



AN OPEN LETTER FROM A FRIEND TO:

**PRES. BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**PRES. VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH PUTIN
RUSSIAN FEDERATION REPUBLIC**

DEAR FRIENDS,

WORLD PEACE IS IN YOUR HANDS

This open letter, I pen to both of you as a nobody in the scheme of global issues that you grapple with daily, let alone the formidable politico-military power you wield on behalf of your two nations – RUSSIA and the USA.

Respectfully, this open missive I direct at you as an ordinary citizen of the world which is much larger than your two countries, and which includes, inter alia, powers like China which are critical integral components. A world which looks upon you in the main, with hope in the knowledge that by and large, you have joint responsibility for world peace and similarly, mutual accountability if it falters. Are you up to this challenge?

Indeed, I jot these lines as a disciple of Nelson Mandela, the hero of my country South Africa, and an iconic global statesman, whose legacy of the quest for a just and peaceful world, his Foundation - through its Centre of Memory - is charged to preserve. It is common cause that you hold him in high esteem.

Additionally, I write as a freedom fighter and former political prisoner on Robben Island, whose country, having borne the brunt of racial divisions due to the crime of apartheid, not only is resolving its political and socio-economic problems, but moreso - in contributing to global peace - is the first in the world to unilaterally disarm itself of thermonuclear war capacity; including research, development, production, stockpiling, proliferation or utilization of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction.

This policy of developing nuclear power only for peaceful purposes, virtually rendering Africa as a non-nuclear armed continent, has been sustained from the Mandela government years to date. Though proper this principled standpoint was and still is today, the moot point is: For the foreseeable future, can this position be justifiable and sustainable in a world where nuclear weapons are proliferated and rattled about - including those in your massive stockpiles? Where does this leave countries like ours?

Moreso I write to echo those willing **to speak truth to power** as the world, at this time in the 21st Century, under your leadership and during your watch, is tension-filled and gradually edging towards the precipice. Needless to say, the truth, as the saying goes, is often the first casualty during hostilities as finger-pointing takes centre-stage. During such times great leadership qualities emerge or simply wither. Much is expected of you. Are you up to the task?

Last but not least, I also address this plea to you as a friend fully believing that, although you are surrounded by important advisers, you as powerful decision makers still remain open to friendly advice beyond your immediate circles. Are you? Or has the din of war talk rendered you no longer capable of hearing the pleas of the meek for peace?

History teaches that greatness in leadership lies not in the power wielded, but in the willingness even to listen to counsel from commoners. Friends tell one another the truth no matter how unpalatable. Dear friends, this is the spirit of this open letter to you in the strong belief that you can make a difference for world peace.

UNCONTROLLED LOCAL WARS – THE ROAD TO GLOBAL WAR

Our world is conflict-ridden with a multiplicity of local wars involving various antagonists. Fearfully the clouds of a major war are steadily gathering. As they do, we are reminded by history that: ***The trigger of war is often a deliberate incident, a reckless accident or a disastrous miscalculation.*** The increasing number of local conflicts, as happened in the past, may embroil powerful nations, particularly yours, leading to a global war.

The day-by-day rapidly deteriorating relations amongst leading powers, provides fodder to loose cannons across the world. These include political fundamentalists, religious extremists, ultra-nationalists, ethno-fanatics, neo-fascists, neo-Nazi's, misdirected jihadists, beheadists and outright terrorists - all believing in the justness of their cause. This raises the spectre of failed or near-failed states in the Middle-East and Africa in particular, and unstable ones generally elsewhere.

In this light, foreign policy formulation and implementation by major powers ought to be about the reduction of tensions and hostilities; not about pouring more fuel into the fire to the benefit of those whose objective is to spread global chaos.

