership. Unless the relevant decision makers, at the national or international level, want something to happen it won't. We can have the concepts right, the analysis right, the resources and capacity available, but still remain totally inert in the face of situations which seem to cry out for active response.

What we perhaps still need to learn is that merely lamenting the absence of political will – as so many commentaries do, stopping the analysis right there - doesn't help very much: what we have to is work out how to *mobilise* it, recognizing and squarely dealing with all the institutional dynamics and personalities and interests involved. And that requires both good institutional structures, of the kind just discussed, and good arguments – financial arguments (that prevention is always cheaper than cure), national interest arguments, political interest arguments (of the kind, e.g., that enabled the Christian right to mobilize the Bush administration on Darfur), and moral arguments (because however base and self-interested their actual motives are governments always like to be seen as acting from higher ones).

But even the best arguments are not much use without receptive ears, and the bottom line – when it comes to ending deadly conflict or anything else - keeps coming back to leadership. Of course what I'm talking about here is not just *any* leadership: I spent a little time in Nuremberg recently, standing where Hitler screamed his obscenities from the crumbling podium of the Zeppelinfield, and in that courtroom where Goering and others stood trial for their crimes against humanity – reminding myself just how monstrously, horribly, astray a country can go when it succumbs to the collective belief that the only thing that matters in a chaotic environment is leadership strength.

The kind of leadership I'm talking about is what we can all recognize when we see it, and lament it when it goes missing. It's leadership that recognizes the big turning points in national or global history, and makes the right calls, and delivers the right responses – as Roosevelt did in the 30s, or Truman and Marshall after the war; or as Dag Hammarskjold did in inventing peacekeeping and keeping the UN flame at least partially burning during the worst of the Cold War years; or as Gorbachev did in Russia, seeing the impossibility of sustaining the Cold War, or as Deng Xiao Ping did in China, at least in setting a wholly new economic course for the country in the chaotic and desolate aftermath of Mao; or as George Bush Senior did in leading, through the UN, the unequivocal response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the first big post Cold War test of the system of international order.

It's the kind of towering moral and political leadership showed, above all perhaps, by Nelson Mandela in South Africa's transition, completely avoiding – with crucial support, it should be acknowledged, from another leader, in FW de Klerk, who came to understand, late but not *too* late, what the moment demanded - what just about everyone feared would be an unavoidable racial bloodbath. It's the kind of leadership shown by Kofi Annan over many difficult years confronting head on the notion, so strongly entrenched among his colleagues from the global South, that state sovereignty entails inviolability - is in effect a license to kill.

The kind of leadership I'm talking about doesn't always have to be delivered in a spectacular way to be effective, and it doesn't always have to be delivered by the biggest figures or the greatest powers. I'm thinking of the kind of leadership that was shown by Canada, for example, and its Prime Minister Paul Martin, who worked away diligently behind the scenes for months in the run-up to the 2005 World Summit to ensure that the 'responsibility to protect' norm would be embraced: an example which, if followed by a few more leaders in a few more capitals, would have saved a good deal more of the outcome we hoped for from that summit, which turned out a huge missed opportunity for the international community.

It's perhaps the kind of leadership that was shown by Australia, working closely with Indonesia, in crafting the UN peace plan that brought a final end, at the beginning of the 90s, to Cambodia's protracted nightmare. It's the kind of leadership that was shown by Sadako Ogata as UNHCR and more recently Jan Egeland as the UN's humanitarian relief coordinator, in speaking out strongly and consistently and relentlessly about the horrors they saw unfolding around them and demanding an international response.

We all know, without me needing to take the time to spell it out, where international leadership has spectacularly failed us in recent years, most obviously in the Middle East, where it's gone astray when it hasn't gone completely missing; in Iraq, where it has been shown over and again, if we needed to be reminded, that tenacity is no substitute for intelligence; in Africa, where a succession of celebrated leaders of a new continental renaissance have turned out to have feet of clay; in Europe, which continues to punch well below its weight across a spectrum of global issues; and on weapons of mass destruction, where none of the P5 nuclear weapons states seem to begin to understand that the rest of the world is fed up with double standards, and non-proliferation can only begin to get back on track if disarmament is taken seriously.

We know all too well that when it comes to this crucial ingredient of leadership, there is an awful lot of pure chance in play. So much does seem to depend just on the luck of the draw: whether at a time of fragility and transition a country finds itself with a Mandela or a Milosevic or a Mugabe; an Ataturk or an Arafat; a Rabin who can see and seize the moment, and change course, or someone who never will. Despite all our best efforts, that has always been so, and I suspect it always will be. Looking around the world at those individuals who currently matter most, we just have to express the fervent hope that even if leaders are not always born, and only on very rare occasions are elected, they can at least on occasion be made.

A European friend of mine is fond of saying that in periods of profound transformation there are three kinds of actors: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and adjust - and those who wonder what happened! Too often, when it comes to war and mass atrocities too many of us have been left wondering what happened – how this or that man-made disaster could possibly have happened yet again, when there were so many reasons, and so much international capacity, to make it avoidable. We are getting much closer than many people think to realizing the impossible dream of ending deadly conflict. But we would be much closer still if there were just a few more leaders in the world, in national governments and international organizations, passionately committed to making this happen.

And I guess it's the task of all of us here tonight, meeting as we are to honour a great leader in his own right, Zelman Cowen, to act in any way we can – in our varying capacities as educators, or press commentators, or philanthropists or international activists, or just plain voters – to help find such potential leaders, and nurture and encourage them when we do. As I said towards the beginning – of a talk which I fear you'll be now feeling has lasted a Downer-tenure-like eternity -- you don't get to change the world simply by observing it.

Melbourne 21viii07