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The Voice of Maria Dolens

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New Threats to Peace

«We will arrive and strike anywhere, with our highly sophisticated military capabilities," is the ominous warning issued by Tel Aviv's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. 'We will turn Israel into hell," was the no less emphatic reply from the latter, in a verbal escalation that rivals, if not surpasses, the military one.

The night of June 13–14, 2025, seems destined to add to the growing list of dates marked by events whose dramatic consequences—both immediate and long-term—pose a serious threat to the increasingly fragile framework upon which international relations and coexistence among nations rest in this turbulent early millennium.

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IN THIS EDITION

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EIGHTY YEARS ON FROM THE END OF WORLD WAR II

An unlearned lesson

It always feels like the first time. The first time of a 'war that is fair', the first time that 'it cannot be avoided'. And yet it's not the first time, but 80 years after the end of the Second World War, we've forgotten. That event changed the geopolitical, moral and cultural coordinates of the world forever, caused over 60 million deaths, and the systematic extermination of peoples, breaking up cultures and annihilating cities. It is a defeat for humanity, even before it is a defeat for politics. Yet, eight decades later, the lesson of so much suffering still seems largely unheeded.

Wars continue to stain the planet with blood, almost always for the same reasons. In Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Africa, in Asia, the language of force remains, which is all too often the only one used to address geopolitical issues. Armed oppression as an instrument of domination persists. Despite Hiroshima and Auschwitz, despite the physical and moral ruins of the 20th century, old patterns repeat themselves: disinformation, rhetoric, the construction and dehumanisation of the enemy. Yet it is not only the leaders of the bombing nations who promote warmongering views, but also people like us—convinced that violence is the only possible way out.

Sometimes they are real men and women, often it is propaganda, which has always been there but is now more refined. Expert communicators hiding in the shadows of the web pretend to be mothers who have seen their child killed, war widows, veterans or experts on anything, in a bid to convey preconceived theses with the sole purpose of creating opinions in society in support of the war effort. It's a new kind of communication that demands a different kind of attention, but ultimately it draws on age-old feelings—those who drive us to see others, those who are different, as the source of our discontent.

The struggle between peoples for power has deep roots, planted well before the 20th century. Classical mythology already presents war to us as a structural element of the human condition.

> Those who believe in the power of dialogue must think that war is not a destiny, but a choice

> Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, the best way to honour the dead is not to remember heroic deeds but to strive so that they are no longer needed

Achilles and Hector, in Homer's *Iliad*, are heroes and victims of the same logic: honour, revenge, glory, all through violence. "Sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles, son of Peleus, that destructive wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans" is the line that opens the founding poem of western civilisation. 'Destructive Wrath', not peaceful Peace. But the same masterpiece also shows the despair of mothers, the weeping of friends, the disintegration of the community. What we see today in the news, for those who still watch it, or on social media, which most of us use. Homer may have thought that this example would have helped us avoid falling into the tragic trap of war justified by a noble end, but it does not seem to have been successful.

It almost seems as if classicism wants to tell us that conflicts are inevitable even if they bring tragedy, and ancient history, too, seems to confirm this view. Although the Roman empire is the bearer of an idea of order and law, it was founded on centuries of military expansion. The *pax romana* was the result of the Roman war. And these are not old things that have no importance or influence on the present. Several centuries later, indeed, Europe followed the same pattern at the end of the Great War: Peace imposed by the victor, with the result that the fighting started again after a few years.

The second half of the 20th century seemed to have broken this logic, seeing the emergence of multilateral institutions with the declared aim of averting new conflicts. The United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Union were designed to prevent the use of force, to foster dialogue, to protect rights.

