

THE WAR MACHINE AND NEW SECURITY HAZARDS

THE SYSTEM IS POISED TO DEVOUR ITS OWN
CHILDREN

The problem of corruption with its underlying desecralised ideology of materialistic greed has rendered the ailing military security system quite obsolete. Collective security of the world has acquired new dimensions and contours, calling for a response that is radically new.

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In the final years of the twentieth century, the notion of national security has tended to merge with its global context. There is growing perception that the world is an indivisible unit, wound ever tighter by the advances of technology and by the expanding process of globalisation. Security can no longer be conceived in solely military terms since it comprises factors as diverse and fundamental as the health of the natural environment, the political ideology, the degree of economic stability and development as well as the stage and the orientation of scientific and technological R&D.

However, military preparedness remains the linchpin of orthodox security doctrines from the standpoint of national governments and supranational defence pacts. The predominance of the traditional theories of security has been reaffirmed by the Republican administration of US President George W Bush, inaugurated in January 2001. The new regime came to power with the promise to revamp and strengthen the defence of the United States and in particular, to develop the missile defence system known under the acronym NMD, a scaled-down version of the 'star wars' (SDI) array, supposed to make

the USA nearly invulnerable, at least to small-scale missile attacks from any part of the globe.

This costly and problematic endeavour, from the moment it was announced, has attracted a barrage of criticism and opposition; not only are the other major military powers, Russia and China, as well as traditionally non-aligned countries opposed to the programme, but most allies and vassals of Washington too, including the NATO countries (with the notable exception of Britain) and Japan have voiced major reservations and misgivings about the likely consequences of the undertaking.

THE ENDANGERED PLANET

The NMD has raised apprehensions of triggering a new triangular arms race between USA, China and Russia on the ruins of the current non-proliferation agreements, while inciting other countries to acquire and deploy weapon systems capable of escaping detection by American electronic surveillance. Irrespective of its much vaunted merits and likely failings one cannot help noting the very high cost of the project, chiefly promoted by the American military-industrial complex. While one wonders if a maverick missile attack from one of the nations designated in Pentagon-jargon as 'states of concern' (ie, North Korea, Iraq, Iran or Libya) or an ill-defined terrorist group, is indeed the main threat America will be facing in the next decades, especially when one considers the bewildering array of ills and menaces that are emerging on the planet.

To mention just a few of the better known plagues that are affecting, in varying degrees, all people on earth, we should point out the major and increasingly obvious changes in the global weather and climate. These threaten the lifestyle, livelihood and the very survival of large proportions of humanity through the large-scale cataclysms they can bring about.

We cannot underestimate either the dramatic impact of new pandemic diseases of which AIDS is presently the most widespread, especially in Africa and in vast regions of Latin America and Asia, but also other viruses like Ebola and other 'mutants' that may soon manifest their catastrophic destructive potential.

Just as it is highly probable that the climate changes are caused or at least influenced by human industrial activity and by the pollution and degradation of the planetary living medium, likewise the well-publicised and multi-faceted crisis in the food sector. These include cattle (bovine spongiform en-

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cephalopathy and other increasingly common degenerative diseases in sheep and hogs), seafood (dioxin, radioactive and pesticide contamination) as well as crops and the soil itself. These crises stem from the industrial and chemical processes applied to agriculture and from the proliferation of the toxic effluents our civilisation generates. The many-

pronged threat to our common biological heritage is heightened by the realisation that the three most vital and, far from infinite resources, air, soil and water, are gravely affected by the proliferating human population and by its fast expanding and multiplying technological activities.

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Faced with resistance from the major financial, industrial and business interests to the prospect of radical change, most states have vacillated between expressing resolves more theoretical than practical, and citing their powerlessness as an excuse for inaction. As could be expected from the greatest beneficiary of the *status quo*, the US government has been the least willing to undertake or accept substantial environmentally dictated reforms to industrial activity, ignoring the fact that short-sighted priorities do not provide the best policy for real security.

