

IV. Interview

Interview: *Jan Øberg*

War Avoidance Means Having a Vision of the Future

Jan Øberg is an independent peace and future researcher, art photographer, columnist, commentator, and mediator from Denmark. He has a PhD in sociology from Lund University, Sweden, and has been a guest professor at some ten international universities. He is the co-founder and director of the [Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research \(TFF\)](https://janoberg.me/), founded in 1986, as “an independent think tank, a global network that aims to bring about peace by peaceful means. It inspires a passion for peace from the grassroots to the corridors of power.”



Courtesy of Jan Øberg, <https://janoberg.me/>
Jan Øberg

Michelle Rasmussen of the Schiller Institute in Denmark and EIR interviewed Øberg on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025. EIR has edited the transcript and added subheads. The video is available [here](#).

Michelle Rasmussen: Thank you very much Jan Øberg for giving me the opportunity to interview you in these tumultuous days of importance for world history. What is your evaluation of the current world situation, in the context of the transition from one world order to another?

Jan Øberg: Well, that transition—and thank you for having me—is going very well, for the majority part of the world, that is, about 85% or more, not least thanks to China’s various initiatives for security and a common future for mankind in the Belt and Road Ini-

tiative, and all that. It’s only that those who live in the West have not understood anything of that change, and if they have, they will not accept not to be dominating. And that’s, of course, the end of the West: You can either join the rest of the world, or you can become isolated, and self-destructive. And it’s a great pain in my heart to say, the West today is now self-destructive. There’s nobody who wants to destroy the West or occupy the U.S., or conquer Europe or something like that, but that’s how we react to everything that happens. And we feel threatened in the West, because there is this situation after 300 or 400

years, or whatever, where the West cannot any more dominate, decide, be the one owner that runs the rest of the world. You remember the old distinction of the first world, the second world, the third world, and the fourth world; and the fourth and the third and the second world are now moving upwards, and the first world is moving downwards.

And that is painful, of course! It’s painful to get very old and frail and be on your deathbed, but there’s no reason to be so aggressive. And that aggression, that militarism has swept over the whole Western world, particularly in Europe. But you wait and see with [United States President Donald] Trump—that is self-destructive. Because you cannot have both economic development, prosperity, a welfare state, cultural creativity, technical innovation, etc., if you’re also spending horrendous sums—wasting, I would say, horren-

dous sums on the military and preparing for war all the time. Your mind is on how to fight the next war, instead of how to create the good society—and that will be self-destructive: There's no doubt in my mind, it'll be self-destructive for a few more years; then it will be obvious even to the West that it is falling, declining. It will have a "*Pravda* moment," as I used to call it, when they found out most of our mainstream media have been lying to us about all these kinds of threats everywhere. And finally, I would say, what happens is just natural. It's a big change.

But this macro-historical change that tells us that empires are going down—you know all empires go up and they go down again. There's no empire that has lasted forever: This is natural law! And you can adapt to it, or you can say, "I'll fight it." The more you fight it, the faster your decline will go.

And I say it, as I said, with pain in my heart. I have never been anti-Western, I have never been anti-America. The Western world has given the world a lot of good things—culture, innovations, ways of living, products, ideas that were good, like freedom of speech, free media, etc., and a certain kind of democracy—although it's not a democracy any more anywhere in the West, but it was. The theories were good. And now you have basically destroyed it all. All the values of the West are now, if you will, undermined by the West itself, not by anybody else, but by the West itself.

So, it's a very sad situation for the West. The rest of the world is going well.

Rasmussen: And we have been calling for Europe and the United States to actually ally with the BRICS-Plus countries, the Global South countries, instead of continuing the confrontation policy.

Øberg: I totally agree with that. But I don't think they know anything but confrontation. You take the Danish government, which is now covered by the world press, where its completely emotionalist, totally outrageous policies and waste of money—Denmark will go down the drain very soon. And that's an example of many others. I was born in Denmark, as you know. You sit in Denmark. And Denmark was a peaceful society. It was Hans Christian Andersen, it was all these kinds of welfare things; it was Kierkegaard, it was folk high schools, it was women's equality, it was smaller income differences, it was an ability and a will to help the world

in different ways, it was strong, as Sweden, as neutral states at the time. Sweden was a country where you could count on a strong adherence to international law, and to the United Nations and united peacekeeping. All these good values are gone! The only thing you can hear the Danish Prime Minister [Mette Frederiksen] talk about is war! Now, she has some kind of irrational disturbance, pathological, I would say, and she's a very powerful woman and she plays power games all the time.