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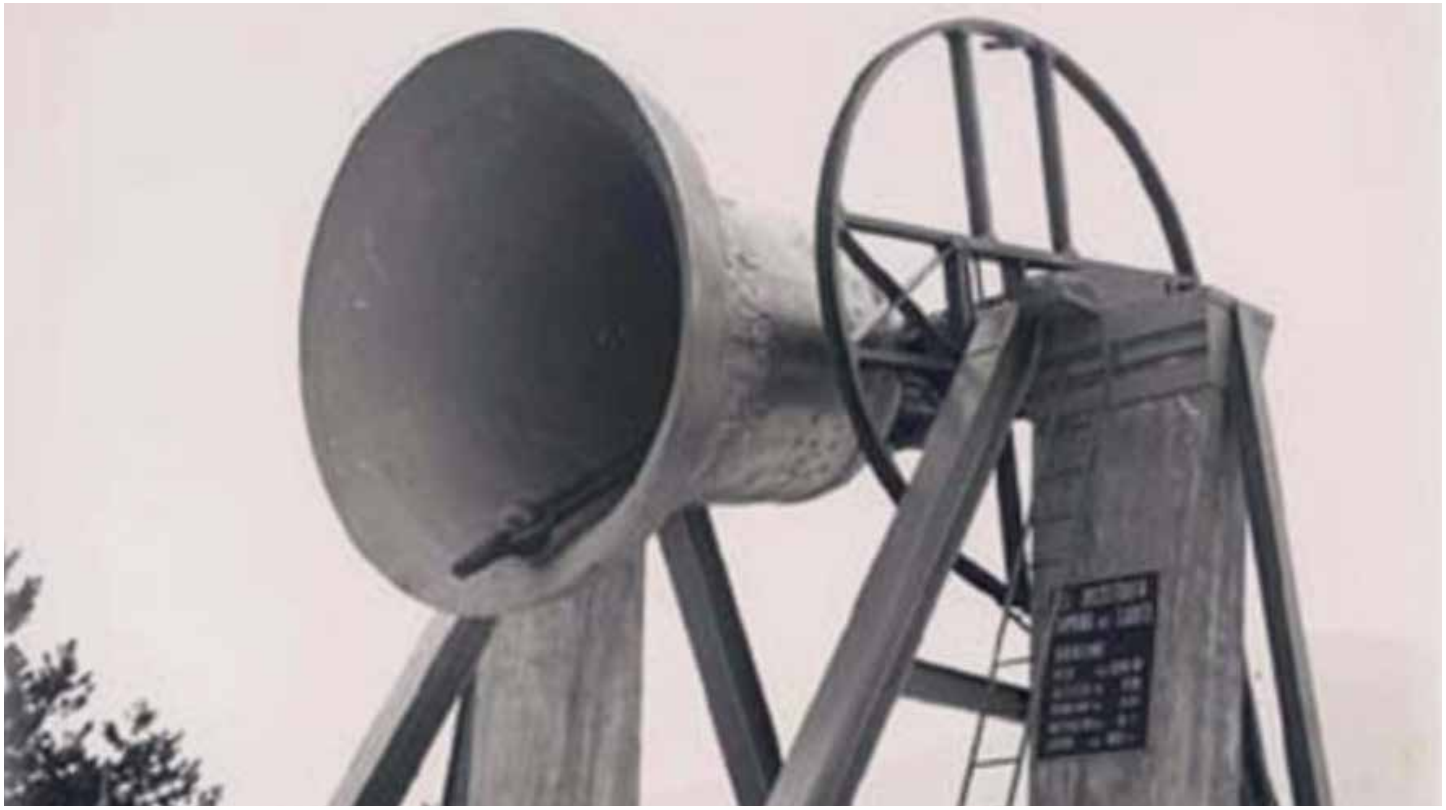
FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS - P 19

