Sharing the World—*Dr. Ronny Noor, USA*

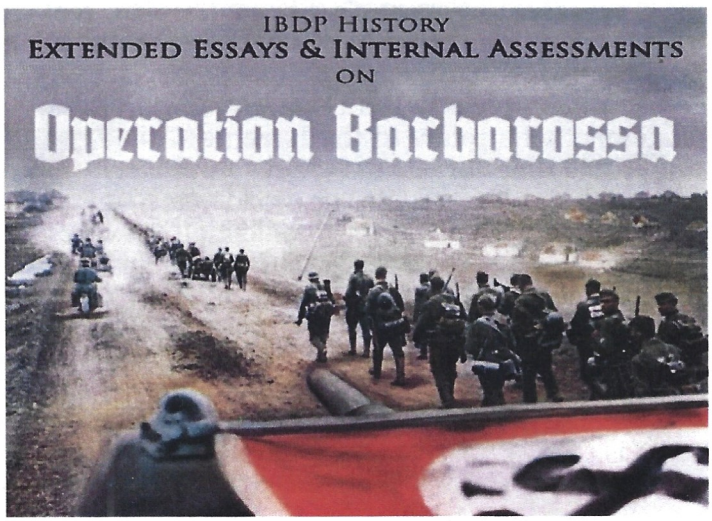
War is a dreadful thing.– *Charles Dickens*

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
T. S. Eliot

On March 14, 2022, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in reference to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict that nuclear war is "within the realm of possibility." That was certainly not a flippant remark and it will be unwise not to take it seriously because the existence of the world is at stake if it occurs, especially when there's talk of a nuclear Armageddon now in Russia and the West. But how did we get here, to this twilight of human civilization?

After the breakdown of negotiations between the West and Russia regarding military security on the European continent, the Russian Federation launched an invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, calling it a "special military operation." The negotiations failed because Russia opposed NATO expansion to the east to include Ukraine. Hence, this is certainly not, not by a long shot, a war between good and evil, as some reporters and commentators in the media would like to imply, but a war for strategic military advantage. NATO expansion to Ukraine and the possible deployment of its missiles to the Ukraine-Russia border raise the spectre of, at least in the minds of the students of history, Napoleon's burning of Moscow in the 19th century and Hitler's invasion of the former Soviet Union in the 20th.

Moscow Burning 1812



The failure of negotiations and the subsequent war led to the weaponization of the U.S. dollar and the European Euro with a host of sanctions on Russia, which led to Russia's weaponization of oil and gas, causing hardship and misery to billions of people around the world. Not only the developing countries but also the developed countries have been affected due to high energy prices, high food prices, and inflation. Many Europeans have trouble heating their homes in the winter due to the high cost of energy and shortage of supply, between 20% and 30% facing poverty; hard-up American families cannot make ends meet, their children depending on charities for school lunch; Africans are going hungry. The island nation of Sri Lanka defaulted on foreign debt last year. But the merchants of death are making a fortune as their missiles, bombs, and drones are burning billions of dollars in the battlefields of Ukraine, not to mention soldiers and civilians. This money could have been put to better use to develop the warring nations as well as to reduce poverty, hunger, and the deleterious effects of climate change worldwide. The insanity that prevails in Europe reminds one of what the sagacious Ralph Waldo Emerson said about Napoleon's wars: "Here was an experiment, under the most favorable conditions, of the powers of intellect without conscience ... And what was the result of this vast talent and power, of these immense armies, burned cities, squandered treasures, immolated millions of men, of this demoralized Europe? It came to no result." Exactly. Confrontations lead to nought in the end except death and destruction.