There is no substance behind it, and it applies to all the other European countries. My question is, could you please give us a scenario by which Russia will take all of Ukraine; then continue to Poland and the Baltic republics, and Finland and Sweden, and land in Denmark, or occupy the Eiffel Tower in 48 hours, with its tanks? Would you please give me that scenario? For a country that has a fraction of NATO's military expenditures, and weapons, and manpower, and for a country that has not for three years been able to—you may say willingly, I'm not a military expert—but has not been able to take more than about 15%, 15-20% of Ukraine; now mind you, if you occupy all of Europe, you have to administer it too, to keep it, as if Russia was also not beaten up already—I mean, these things are fantasies!

These things are constructions in the minds of people, who are emotionalist, who are irrational, and who are damned dangerous! So they contribute to their belief that they are making the West strong, but they are adding to the decline and the accelerating—Mette Frederiksen, the Danish Prime Minister, talks about accelerating, and just put 50 billion Danish kroner *more*, after several hikes of the military budget, yesterday, and she said two more years, and then we will continue upwards. You know, that is not to accelerate, that is to accelerate two things—not peace and security—but war and Western decline. She doesn't see it.

A New Security and Development Architecture

Rasmussen: My [first interview with you](#) was actually on Feb. 21, 2022, just three days before the Russian military went into Ukraine. And the response of the chairwoman of the Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, was to call for [a new international security and development architecture](#) where the security interests of all nations were taken into account, and the principle being one humanity first. And you spoke,

then, at the Schiller Institute in Denmark's [online seminar](#) on the subject in May of that year: So, why do you think this is important, now, and what would important aspects be of such an international security and development architecture?

Øberg: Well, that's very simple, intellectually, in terms of values. The problem is how to implement it with the present leaders, whose minds are totally set on militarism. It's militarist thinking! We're deep down into a cultural, militarist crisis.

It's very simple: A strong United Nations, reformed, much higher budgets, much more efficiency; and that's what we should talk about, because we talk too little about the future, and we should talk much more about the future, because you cannot shape the future, by means of being in the present, or thinking about the past. It's like you cannot drive to your goal in a car, if you only look through the rearview mirror. That's what the whole Western world does, with the exception, again, of China, which is looking into the front window, to see where we're going in the next 40 years. So, future thinking is important.

Common security is the only relevant theoretical, or conceptual way of seeing it. We can only live together on this globe, if we have common security: that is, we are safe with the others, when the others are safe with us. That was the not very creative, but very important, idea of the Palme Commission. The Palme Commission—Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden who was killed shortly after—the idea that security is not against someone; it is to understand each other in such a way that we avoid misunderstandings that could lead to a blowup.

Third, it means global governance, that is, to do something about the democracy, or decision-making, which today is basically national, politically, but is global for those who are in economics and the military sector. These two sectors are, if you will, intellectually more advanced, because they think of the globe as one system: intercontinental ballistic missiles, and interventions, and all that, and empire building. And the people who are sitting in finance and the corporate sector, they think globally, whereas democratically, you and I can only vote for our own government and municipalities. That's totally grotesque! The whole political sphere is behind the economic and the military sphere, in terms of maturity and relevance.

So, I'd like to have a global democracy. I'd like us to, for instance, elect the representatives of our countries to international bodies. I'd like to elect the person who represents me in, be it NATO or the European Union, or the United Nations or OECD, or whatever. And we could—it might mean some other technology—we could vote for global issues, globally. If you can decide which song should be winning in the European song contest by text messages, why the heck can we not do something—I know, it's not that easy, but I'm trying to say, why are we only allowed to vote for our Prime Minister, whose importance—as are all other prime ministers in governments—is having less and less influence on the global future and that of their own countries, because more and more of my country's decisions and path into the future is decided internationally, whether by the World Bank or NATO, or whatever.

Fourth, it would mean defensive defense. Deterrence must go. Deterrence is a sick idea. Nobody knows what it is. Everybody talks about it. Deterrence means, let's talk, my friend, with me pointing a pistol at your head: Meaning, I can kill you where you are, 5,000 km away. I don't have the intention to do so, but if you don't do what I say, or if you do something I don't like, then I'll be able to kill you.

Now, then, we have the naïve, self-centered idea, in NATO, for instance, which is built on this bizarre idea, that we can persuade the Russians that we have no bad intentions, and we will never use these weapons. It's the same people who say, "We have nuclear weapons for deterrence." This is bullshit! Sorry for my words. It's bullshit because, if both parties know that nuclear weapons will *never, ever* be used, then there is no deterrence. You cannot deter a cat, with anything, when you at the same time say, "I'm never going to use it." That means there's always a possibility of using your weapons.