THE OTHER COST OF WARS

This brings us back to the issue of military preparedness. The prevalent view among scholars of Soviet history is that the main cause or at least the triggering factor of the collapse of the USSR, was the crushing burden of

military expenses that had been required to keep up with the NATO powers. The final decade of the twentieth century saw the USA exercise unmatched strategic dominance while, paradoxically, reducing investments in defence in real terms. The frustration and anger of the defence staff at being entrusted with ever greater global responsibilities while its budget was being eroded was one of the major reasons behind the controversial, razor-slim victory 'by default' of the Republican party in the presidential election of 2000. The United States is not the first empire to become uncomfortably dependent upon the goodwill of its praetorian guard, but the looming influence of the latter does call for an assessment of the true merits and real limits of military might as a guarantor of security.

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A review of the most recent conflicts in which America has been involved demonstrates the ambiguousness of the intended and unintended effects of modern warfare. A great deal of environmental and human damage inflicted upon the two targets (that were too insignificant to compare in military might to qualify as full-fledged 'enemies'), Iraq in 1991 and the following years, and Yugoslavia from 1995. The amount is still to be fully assessed because we are only becoming aware of the likely effects of 'depleted' uranium missiles and other sophisticated weapons, on the population and on land. Large-scale human migrations in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Balkans, often intensified by foreign air attacks, have also exacted huge tolls —humanitarian, economic and political — while the heavy-handed western military interventions, far from leading to any improvement in regional situations has on the contrary made them worse. The tactical benefits reaped by some local actors in these conflicts (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Croatia, Muslim Bosnia, Albania and the Albanian majority in Kosovo) are fragile and offset by the increase in overall tensions that seem to lay the ground for future regional wars. The indecisive and bitter outcomes of the western campaigns has been only more anger and resentment. The so-called 'surgical' strikes and 'clean' weapons which, apart from the immediate local destruction, may leave a subtle and lethal trail of biological harm gravely affecting the climate and

the environment. We are thus brought to the conclusion that these modern military endeavours, supposedly intended to protect international security in the short term, bring about its sharp deterioration in the longer term.

HOT SPOTS FOR FUTURE WARS

One of the first initiatives taken by President Bush Jr after his inauguration has been to entrust his secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld, assisted by the renowned expert Andrew Marshall with the task of conducting an overall review of the American armed forces, their changing mission in a fast evolving international environment and the reforms that are in order, to increase their efficiency and reliability.

Despite the periodic calls, echoed by Marshall for making the USA less of an Atlantic and more of a Pacific-oriented military power, the basic priorities of American defence policy have not changed very much though their order of precedence has been modified; while the troublous Middle East remains the area of highest immediate concern, China comes a close second

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and is about to become the foremost focus of attention and activity for Washington's strategy planners. Russia has slipped to the third place but could quickly return to the top of the list because of her huge nuclear, conventional and unconventional (chemical, bacteriological and electromagnetic) arsenal. Russia could strive again for

the great power status and work to forge a strategic alliance with China while restoring her economic and military partnership with India and supplying the defence needs of both Iran and Iraq where China also plays a major role as an exporter of nuclear technology and advanced weapons. All these possibilities pose a major source of worry for the Pentagon and the US intelligence community.

It is generally agreed, though predictions in this topsy-turvy world can turn out to be misleading, that the potential for an intercontinental war is

highest in two areas of the China Sea: Taiwan and the Korean peninsula. In both cases, China and the USA would be involved in a confrontation which could turn into direct conflict.

In the Middle East since the gradual collapse of the peace talks in the year 2000, the hostility between the Israelis and the Palestinians has grown to an ever more dangerous level — especially since the election as Prime Minister of General Ariel Sharon, mostly on the strength of his reputation for ruthlessness — foreboding the likelihood of a larger regional conflict between the Jewish state and its neighbours. Such a conflict would probably intermesh with the simmering US-Iraq war and attract at least the indirect involvement of some of the world's leading military powers.

Another zone of tension lies on the southern flank of Russia, in the chronically unstable Caucasus and Central Asian steppes where Chechnya, like Afghanistan and Kashmir, remains a fulcrum of unrest which attracts the intervention of Muslim fundamentalists from all parts of Asia. There is a distinct possibility of an international war arising out of the ruthless competition over the control of the vast energy resources of that sprawling region. Russia feels the strategic necessity of protecting the region from a Taliban-style insurrection by Islamic radicals, backed by the money and influence of the Arab Gulf monarchies.