The Square of the People

«A reminder of war, but also a sign of Peace". It was late in the evening of 30 October 1965 when Pope Paul VI pronounced these words while receiving in audience the members of the Regency and other authorities from Trentino, accompanied by the Archbishop of Trento, Alessandro Maria Gottardi. The Bell meanwhile rested in the middle of St Peter's Square where it remained until the next day, when in the Sunday Angelus from the window of his study the Pontiff spoke again of Maria Dolens and those who had brought her back to life. "The Bell of the Dead is really the Bell of the Living. For it invites us not to forget those who have died because of war, and to pray that war may cease in the world and that Peace may reign among all peoples'. The crowd listening to him included a thousand people from Trentino who had arrived for the occasion, and thousands of people drawn by the last sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Above all, Pope Montini emphasised the new meaning that the symbol of Peace was to take on at a time in history torn apart by the war in Vietnam, which was escalating dangerously from month to month. It was no longer just the War Memorial Bell, but a warning for the whole world.

With this new mission, Maria Dolens returned to Rovereto on 3 November, welcomed by the crowd in Piazza Rosmini. It was a scene that had played out after previous relocations too, but this time the emphatic tone gave way to calm, measured words—mindful of the tensions that had gripped the city following the decision to move the Bell to a new location. The following day, the people of Trentino paraded in front of the bronze, which rested on the pavement of the square and was bathed by a light rain. The journey to the Miravalle Pass began on the 5th and lasted 48 hours, not without some logistical difficulties, but with the support of at least 15,000 people.

The new arrangement was technical, nothing fancy: two reinforced concrete pylons, designed more for functionality than aesthetics. But it was precisely that 'structural nakedness' that enhanced the form and meaning of the Peace symbol.



To hear Maria Dolens tolling again, we had to wait until Easter 1966, which fell on 10 April. The silence had lasted six years. The official inauguration instead was held on 28 May, a date chosen to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Damiano Chiesa, a Trentino hero of the Great War. With him, Fabio Filzi and Cesare Battisti were also commemorated. After the words of Paul VI, however, the spirit had shifted: it was no longer just the national martyrs being honoured, but the shared memory of all victims of conflict. Representatives of 24 nations also climbed the Hill, while religious ceremonies were held in an ecumenical style, combining Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox and Jewish rites.

The era of territorial claims and national rivalries seemed to have come to an end. Europe was beginning to look for a common language for Peace. Primo Levi's hope was beginning to take shape—his call, nearly twenty years earlier, to cultivate memory so that what had happened would not happen again. Meanwhile, Kurt Vonnegut, who as an American prisoner of war had endured the Allied bombing of Dresden, was writing *Slaughterhouse*- Five in which he declared that 'there are no good wars, only well-told lies'.

Great ideals were gaining ground, even if local tensions remained unresolved. While the controversy over the Bell's new location continued to dominate public opinion in the city—drawing in institutional bodies as well—a presidential decree on January 18, 1968, granted legal status to the Foundation. This was the crowning achievement of the work begun by Don Rossaro and later carried forward by Father Iori. It was a decisive step for the future of Maria Dolens, but it also led to an immediate reaction from the group opposed to the removal of the Bell from the castle rampart. It was at that moment that the campaign to denounce the Regency's actions was forcefully relaunched. In an attempt to reconcile the rift, on 16 May 1966, Father Iori sent a letter to the director of the Historical Museum and the chairman of the 'Don Rossaro Recognition Committee' in which he asked for forgiveness from those who had felt offended. But that was not enough, he also made two concrete proposals for 'fruitful collaboration': 'The sale of a common entrance ticket, the amount of which would be split in half between the two entities', and the presence of a representative of the Museum and the Committee in the Regency of the Opera Campana. Neither proposal was accepted. The Museum waited until 1970 and then filed a civil lawsuit against the Regency, which resulted in a very long process ending in 1983 at the Court of Cassation in Rome with a final ruling in favour of the Foundation.

The Bell, however, could not lie still for 13 years pending the outcome of the trial and in fact it did not. On the contrary, it intensified its activity in the direction indicated by Pope Montini. On 14 September 1975, on the occasion of the Holy Year, an ecumenical rite was held on Miravalle Hill to remember the victims of all wars and to remind the powerful of their duty to keep the Peace. That 'International Day of Remembrance for All the Fallen' was attended by ambassadors from over forty nations, representatives of more than twenty religious denominations and a huge crowd. The Piazzale delle Genti was born, a real place created to offer a home to humanity in search of moments of dialogue.