Now, so, we have no bad intentions—we just expanded NATO against all promises to [former Soviet President] Mikhail Gorbachev. We also tried with Ukraine as the 11th country that we should never have gone into, but we only have good and peaceful intentions! I mean, how on Earth can anybody believe that the other side, if you have empathy—which is a human value, I would say, but it doesn't exist in politics, and security politics—how on Earth can we expect that somebody would accept that type of policy as "peaceful"?

So, defensive defense means, defensive military: That means less destructive capacity, no nuclear weapons, [only] short-range weapons. It means helicopters to protect your borders, rather than fighter aircraft and intercontinental missiles. I'm just giving you a hint. The most defensive defense you have in history is the Chinese [Great] Wall: It's a very difficult thing to get over, if you try to invade, but it doesn't threaten anyone. That can be done by a lot of modern technology, etc. That's what we need.

And then we need a European United Nations. We need it, because we have had this long, long-term confrontational situation: the first Cold War and now the terrible much worse, second Cold War in Europe, and therefore, exactly as Gorbachev said, we need a European common house, where we talk about things, where we have a conflict-management discussion forum, like a European Security Council, with Russia, where we talk about things before they run into violence. Every situation can be seen as a conflict, and what we need to learn, and come down from the trees, and stop the military-industrial-media-academic complex, is to deal with the *issue*, not who is right and wrong! That's a sick idea! It is what is the issue that stands between the parties here, the parties there, the issue here they cannot solve. If you take it, in the Ukraine, it's a conflict between NATO and its expansion, and Russia and its rising after it's been on its knees. And these two are pitted against each other, and they both use, to a certain extent, they misuse, of course, Ukraine, for their purposes. That's not a matter of who is good and who is bad! It's a matter of, here is a problem that the parties could not handle. Conflict resolution is problem-solving, if you will, and that cannot be done without creativity, because conflict resolution is about seeing a better future, suggesting something all the parties could live with—maybe not be 100% happy with, but could live with, so they say, “hmm, that idea for the next 10 or 20 years for my country, is better than continuing the war.”

Now, that's what Trump has not understood a word of. He doesn't do conflict resolution. He does—in my view, the positive thing, he wants to stop the war. And that “khaki-stocracy” we're living with in Europe says, “No, we're upset that we're not at the table.” For three years, very soon, for three years the European politicians could have talked with [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and taken a telephone, like Trump did. But

these fools didn't do it! They were so cocksure that they would “win”! And so, serve yourself—that you're now totally marginalized. Europe is becoming a fool in the international society! And that's a pity, because it's a fool in comparison with Mr. Trump. He's only doing what he had said all the time.

So, back to the question of finally, how to create a more secure structure of the world: I would say, peace education, peace culture, cultivate that idea. Give people a chance to do peace service, instead of military service. Build down the military-industrial-media-academic complex. We have one cluster which is outside of democratic control: [former U.S. President Dwight] Eisenhower said in his farewell speech, you may remember better, in 1961, where he said, we have a military industry, he called it “the military-industrial complex,” which is outside of control, and in the long run, it can be a danger to the U.S. society. Nobody's done anything to de-build it, because it's part of the Deep State. It's a part of the Deep State anywhere, not just in the U.S., in Denmark, too, or Sweden, or wherever we're sitting.

So, we have something we have to build down, we have to tear up some of these military structures that create a terrible world and a terrible waste of resources. And then build something new, as I said, a defensive defense, global government, a stronger United Nations, a UN in Europe, etc. etc., etc. There's no limit to what we can do with a little creativity, but there's no creativity left in politics, there's no vision! Ask any European politician, where would you like to be in 40 years? Where would you like to have your country in 40 years? They will not tell you anything you would want to listen to.

The Perspective of Economic Development

Rasmussen: Let me ask you: how can an economic development perspective, and China's Belt and Road Initiative aid in the pursuit of peace? For example, in the Middle East, if it were combined with a broader recognition of the Palestinians, and also in Ukraine?