The locked doors of international arms bazaars have been blown-off their hinges, enabling a free-for-all access to all types of armaments including heavy machineguns and artillery, rocket launchers, missiles and tanks. The sight of a one-ton commercial truck converted to mount heavy anti-aircraft guns, shooting at ground targets, has become common-place in daily headline news. There is a real danger of the unprecedented proliferation of conventional weapons in unsteady hands.

Villages are torched, towns and cities are razed-down, innocent civilians, including defenceless children are mowed down. Millions are displaced, refugee camps are bursting, socio-economic and war migrants are scattering, sparking racial and xenophobic hatred. All worsened by warring opponents swelling their ranks with child-soldiers and teenage bombers including even American and European girl recruits, some as young as fifteen years! Battle-lines have extended worldwide, beyond the Middle East and Africa with Europe being increasingly affected. Some parts of the world are

worse-off than others; yet one thing is clear: **no continent is any longer safe.**

With this backdrop therefore, the current situation is characterised as the rapid spawning of anarchic chaos in the global order due to the multiplicity of instabilities in various countries, bloodletting violence in some and full scale wars in others. The international system of peace-making, the UNO, is all but side-lined as condemnatory resolution after resolution, are by and large ignored. The mighty, with their veto powers, by-pass these in the name of right. Surely, this cannot be right?

The **risk** for the world is that the various extreme animosities and many proxy wars being waged, owing to overt and or covert interests, are contributing to the escalation of the already deteriorating relations amongst the leading powers. The **threat** is that the big global players are further and deeper sucked-in by the alarming local shambolic situations. Thus, the temptation of introducing more lethal weapons into volatile situations looms large. The **danger** is that big powers can end-up entangled in unplanned theatres of war on opposing sides to the benefit of local warlords and questionable leaders.

Meanwhile, space, air, sea and land-based military assets are being openly or secretly shifted around by the major powers. Brinkmanship military exercises are being brazenly conducted. Threats of lowering the nuclear-threshold are being uttered. First-strikes are supposedly contemplated. The climate of the cold-war is again upon us.

Where is leadership? If this situation is allowed to persist, then something, somewhere, somehow, is bound to give. Thus the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats - echoed by the African literary giant professor Chinua Achebe - warns in his acclaimed *Second Coming*: **"... things fall apart, the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosened upon the world ..."** All protagonists are well aware of their intentions. If this is not playing Russian roulette or American fast-draw with global security, then what is?

NATO AND UKRAINE - THE BURNING FUSE OF WAR

The unacceptable breakdown of trust amongst the world's major powers, therefore, especially the palpable tension between your two states - sometimes even at personal level - have grave consequences for world stability and peace. This leaves smaller and less powerful nations at the mercy of global volatility and uncertainty. An old African adage popularised by Swazi King, Sobhuza II says: **"when two elephants are fighting it is the grass that suffers"**.

The recent shuttle diplomacy and co-operation amongst the powers involved in the nuclear framework deal around Iran is welcome. However, this should not camouflage the true state of relations between your two nations, and should not conveniently postpone the need to engage on other more urgent issues. A close reading of the geo-political and military situation, indicates that the real danger of a piecemeal Russia-US war, remains the volatile situation in Eastern Europe around NATO.

Tragically, in this respect, the conflict in Ukraine has become the burning fuse ... If this is not sorted out, then the **'scenario is war'**. These words are not mine. They are from French President Hollande, who together with German Chancellor Merkel, should be applauded for demonstrable leadership, and who together with your two trusted and respected top diplomats – Secretary Kerry and Minister Lavrov – facilitated the Minsk ceasefire agreement on Ukraine.