The phrase "intellect without conscience" in the above quotation is telling and bears repeating for intelligent people can do unimaginable harm if conscience does not rein in their iniquitous actions, as we saw in World War I with 15 to 22 million deaths and World War II with 70 to 85 million deaths. Europe gave us both those wars. Now it might give us World War III, as the UN Secretary-General indicated, for a nuclear war in Europe will inevitably ensnare other continents and sooner or later all corners of the world will directly or indirectly be caught up in that conflagration, like in the two previous Great Wars, ↗

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with untold millions of deaths, putting human civilization in peril. Wars are raging in other places outside Europe—e.g., Syria—and though they are gruesome and appalling, they do not threaten human civilization. But this war in Europe does. Hence, it will not be wrong to say that Europe is the sick man of the world, T. S. Eliot's "patient etherized upon a table."

One would think that European nations, which have contributed so much to the world in the fields of science and technology since the Enlightenment to help modernize human civilization, would know better than to wallow in mutual destruction. Unfortunately, the calamities of the two horrendous World Wars have not chastened European political leaders enough to change their course, as revealed in the French President Emmanuel Macron's condescending speech at the UN General Assembly's annual high-level debate in September 2022. Being

critical of those non-European countries that are "neutral" in the Russo-Ukrainian war—that's the vast majority of the world population—and do not wish to be dragged into a European conflict, he asked them to pick sides—Russia or the West—admitting inadvertently that the West is fighting a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, training Ukrainians and supplying the country with all kinds of weapons: attack drones, machine guns, armored ve-

hicles, self-propelled howitzers, tanks, missile systems, and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), among others. What the Europeans do not realize, or care a hoot about, is that their actions are putting the whole world in jeopardy and human existence on the brink of extinction because their blind desire to maintain a world order to their liking gets in the way of their understanding. This self-absorbed mentality – *Play by our rules or you don't get to play* – led them to slaughter each other in the two Great Wars. President Macron could have done better and garnered much praise from nations around the world if he had listened to one of the best European minds, Wolfgang von Goethe, who said that "there can be no question of the nations thinking alike, the aim is simply that they shall grow aware of one another, understand each other, and, even where they may not be able to love, may at least tolerate one another." Then the French president would not have tried to divide the nations of the world into different camps – *us* versus *them* – seeking hostile confrontation, which is an attempt "in principle suicidal," as Emerson said.

All nations, big or small, should be able to feel secure within their borders without the fear of foreign threats, which can be achieved if people follow Goethe's judicious advice cited above: tolerance of one another. That mindset can foster economic cooperation instead of military confrontation, rendering military alliances irrelevant. Two countries of continental Europe – Switzerland and Austria – well known for peace and prosperity bear witness to that. They are not members of any military alliance but research shows – for instance, the Legatum Prosperity Index published by the London-based Legatum Institute – that they are among the best countries in the world to live in. Wise nations can follow their lead and worship at the altar of life through cooperation, not at the altar of death through confrontation. Afterall, the world was made for all people, not for a particular group or nation. So instead of trying to impose our will on others for a strategic advantage, being "huddled and concentrated in ourselves," to use Michel de Montaigne's words, and threatening the existence of human civilization, let's prove our worth as human beings by sharing it with all.

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Dr. Ronny Noor is no stranger to FreeXpresSion, he often contributes to Cynthia's haiku pages with thoughtful compositions. Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh and educated in Germany and the United States, Ronny Noor is now an English professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, U.S.A. He previously taught at Salisbury State University and the University of Texas at Brownsville. An award-winning teacher, his poems, stories, essays, and reviews have been published around the world, in journals and newspapers such as The Toronto Review, Palo Alto Review, South Asian Review, Short Story, World Literature Today, Commonwealth Novel in English, World Haiku Review, Taj Mahal Review, South Central Review, The Weekend Independent, High Coupe: A Journal of Contemporary Haiku, the Aurorean, paper wasp, FreeXpresSion, South by Southeast, The Daily Star, Kokako, and Contemporary Literary Review India. He is also the author of Snake Dance in Berlin (a novel), Slice of Heaven and Other Essays (a collection), and Where Heaven Spreads Wide and Other Stories (a collection).