Øberg: Well, let me say, it's not a simple theory, but, you can say: If you cooperate with, have frequent contacts with the other side, those you have a problem with—or, you don't have a problem with them, yet, but you don't want to have a problem with them in the future, then you build cooperative structures, you have

a project together. And whenever you have a project together, *and* you strive for equal benefits—if it's exploitative, like the West has been vis-à-vis the third world, it doesn't work. But if all the parties see, "Hey, I'm winning something," it's a "win-win" as the Chinese call it, a cooperative project, or structure, then, we reduce the risk of war. It's much more difficult to kill people you know, or people you're dependent on, or people who give you benefits. Whereas, if you don't know people, if you exploit people, or you are exploited, the hate comes up at some point, the sense of unfair treatment; the sense of this will make me in a worse and worse position, means uproar. So, you can build peace into structures, you can build peace into trade, you can build peace into investments, you can build peace into a multi-decade macro-project, as the Belt and Road Initiative, which is now I think 140 countries, just NATO and EU being on the outside—as stupid as they are: Instead of participating in what is humankind's largest, and most visionary cooperative project, we're just isolating ourselves, as I said in the beginning.

So, there are so many things you can do if you have vision. There are so many things you can do if politics were about selling good ideas; there's so much you can do, if you involve cultural people, intellectuals, ordinary citizens and their civil society organizations, and *asked*—you know, the time is over when politicians asked for good advice from the people. They believe that they know everything themselves, and they're driving our societies to hell. But that closed-mindedness is frightening to me: I'm so old, that during the 1980s, I sat in the Danish Commission for Security and Disarmament; also through the '80s, I was with my colleagues at Lund University, where I sit in Lund, Sweden, I was part of constantly writing papers for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, going up to Stockholm, sitting all day discussing texts. What does deterrence mean? What does this mean? How do you write this on page 2? How does that compare to what you say on page 10? It was people who were intellectuals who made decisions, and wrote speeches!

And I sit today, and say, and I use the word "khaki-stocracy" about our leaders; khaki-stocracy is the opposite of aristocracy, which I don't support either, but khaki-stocracy means governance by the least able and the least good people. The lack of knowledge among people who play with nuclear war in the Western world

is deeply frightening to me! The weapons have always been there. Weapons are a sick idea. It seems to be that weapons are something people want in all cultures. Nuclear weapons are what you see also everywhere, which are totally immoral to have, unethical, and useless, cannot be justified in any way, except because the others have them, we will have them. But, the lack of knowledge, the lack of being able to handle rationally complex problems; the ability to see what happens, if we send a signal. It makes me sick to hear the word "signal," we're sending "signals"—you're not sending signals, you are making a situation worse. These people are dangerous, and people are much more dangerous than the weapons. Because, if you put terrible weapons in the hands of people who don't know what they do, and are imbued with group thinking, you will, at one point, have a catastrophe. Because, at the moment, there's nobody who can get through to deaf and blind leaders in the West, and say, "You are on the wrong track for the following reasons." Madam Prime Minister in Denmark, there is no threat from Russia—but you can provoke them to become threatening. There is no threat from anyone; you don't need all this military. Do something more constructive with the money you have.

She can't be reached. We're in a situation in which democracy does not permit people to reach their leaders and their leaders do not consult. Sweden signed half a year before it came up in the Swedish Parliament, Sweden's defense minister had signed in Washington, the agreement about 17 U.S. bases in Sweden. Is it democracy that you sign a binding agreement for 10 years, with 17 bases in what was once a neutral, peace-loving Sweden? And then, half a year later, you take it up in the Parliament, and because of propaganda, media and everybody else being behind that stupid, very dangerous, very counterproductive, peace-defying, peace-destroying agreement, you take it up in the Parliament and it passes through!

That's one of the things we should be very careful about, in the Western world, from the right to the left: Militarism is now the answer to everything. You don't even have a left any more! You don't even have a social democracy! Think of the tradition of Willy Brandt, Urho Kekkonen, Bruno Kreisky, Olof Palme, Anker Jørgensen. These people had, one, a sense of what war was; secondly, they were intellectuals, com-

pared to today's leaders. These things are dangerous: I'm pointing, again and again, to the fact, wake up, friends in the West, because otherwise, what is it they say? "Those who fall asleep in a democracy may wake up in a dictatorship." It's a very famous quote from a German author [Otto Gritschneider]. If you sleep in democracy and let these things happen, you will wake up in a dictatorship: that's where the West is on its road to.

Rasmussen: The Schiller Institute has proposed many economic development programs around the world, including an [Oasis Plan](#) for the Middle East, and they are visions of a future we can work towards. And you have spoken now in the interview of the need to think about the future. In a recent interview, you quoted George Bernard Shaw, which Robert F. Kennedy, Sr. also used to quote, very poignantly: "You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'"

So, why is it important to develop visions of the future to inspire people, as you say, something Western politicians lack?