As always, Father Iori regarded that success as a new starting point. But this time things were different. When the news reached Rovereto, it was a shock for everyone. The President, on a mission in Rome on behalf of Maria Dolens, had died suddenly during the night. It was 12 August 1979. His had been a full life, that of a man of action. Upon taking office, he had expressed his intention to give the Regency legal stability and the Bell universal significance. *Fait accompli*. This is the legacy of a visionary who worked for Peace for 26 years, right up to his last day of his life.

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Iranian missiles falling on the capital and other Israeli cities, causing numerous casualties; jets from the "Rising Lion" campaign carrying out strikes that decapitate military and intelligence leaders as well as key Persian nuclear experts; the ayatollahs' threats to indiscriminately target Western military bases in the region; and the real danger of contamination linked to the destruction of the Natanz and Isfahan nuclear plants (and damage to the underground Fordow facility). Viewed closely, these are all pieces of a vast puzzle with "reverse" rules, where the winner is not the one who first completes the intricate mosaic, but the one who manages to disable all its components before anyone else.

The direct damages caused by this situation include the indefinite postponement of those nuclear negotiations that had already engaged both US and Iranian experts in Oman for several sessions. Although shrouded in modest expectations of success, they nevertheless offered a rare, and therefore valuable, opportunity for direct dialogue. The same fate befell the Conference for the Recognition of an Autonomous Palestinian State, which was supposed to open shortly in New York under French and Saudi co-chairmanship and was itself postponed until a later date. And the latest confirmation of the United Nations' operational paralysis does nothing to improve the overall picture.

> Any glimmer of hope for a negotiated solution to the conflict must be immediately seized and pursued with courage and determination

The organisation has effectively become a kind of "global press room," where representatives of warring nations engage in constant mutual accusations before diplomatic colleagues resigned to an embarrassing state of impotence.

At the time this article goes to press (20 June), the situation appears difficult to decipher, apart from Israel's determination to zero in on Iran's nuclear programmes, fearing their imminent use for military purposes.

One of the few encouraging signs comes from the G7 forum—specifically from the recent Canadian summit in Kananaskis—in the form of a unanimously adopted statement in which the world's most industrialised nations call for "a resolution to the Iranian crisis, broader de-escalation, and a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip," recognising these as interconnected objectives.

