

Briefing Memo

The future of war: from a historian's standpoint

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A close connection can be observed between changes in society and changes in the forms of warfare. This is because war is one of the significant social phenomena carried out by the human race. According to such views on war, it is only natural that the forms of warfare are renewed in keeping with a new era, and through this process, the existence of the *Zeitgeist* will play a major role.

Towards the end of the 20th century, during the demise of the Cold War, the argument that war was becoming obsolete attracted people's attention. Is war truly becoming obsolete? The answer to this is probably "No." Certain forms of war may have ceased to exist, however it is probably more accurate to say that other forms of war – often referred to as "conflict" – have been emerging. Mary Kaldor explained this in her term "new war," suggesting they are based on identity. Looking back in history, when faced with a new form of warfare, people have strived to understand this through new terminologies and concepts. For example, stunned by the aspect of the Revolutionary Wars that followed the French Revolution which broke out in 1789, and also the Napoleonic Wars, Carl Von Clausewitz tried to understand the wars using the words "absolute war" and "limited war." Moreover, being confronted with the First World War, a form of warfare that people had never up till then experienced, Erich Ludendorff tried to explain it during the inter-war period through the concept of total war. Ulrich Beck once pointed out that risk society is a status where there are gaps between "language" and "reality." In this day and age where we are faced with a new era of war, we are in a situation where the social phenomenon at hand cannot be explained without using new terminologies and concepts.

Supposedly, if war is an act closely related to "interest," "fear," and "honour" as stated by Thucydides, then the possibility that war will cease to exist is extremely low. That being the case, there will be a call to assess what the future of war will be like, and the most critical prerequisite for that would be to provide a *Weltanschauung* (world vision) concerning the type of society the human race is heading to and the *Zeitgeist* of the period. The reason being, only then would it be possible for the outline of the future of war, which is the mirror of society, to vaguely emerge.

The expression or the *Zeitgeist* that will be suggestive of the future direction of society and also the vision of future wars can be said to be globalization. Although views are divided as to whether sovereign states are facing disintegration in this day and age, they are unquestionably being corroded from top and bottom in line with the progress of globalization. Following upon this, a situation is arising where the monopoly of the sovereign states that have controlled force and arms – namely military power and police forces – is being shaken. People are starting to turn "upwards," that is, to international organizations as represented by the United Nations, and "downwards," that is, to ethnic groups and religious groups, and moreover organizations such as armed factions or war lords for protection.

In fact, concerning the new forms of warfare associated with the changes in society, Martin van Creveld introduces the concept of “non-trinitarian war” or “non-political war” in his *The Transformation of War*, and argues against the concept of the “remarkable trinity of war” as expressed by Clausewitz, that is, that the warfare is a phenomenon created by the three elements, “politics,” “armed forces,” and “people.” Furthermore, in their book *Unrestricted Warfare*, two Chinese colonels in the People’s Liberation Army, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui pointed out that nowadays a new form of warfare that can only be described as “war operations other than military ones” [the author’s own phrasing] is emerging, that far surpasses the “military operations other than war,” a concept that became established after the Cold War. What this indicates is that the conventional classification of peacetime and wartime has become completely outdated. Moreover, Rupert Smith presented the concept of the “war amongst the people” in his *The Utility of Force*, and tried to correct the preconceived ideas of the people that war is fought between sovereign states.

If one thinks more in concrete terms the direction of the society in the 21st century and the relationship between the Zeitgeist and warfare in the 21st century, while keeping this reality in mind, concepts such as prevention and pre-emption can be listed as the prominent features. In the past, the concept of “preemption” was considered as “lawful,” and activities such as “prevention” or actions known as preventive wars were deemed “illegal” in terms of international law. Naturally, the boundary between preemption and prevention, and the boundary between legal and illegal were divided among the experts, and were not necessarily clear, and at least the common conceptual view was that both sides in each case do differ. However, in accordance with the changes in the strategic environment in recent years, plus the policy shift of the US in response to this, “preemptive” is becoming recognized as a rough synonym for “preventive.” And what is more, as typified by the theory of preventive war in the beginning of the 20th century, in general the concept of prevention incorporates the dangerous thinking that some kind of measure should be taken before the potential enemy state starts posing a threat or “before it is too late.”

In today’s 21st century, the policy of the US, which is the great power, is strongly influenced by the Zeitgeist as described, and concurrently is also exerting a strong influence. The truth is, although the US has been driven by such dangerous thoughts from time to time, what prompted the concept of prevention or preemption to be situated at the forefront of its policies, was the simultaneous terrorist attack on the US on 9/11. In that sense, the September 11 attacks will be viewed by historians in years to come as one of the biggest turning points when explaining the history of war. As is widely known, in response to the September 11 attacks, the US immediately pressed on towards military actions in Afghanistan, followed by those in Iraq. President Bush’s commencement address at the US Military Academy at West Point made in June 2002 emphasized that “the US maintains the option of preemptive actions to counter upcoming threats,” and furthermore this idea was put into statutory form in September of the same year as the *National Security Strategy of the United States*. This is the line of policy generally known as the “Bush Doctrine.”