Øberg: I'm very glad you're quoting this beautifully from [George Bernard Shaw](#). I think you will find it probably back 45-50 years in my writings, and I don't think I've ever ended a public speech without quoting that. I deeply believe in that, and that's because one of my mentors was [Norwegian political scientist] Johan Galtung who always said, you haven't done your job as a scholar before you have: 1) done an empirical analysis of reality; 2) criticized it according to some values, [judging that] it's not good enough; and 3) suggested what should be done. Remember, the largest work on the dissolution of Yugoslavia was written by three peace researchers, including myself, Johan Galtung, and [Swedish peace researcher] Håkan Wiberg, and we called it [Yugoslavia—What Should Have Been Done?](#), 2,000 pages online. And that is what peace research is about.

And that's what a peace movement is about. A peace movement that can only criticize weapons is an anti-militarist movement—and that's good, it's important, but it's not a peace movement. And we basically have no peace movement today, anywhere—because people do not think of how to solve problems. They criticize what is bad, and they don't ask, "Why not?"

to see the world as it could be and ask, "Why not?" And that's what I see as my task as an intellectual, to do; together with my colleagues in the Transnational Foundation, we've always done that. And I would say, the world is far too complex and difficult, and threatening to a certain extent, to let the politicians decide what to do. You cannot put up a critical study of something, and then expect politicians to make it a better world; that time is gone. We could once upon a time. We had good leaders. We don't have any leaders today, only bad ones, if so. In the Western world, there might be a few exceptions—I might be wrong—but the level of peace—every peace has disappeared for Christ's sake! There's no peace research left, there's no peace discussion! There's not a peace—it's a word never mentioned in the media! And I haven't heard a politician recently say "peace," except weirdos like [former NATO General Secretary Jens] Stoltenberg saying, "The road to peace is weapons and warfare"! I mean, Orwell would be envious of the reality, because it's way beyond what he envisioned.

So, all kinds of visions are so important. Idea debates, and don't shoot them down with the argument that "this is not realistic"—because the most unrealistic thing is to do what the Western world is doing today, and believing that it can survive, or that the *world* can survive, with a West that behaves that way. We still have far too much weaponry, and wrong thinking, to believe in that.

So, I would say, we need a popular uprising everywhere. Protest against what is happening, but with positive visions of, "you fools, it could be done completely differently, and we would all benefit. Why don't you do something good for humanity? Why do you only do something bad for your own people, or evil for your own people and for humanity?"

It's so much more of an intellectual, moral, and cultural push. In discussion about geopolitics, and who moves, and does that—I'm sick and tired of all these discussions! Because they never come to, with few exceptions, they never come to more than commenting on the madness! And interpreting the madness! We don't need that any more!

Rasmussen: We have three minutes left in our time here.

Øberg: I hope we will live longer!

Advice to Governments

Rasmussen: First I want to thank you so much for the interview. You are a conflict-resolution expert: What is your most important advice to the governments that are negotiating now in the Middle East and Ukraine?

Øberg: Get all the parties involved, don't just discuss with one or two or three. Secondly, find out or define what is the conflict that stands between them, all the different types of conflicts, plus the problems that they have with each other. Don't talk about who's right and who's good, or wrong and bad. Third, use your vision, if you have any, or ask people of culture and others to have a vision for the whole Middle East: Israel and Palestine is about the whole Middle East.

Johan Galtung, my mentor and dear friend of over 50 years, who died a year ago, made the best plan so far for the Middle East: I think it was 1973. He had been to all the places and talked with all the people on all sides, and then he applied the idea, first of all, it

has to be part—what you do with Israel, Palestine has to be seen in the larger regional context. How do you do a kind of economic community that everybody benefits from? How do you do reconciliation and trauma treatment after all that has been? How do you tie that in with a completely different type of security, and no weapons of mass destruction in the region? etc., etc. It's a very complex peace plan that he suggested. It's on the [Transnational Foundation website](#), if you want to read it, much better than anything that has been suggested since then, which is done by politicians who believe they know everything, which they don't.

The approach to this is, and this is a very important final thing to say: Those who can mediate, must not be part of the conflict. I mean, Trump trying to mediate the situation in Ukraine now, when the United States is the main reason that we have a war there, [former U.S. President Barack] Obama's regime-change in Kiev in 2014, arming Ukraine and killing Russians, expanding NATO, is all the work of the U.S., of course, with the help of the NATO allies.