Kashmir is another, and often mentioned bone of contention which may trigger yet another war between India and Pakistan, despite the growing disparity between the military strengths of the two countries which Islamabad is trying to offset with its atomic weapons programme. However, while China is expected to intervene on the side of Pakistan to prevent the predictable defeat of her ally, the lack of enthusiasm in Washington to support a confederation of dubious value against India, a country of much greater economic and strategic importance, may be a factor in holding a *détente* in the region and may dissuade Pakistan's regular forces from launching a new assault on Indian Kashmir for the time being.

TERRORISM RESPONDS TO GLOBALISATION

This review of crisis spots worldwide leads us to consider the paramilitary and terrorist implications of modern warfare. The overwhelming prepon-

derance of major military powers such as the USA and the NATO alliance on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other makes it all too tempting for smaller states and for non-governmental actors as well, such as rebellious guerillas or sects, to resort to terrorism if they are to fight efficiently. The greatest threat to the world's security probably stems from the proliferation

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and the increasing technical sophistication of weapons accessible to all kinds of terrorist organisations from Colombia to the Philippines and from Russia to Algeria, whether they are of a political or a purely criminal nature. All of them are, however, invariably involved in illegal economic activities which, soon or

late, tend to become their sole real vocation even when they preserve a revolutionary façade for their public image.

The increase in economic and social disparities, across and within national borders, is a decisive factor in the widespread resentment both in developing nations and amongst the less favoured denizens of advanced liberal societies. The latter, behind the rather transparent mask of electoral democracy, operate more or less a corrupt plutocracies dominated by powerful minorities.

A new wave of revolutionary activity was heralded in February 2001 at the far left-dominated World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and conceived as an 'anti-Davos' movement. Resistance and rebellion against the increasingly tyrannical imperatives of capitalism are beginning to manifest through violent means as the democratic processes fail to bring about the desired changes in the system — a system which is indeed designed to sustain the tyranny of the affluent.

A telling illustration of the limitations and possible manipulation of the electoral system was provided once more by the American presidential election of 2000 when a Republican majority in the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the party's candidate in the absence of a definitive verdict from the ballot box and did so in a manner which cast some doubts on the democratic legitimacy of the new administration, threatening thereby the inner cohesion and resolve of the nation. On that day, the USA was found to be not very

different from other often disparaged Third World nations. The rich states of the West are not always transparent in their political processes, even as they insist on exporting their electoral systems abroad and governance.

THE SELL-OUT OF DEFENCE

The issue of corruption, complex as it is, brings us back to the philosophy of the market economy which results, willy nilly, in the privatisation of politics and in the commercialisation of power. In the case of corruption, however, we cannot single out the premises of capitalism since socialism worldwide has proved to be as much, if not more, corrupt than its alternatives. We may point more generally to the effects of the desacralisation of public institutions under the pressure of the secular, economic, solely materialistic ideology which begat the rival twins called Liberalism and Marxism.

The oft-quoted quip about the USA being, a 'mature' liberal political democracy, having 'the best government money can buy', is quite factual in its positive and negative implications. The negative inevitably confronts the decision-makers, at once beneficia-

ries and victims of the rampant venality which — under various euphemisms such as 'campaign financing', 'soft money', and 'lobbying' — shapes and structures all the powers in the country. We are in fact witnessing, all over the world, what a French investigative journalist has appropriately called the 'criminalisation of public life' under the influence of big money, as a result of the gradual infiltration of the more lucrative and influential sectors of economic activity by mafias and other unlawful associations.

The problem of corruption is far more significant in the United States from a global perspective than in less influential and more troubled nations like Russia, China and India and in the case of lesser powers which are in the throes of painful transition toward a liberal western-inspired system, foreign

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to their cultural and political traditions. In North America on the other hand there is no crisis of adaptation, no forced adjustment of the social fabric to alien financial and industrial requirements. The USA takes pride in Coolidge's assertion that 'their business is business' as in the fact that their new rules were designed 'in house' before being exported worldwide. Thus corruption must be an intrinsic part of that system which depends on it for its survival and expansion, notwithstanding the rhetorical pleas for honesty and accountability ritually voiced in policy speeches by government leaders.