This leadership was expected from Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande as they know the history of hardship unleashed during the second World War. After-all they are students of **German Real Politik** and **French Detenté Diplomacy** respectively. Both the US and Russia fought well as allies in that war with Russia suffering the most. Therefore

the horrific past experiences – including those of the post-WWII Cold War, ought to be a constant reminder of the responsibilities you both shoulder. The wise have warned: **Those who forget the bitter lessons of history are doomed to repeat its terrible mistakes.**

However, the perilous peace following the Minsk ceasefire agreement can only be sustainable in the context of courageously addressing the thorny question of an eastward expanding NATO. This is in spite of assurances given after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The principle of the freedom of nations determining their own destinies and to freely associate, is enshrined in international law. This applies to Ukraine, the Baltic States and nations worldwide. However, **great circumspection** must be exercised when it comes to affiliating to military organizations as this can trigger a chain of counter-reactions.

This applies, in the main, to former Soviet republics such as Ukraine. By all means, joining the European Union is no issue and should be recognised. However NATO is not a picnic organization.

Therefore, joining it in the current circumstances should not be encouraged. Rather consideration should be about the major powers jointly finding a solution to guarantee the security of these states in a sustainable and verifiable manner.

With the unravelling of the Socialist world, Russia retreated from Eastern Europe. With the unwinding of the Soviet Union, Russia further retreated from former Soviet states. Surely today Russia cannot be expected to retreat from Russia. In a manner of speaking, the "Bear" is somewhat cornered, yet it would be fool-hardy and dangerous to try to collar it with a hot chain of nuclear or heavily armed NATO states. However, Russia's fears should also not be addressed anyhow to the detriment of the security of others.

Similarly, the US lost its hold on Cuba. Its influence over Latin America has been diminished by left revolutions. However, the US cannot retreat from itself. If Russia today contemplated introducing lethal weapons into Mexico, this would be provocative and threatening to US security. But then, this is precisely what the US Congress has elected to do when it passed a law to introduce lethal weapons into Ukraine.

Although no two situations are identical, there is no doubt that these are echoes of the Cuban Missile Crisis which can plunge the world into much deeper turmoil. The situation in Ukraine needs to be resolved through political negotiations as it is too complex. A military solution is neither desirable, feasible nor sustainable.

Today in the 21st Century, you are both heirs, having inherited the political and economic superstructure of the two leading nations of the 20th Century, the USA and USSR, which were at daggers drawn for a greater part of that century. Moreover, you have also inherited the techno-military infrastructure capable of destroying the planet several times in the event of the outbreak of the unthinkable thermonuclear catastrophe.

Those in the past who had entertained the development and possible use of these apocalyptic weapons, came to realise the futility of any thinking that could have led to a nuclear-war. This is because it is one no-one can win. A war which, experts have warned, can only result in one certainty: Mutually Assured Destruction. It is a MAD war.

BOLD LEADERSHIP – THE WAY FORWARD

In the light of all the above, the famous question arises: ***Chto Delat*** - What's to be done? It is not for me to provide answers. That would be presumptuous, as the matters confronting you are too complicated. **However the first advice is an easy one; since the issues are already complex, it would be unwise to render them more complicated.**

Secondly, **it is imperative, regardless of the suspicions and mistrusts, to engage, face-to-face, president-to-president, in talks-about-talks.** Minister Lavrov and Secretary Kerry are doing their best under the circumstances. They now need to lay the table for you. Dialogue is essentially not necessarily about agreeing to agree, but agreeing about the differences to be discussed. Whereupon parties may agree to agree or agree to disagree. But chiefly you must agree to meet. You have nothing to lose. Only vanity can stand in your way.

The Mandela-Way teaches that negotiations are not between friends. That's a chat. They are amongst adversaries - those who have ceased seeing eye-to-eye.

Many people worldwide would agree that the global tensions and hostilities are stressful not only to nations. They are unhealthy for the mental and physical being of ordinary people who are daily bombarded with debilitating headline news from killing fields across the world. Sadly this is while those expected to lead in fostering hope are seemingly more concerned about their images. The world needs assurance that you are not indifferent – that you are different.