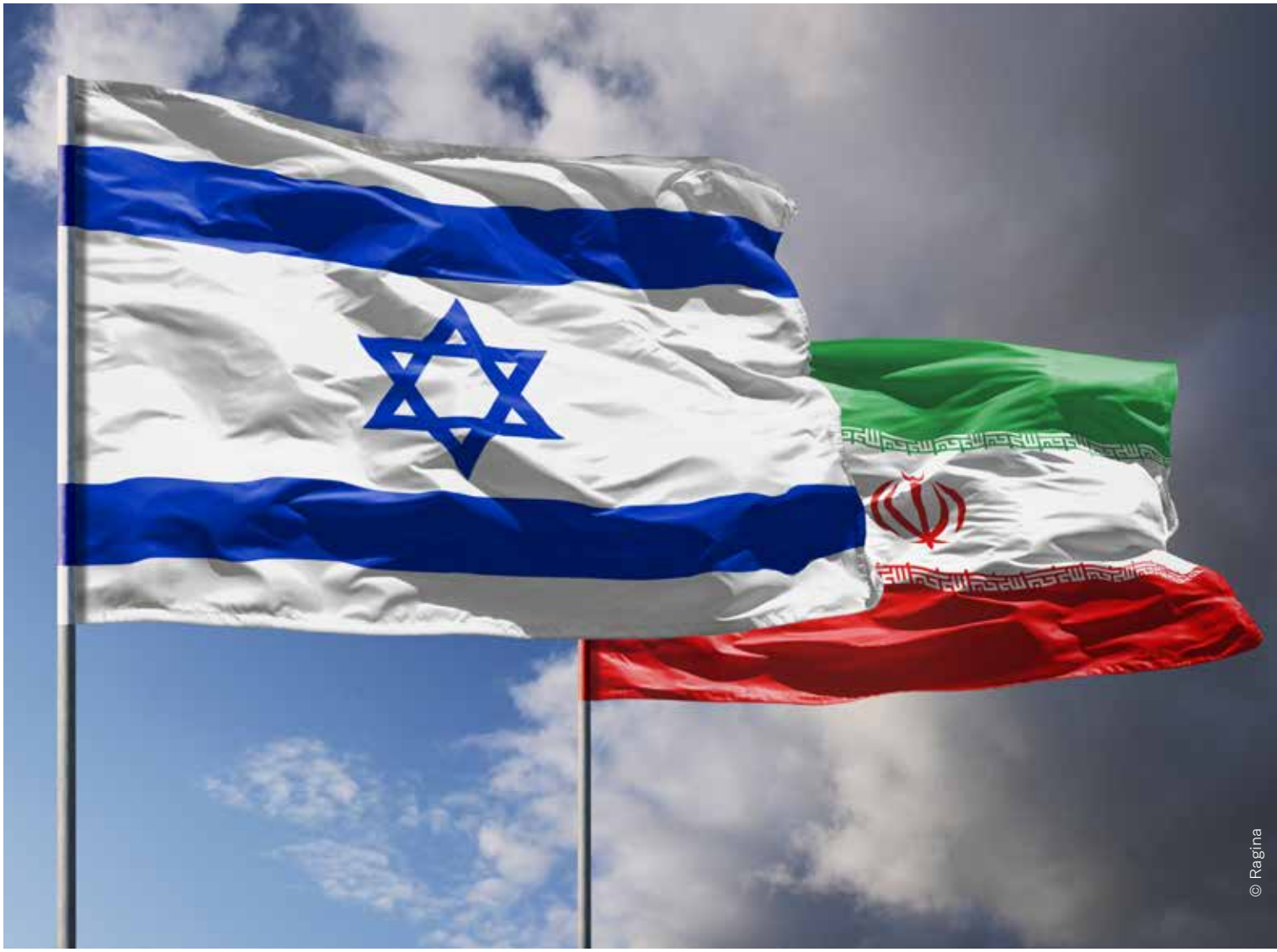
We wish to briefly address the interest, expressed by a number of foreign ministries, in provoking regime change in Tehran—by removing the ayatollahs and promoting the formation of a government more open to cooperation with the Western world. However detestable the current nomenklatura in Tehran may be, the negative experiences of the past few years in Libya, Afghanistan or Iraq should lead to thoughtful reflection in this respect. As pointed out in a previous commentary (see issue 27 of 'Voce'), Iranian civil society already has within its bosom the presence of opinion movements such as 'Woman, Life, Liberty' capable of gradually changing the current balances on which the current Mollahs' regime is based.

It is precisely from such significant sectors of Iranian society, inspired by shared values of freedom and democracy, that the reconstruction of a new system of government could begin, a development that is only possible in the absence of military escalation.

> Concerns over the indefinite postponement of nuclear negotiations in Oman between US and Iranian experts

And, in any case, any glimmer of hope, however tenuous, that may appear in the near future for a negotiated solution to the conflict must be immediately seized and pursued with courage and determination. News has just emerged of a planned meeting in Geneva between the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, and their Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi. The continuation of high-level government contacts—even under the current, extremely difficult circumstances—offers a reason to hope that there is still room for negotiation.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



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They have succeeded in some areas of the planet, failed in others, sometimes achieved partial results, but those who criticise these organisations should be reminded that when the world fell into the abyss of World War II, 80 years ago, the UN was not there, the EU was not there, the Council of Europe was not there.