The two successive Clinton administrations between 1992 and 2000 provided an ideal climate for the proliferation of financial scandals in the highest political spheres under the stewardship of a chief executive who was truly a 'child of the system'. It is becoming increasingly clear that the very national security of the United States was compromised by the vulnerability of some of the highest-ranking officials, including the President himself, to financial and other temptations.

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Various investigations are underway to determine the extent to which Bill Clinton for one allowed himself to be both blackmailed and rewarded by sundry parties, which thereby came to exercise undue influence on his decisions. The focus of late has been on controversial high-profile individuals such as

Marc Rich, but behind those generous 'friends' and benefactors of the President loom the shadows of certain foreign powers that are not necessarily friendly to the country. Israel, more than most of the others, has long played the dangerous but profitable game of purchasing useful sympathies and applying secret pressures, often through the agency of informal agents of great wealth, like the late Robert Maxwell and Marc Rich himself.

While the Jewish State, though difficult and demanding, is officially held by American policy-makers to be an essential client, ally and partner, China on the other hand is widely regarded as the USA's most dangerous rival and potential foe. Hence the probability that Beijing and its sprawling intelligence services may have acquired a powerful sway over US foreign and economic

decisions during the last few years, through the good offices of some Chinese American fund-raisers who had privileged access to the White House, is highly disturbing and it accounts in part for the perceptible hardening of the foreign policy stance of the new Republican Administration, seeking to control some of the damage suffered during recent years.

The last administration had shown rather inexplicable tolerance and goodwill towards authoritarian but 'generous' rulers such as President Suharto of Indonesia and towards China and the admittedly corruption-ridden administration of Boris Yeltsin. The role of those notorious by-products of the collapse of the USSR, the oligarchs whose enormous influence and affluence was connected to the murky triangular economic and political relations between Russia, Israel and the United States, is not well-understood so far.

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The hidden effects of rampant venality in the military, industrial and political system may be so profound as to provoke disbelief. The General Accounting Office of the USA was quoted by the veteran Senator Byrd as having pointed out that hundreds of billions of dollars in spendings by the Department of Defense, from 1989 to 1999, were not properly accounted for. There is also a growing suspicion that illegal sales of state-of-the-art military equipment have taken place for several years in some depots, in particular at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. The purchasers are apparently arms dealers and agents working for countries regarded as national security risks by the USA, not excluding the traditional *bêtes noires*: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Libya as well as China and North Korea.

The blurring of ideologies has left the politician with only a certain personal interest as his sole remaining beacon; the fact that money is now the only source of power and prestige is evinced by the constant rise in the cost of elections in particular and of political survival in general. In the USA, which leads the way in this regard as in many others, holding political office requires constant and highly effective fund-raising, on top of a hefty personal fortune. The last Presidential and Congressional elections have demonstrated

once more that success is directly proportional to the amount of funds within the reach of candidates. As some currently well-publicised cases of corruption at the highest level of government in France and Germany have shown, the very large investments required to attain and retain power turns expectations towards correspondingly large rewards mostly from a few grey or dark areas of business activity, closely related to the sphere of the state, such as the large oil industry, large public works contracts, the international weapons trade and the sale of sensitive economic and technological intelligence. We discover everyday the unsavoury predicament in which most modern democracies find themselves as they are forced to expose the corruption that eats into their vitals, inevitably at the cost of the national security they are pledged to protect.

The conclusion of this necessarily sketchy overview is that the neo-liberal philosophy of individualistic competition for wealth and power jeopardises the security of the community and ultimately of all its members, beginning with the weakest but eventually sparing none. The loss of traditional, altruistic social standards and values, which alone can create and maintain an aura of legitimacy around tested power structures, makes it increasingly difficult to ensure the intangible collective good against the seemingly irresistible temptations of large personal profits. The leading industrial societies of our age may be exposed more to the danger of self-destruction than to outside threats because, as was often the case in history, it is opportunistic greed which prompts insiders to bring the Trojan horse into the city they were supposed to defend.