It would be naïve to believe that your face-to-face meeting will solve all problems. But surely it will send a positive signal towards lowering the temperature of antagonisms. The opposite is also true: Failure to engage will send a negative vibe and create space for those wishing to spread global despondency. As the saying goes: Nature does not allow a vacuum. Moral leadership needs to reclaim this space. Furthermore, demonising each other is a sure way of making the situation to be intractable, as it may be near impossible to sit down with the demon you created.

We have been down this rocky road before during the Cold-War. However, leaders from your two nations, and others, traversed the globe beyond the Berlin, Kremlin, Chinese and other walls,

engaging in diplomacy. Peace was preserved not because of love for one another but because it was the right thing for humanity!

Then leaders became respected not because they were saintly, but because of their acceptance that war amongst major powers was no option. This is your responsibility today.

The dangerous chess-game playing itself out arising from local conflict situations across the world, should not be allowed to continue unchecked. Bold leadership in the interest of world peace and stability is required, instead of constant efforts by super powers to try to out-manoeuvre each other. This is counterproductive.

The growing list of your agenda items for discussion, beyond Ukraine and NATO, requires urgent attention because delays will only worsen things, and play into the hands of those promoting world instability. You may find the following items as useful food for thought, for mere consideration during discussions.

- Re-activation of hotlines - the "red phones" - to maintain personal and speedy contact relating to crisis situations.
- Re-establishing trust through intelligence sharing especially pertaining to hot spots at critical times.

- Re identification of common strategic security matters to avoid the tactics of undermining each other.
- Avoidance of brinkmanship and provocative military exercises which only serve to aggravate suspicions.
- Building a conducive climate to conduct joint military exercises to assist other countries during natural or other disasters.
- Refraining from introducing lethal weapons into conflict areas, which may fall into shaky hands.
- Ensuring that where appropriate, men in uniform should refrain from issuing statements and threats aimed at elected leaders from opposing sides.
- Curtailment of tit-for-tat and not-well-thought-out statements by spokespersons as these add to confusion.
- To be cautious - as chief communicators of your two governments - not to conduct press conferences aimed at talking past or against each other.

The above minimum set of proposals by themselves, will not solve complex matters of political-military and overall security concern.

They serve as a basis for confidence re-building measures towards the restoration of the climate for mutual trust. This in turn sets the tone and platform for dialogue on more complex matters affecting our world. These include inter alia, development assistance to poorer countries, nuclear non-proliferation, missile shield technology, strategic defence forces, global warming, epidemics control and cyber war prevention.

Bold and courageous leadership, therefore, is what the world requires right now. Nothing written here is new to you. As a nobody I can teach you nothing. Both of you as Presidents of your respective nations are well armed with the knowledge and power to change course and to re-engage, because much of the grave global tension revolves around your two countries.

In taking the requisite bold steps you are naturally aware that as protagonists who are often cast into the role of antagonists, you are not operating on islands. The mainland of the world is much more broader than your two states. Other leaders of some nations are available for consultations. Earlier on I referred to China, **a big and rising global economic power and player in the world affairs.** There are others – including smaller nations

that can offer examples of wisdom. Size matters, but wise matters more.

Lastly dear friends, this open letter should be regarded as a plea to you to pause, to take a step back and to contemplate, to rise to the challenge of the authority of moral global leadership. I trust that you can. The burden of true leadership appears light, yet it is not easy to shoulder.

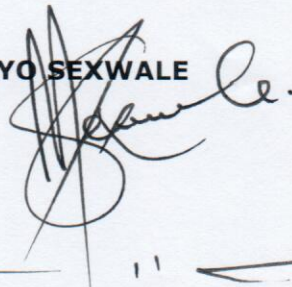
As earlier said, I know that you both cherish and respect Madiba greatly; so allow me to share with you his humble words:

"When the history of our times is written, will we be remembered as the generations that turned our backs in a moment of global crisis or will it be recorded that we did the right thing?"

Wishing you both good health, good speed and God speed!

- fondest regards,

TOKYO SEXWALE



18th May 2015.