> Multilateral institutions, albeit imperfect, are still the most effective tools for containing conflicts and fostering diplomatic solutions

The United Nations has played a key role in maintaining Peace in many areas of the world. It is true, it is often paralysed by mutual vetoes, but perhaps the time has come to improve how it operates: we need more UN, not less. The Council of Europe promoted the European Convention on Human Rights, which remains one of the most advanced texts on the subject today. The EU, despite many limitations, has ensured decades of Peace on a historically war-torn continent. The alternative to multilateralism is nationalism; mankind has already tried this and it did not go well.

Despite everything, however, war continues to return with some regularity. Always for the same 'inalienable and noble' reasons. Russian aggression against Ukraine has brought the conflict back to the heart of Europe. Civilians struck, indiscriminate bombing. The war propaganda is always the same, 'we do it to defend ourselves'. The same one that is being used in the

> The United Nations has played a key role in maintaining Peace in many areas of the world

Middle East by Israel, which is waging two wars at the same time. On the one hand, there is the offensive in the Gaza Strip, officially aimed at eliminating Hamas terrorists, but in reality resulting in the mass killing of Palestinian civilians.

On the other side there is the bombing of Iran, justified by Tel Aviv with claims that the country is close to developing a nuclear weapon. There is no doubt that a handful of dictators rule in Tehran, oppressing the civilian population. The real question is whether this is a strategy that truly works to ensure Israel's security—and, above all, whether there is a genuine threat.

We will probably know too late, as happened just over twenty years ago when Saddam Hussein's Iraq was accused of having weapons of mass destruction that it did not possess. Hussein was a bloodthirsty, unjustifiable dictator, but we now know that when in 2003 the then US Secretary of State Colin Powell presented a report to the UN directly accusing Baghdad of possessing 'chemical weapons capable of killing thousands of people', the 'evidence' shown on world television were vials filled with a white powder that was not anthrax as claimed, and was not even harmful, but could be easily sprinkled on the skin after a shower, it was talcum powder. Baghdad was occupied, the regime fell, Hussein was captured and sentenced to death, no weapons were found, chaos reigned in Iraq, not Peace as was intended.

It feels like we keep coming back to square one, like a tragic game of snakes and ladders that periodically forces us to relive the same tragedies.

The only difference is the technology, which changes how war is fought, but not its essence.

Theodor W. Adorno, witness of the Shoah and author of *Negative Dialectics*, argued that 'writing a poem after Auschwitz is an act of barbarism'. A statement that expresses the crisis of humankind. Of course, it was the German philosopher himself who made it clear that it is not poetry itself that is barbaric, but turning a blind eye to what happened.

And perhaps then it should actually be culture that confronts horror, instead of erasing it. In this sense, poetry can still say something. "Glorious is the fate of the dead at Thermopylae, noble their destiny; their tomb is an altar, remembrance replaces mourning, and lament becomes praise" wrote Simonides of Ceos, who lived in the fifth century before Christ, commemorating the fallen. For Horace, however, 'it is sweet and dignified to die for one's homeland'. After the Holocaust, it is time to move on. Paul Celan tried this in the 20th century. With his *Death Fugue*, he sculpted the image of the absurdity of evil, denouncing horror with a broken, torn language. Poetry won't save us, but it preserves memory. And in an era that tends to forget, this is no small thing.

Those who believe in the power of dialogue must think that war is not a destiny, but a choice Peace is fragile, of course, but it can be built. The international institutions, however imperfect they may be, are still the most effective tools we have for containing conflicts and fostering diplomatic solutions. What we need are reforms, political will, culture, and memory.

Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, the best way to honour the dead, the victims, the survivors, is not to remember heroic deeds but to strive so that they are no longer needed 'Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it,' is written on the monument at the entrance to the Dachau concentration camp. It is translated into thirty languages, so there are no excuses for not understanding it.

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