Then why are principles of prevention and preemptive actions being strongly quoted by countries led by the US today? One indicator to help answer this question would be the social condition of today called the “risk society.” Separate from the aforementioned definition by Beck, risk society generally refers to a situation where safety cannot be secured while on the other hand there are no apparent big

threats. That is to say, in contrast to the existence of the Soviet Union as a powerful and clear threat during the Cold War era, in today's international society such threats are absent. While on the other hand, the situation is such that risks exist at all level of dimensions. Moreover, the thinking that risks exist, and that deterrence will not be effective against risks led to the perception that prevention and preemptive actions are necessary. Let us confirm that, statements based on prevention and preemptive actions are the representations of the Zeitgeist of today. In other words, the principle of prevention and preemptive actions is valued because of the social condition today that is filled with risks and destabilizing factors and this principle is embodied by the expression "before it is too late."

What is interesting is that the phrase "before it is too late" was originally used frequently by people who tackle environmental issues, when they were discussing global warming. As is well known, the cause-and-effect relationship between the carbon dioxide being emitted by air conditioning and vehicles that people use daily and global warming has not been totally scientifically proven. On the other hand, the environmentalists expressed their views that some kind of measures need to be taken "before it is too late," under the strong awareness that the present situation cannot be neglected, and today, in general, such arguments concerning global warming has become to be widely accepted. In fact, these have actually reached fruition in the form of the Rio Declaration in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and so on. Thereafter, and till today, efforts are continuously being made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As mentioned earlier, the true cause of global warming has not yet been completely scientifically proven. However, does the human race have the luxury of time till the cause-and-effect relationships of all the phenomena are completely resolved? The awareness of the "irreversibility" of the environment was what caused the environmentalists to take such an approach in the first place, and the statement that some kind of measure should be taken has come to obtain the approval of many people. This is the reason why people are setting the temperature of their air conditioners to appropriate levels and regulating vehicle carbon dioxide emissions under the slogans of energy saving and ecology.

The point here is, this "before it is too late" statement is taking root in the society as a whole, as the Zeitgeist when people tackle a wide spectrum of such social issues as pollution, natural disasters, crimes (for example, stalker issues), bullying, corporate social accountability or corporate compliance. In fact, when one casts one's eyes on the domain of international politics of today, the principle of prevention and preemptive action are starting to be adopted to "new war" – for example ethnic conflict, and religion disputes around the world. More specifically, whatever region of the world, once incidents such as slaughter or starvations are reported through the media, the international community has started requesting for early intervention. The so-called "neo-cons" in the US successfully incorporated the Zeitgeist of today. In fact, the logic that underlines the statement of the "neo-cons" comes from the same origin as the logic of the environmentalists. The rationale behind their logic is that before terrorism and weapons of mass destruction spread worldwide and "before it is too late," and for the realization of democracy, in line with the same logic as the environmentalists, that attacks should be made on Afghanistan and Iraq. This is why while admitting the irrationalities of the logic of the "neo-cons" that justified the military actions by the US on Afghanistan and Iraq, the people avoided direct refutation, and the situation cannot be reversed that easily just because of a change of the US administration.

However, once the principles of prevention and preemptive actions become widely accepted the roles of the military power, or the people's perception of military forces changes. That is, the positioning of

military forces is beginning to change from the “last resort” as up to now to the “first resort.” Until now, even in the case of an advocate in objection to military forces itself, their general standpoint was that as long as it was to be used as a last-resort then there was no other way but to allow it. However, as the concept of prevention and preemptive action gradually gained acceptance as the *Zeitgeist*, swift intervention – sometimes in the form of military intervention – was called for, and consequently the positioning of military forces is turning in to that of a first means. This is precisely what Christopher Coker described as “war has evolved into an exercise in risk management.”

In association with the aforementioned globalization of the international society, the “globalization” of the battle space is also moving ahead in the domain of military affairs. That is to say, this entails the expansion of space in land, sea, sky and also the universe and cyberspace, but this paradoxically also means the unification of military power, in other words networking, due to the progress of technology. For this reason, the integration of military forces is being perceived strongly today. As the absoluteness of sovereign states is relativized along with the progress of globalization, the conventional boundary between military forces and police forces is becoming ambiguous. Although the fact that the military forces are becoming a “national police force (constabulary force)” has long been a controversial issue, this is in fact, merely violence returning to its original state of being, in association with the sovereign states becoming relativized. Nevertheless, as aforementioned, this does not suggest the future monopolization of violence by the sovereign states. The truth is precisely the opposite. While it was Kaldor who was one of the first to point out the relationship between globalization and “new war,” what can be pointed out as straightforwardly representing the end of the monopoly of violence by the sovereign states – i.e. the national military forces – are phenomena such as the privatization of war, direct participation in war by children, women and the elderly. And these phenomena will raise issues in the future such as who goes to war – and for what reason.

In this short article, we have considered the future of warfare from the standpoint of history, in other words the viewpoint of a rearguard position, by using the *Zeitgeist* in the form of globalization, and furthermore, the *Zeitgeist* represented by the principles of prevention and preemption. However, regrettably as Colin Gray accurately expressed, there is also a risk that the 21st century could turn out to be “another bloody century.” As many advocates have expressed, the international society that was described as the “long peace” during the Cold War era, has today shifted to a “long war.” It seems the international society in the 21st century has entered an age reminiscent of medieval Europe, including the absence of actors with absolute sovereignty, which suggests that a permanent and general state of war, and also a further state of “undifferentiated war and peace” could continue for a long period of time.

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