The Changing Face of Conflict

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Security planners today face the daunting challenge of trying to anticipate what kind of conflicts may occur in the years and decades ahead, so that they may shape their force structures and security policies accordingly. What makes this problem particularly acute at present is the juxtaposition of two contradictory trends. On the one hand, the sheer inertia and 'lead times' associated with defence planning are now greater than ever before, as procurement timescales for increasingly complex weapons systems are now measured in decades (especially at a time of straitened defence budgets). On the other hand, the pace of change in the nature of conflict has become unprecedentedly rapid, as accepted verities of traditional security planning collapse before the technological, political and social revolutions of the modern age. It is now only a decade since the end of the Cold War, and only two generations since the end of World War Two, yet these earlier eras of conflict already seem like distant and alien memories, wholly removed from our current security preoccupations.

In such a situation, there is a natural temptation to ditch such past conflicts altogether, and to base security planning purely on our more immediate experience of the post—Cold War world. However, this 'history is bunk' approach has some serious dangers. It is quite possible that the relatively limited instances of conflict which we have experienced over the past decade are themselves unrepresesentative, and that the strategic situation remains in such a state of flux that conflict in the early 21st century will be as different from that of the 1990s as that

in turn was from conflict in earlier eras. The further we try to look ahead, the more important it is to root our speculations in a longer view of the past, so that we may distinguish fundamental changes from the merely superficial and evanescent features of our immediate experience. Similarly, the more radical the changes in the face of conflict, the more crucial it is to have a broad appreciation of past changes, so that we do not focus unduly narrowly on just one familiar paradigm.

In this paper, I will first examine the changing strategic context of 20th and 21st century conflict, in terms of two fundamental variables—technological trends, and political relationships. I will then discuss what I see as the most important consequences of these technological and political factors for the likely nature of future conflict, by focusing on four defining characteristics of the kind of conflicts we may witness in the years and decades to come, namely diversity, asymmetry, sensitivity, and legitimacy. I will conclude by arguing that the single most important and overarching feature of future conflict is likely to be *complexity*, and that strategists and security planners who

can balance the many subtle and interacting dimensions of conflict are likely to achieve much greater success than those who succumb to the false allure of a simpler and more straightforward approach.

The Changing Strategic Context

Technological Trends

Since human nature changes only slowly (if at all), the primary motor of change in the strategic environment has been technological development and its impact on society. It is very important to address this impact broadly, since certain 'infrastructure' technologies (such as oceanic navigation and steam power) have in the past had even greater strategic impact than developments in weaponry itself[1] Although the pace of technological change has now accelerated to a dizzying extent, the most fundamental associated trends may be traced back for centuries, and are as follows:

Empowerment

Since its very beginnings, technology has allowed man progressively to master his natural environment, thereby empowering him far beyond the other animals. He has been able to ward off disease and increase the productivity of his labour by orders of magnitude, but he has also become capable of causing unprecedented harm to his fellow men and to the natural environment. In the security field, it is the dark side of this double— edged empowerment which naturally causes greatest concern, in the form of the proliferation of increasingly capable and destructive weaponry, ranging from ballistic and cruise missiles to chemical, biological and nuclear munitions as well as more and more powerful 'conventional' weapons.

During the Cold War, security planners came to terms with the novel potential for two competing 'superpowers' to cripple life on Earth through nuclear bombardment. However, this was by no means the last step along the road to destructive empowerment, and as technology matures it is becoming ever easier for states and even sub —state groups to acquire their own mass destruction capabilities. The spread of such advanced weaponry is not in fact occurring as fast as many had feared, since it is limited not just by technological capability but also by arms control and non—proliferation initiatives and by a significant degree of self—restraint. However, should these restraints break down, there is the technical potential for proliferation to accelerate markedly, as with the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. Of particular concern is the fact that ongoing civilian developments in computing and biotechnology may make it easier for combatant groups or even individuals to wreak massive havoc with biological or computer viruses, with nothing like the infrastructure or expense of traditional weapons programmes.[2]

Of course, the mere possession of such capabilities does not automatically give rise to their actual employment. Conflict since the nuclear revolution of 1945 has in fact cost significantly fewer lives than it had done over the previous three decades, with the vast majority of casualties continuing to occur through traditional scourges such as guns, knives, famine and disease. There are some who

argue that the proliferation of more advanced weapons may actually have a salutary deterrent effect, by extending the 'balance of terror' which developed during the Cold War to other international conflicts.[3] However, most observers remain uncomfortable with this acceptance of growing mutual vulnerability, and hence are inclined to pursue countermeasures such as missile defence schemes and preemptive strikes against potential proliferators, which can act as a significant source of tension and conflict in their own right.[4]

The 'Burning Ladder' Effect

Since industrial technology depends so heavily on non—renewable resources such as oil, and since the human population is expanding apace whereas natural assets like water supplies are not, man has for some time been in a situation akin to someone on a burning ladder, facing severe and imminent crisis as the flames slowly rise. The increasingly adverse impact of industrial technology on the environment, through mechanisms such as 'global warming', is another aspect of the same phenomenon. Man's salvation so far has been that continuing scientific and technological developments have in practice allowed each successive generation to exploit the Earth's resources more fully and efficiently than hitherto, thereby allowing mankind to 'climb ahead' of each potential resource crisis.

The question for security planners is whether this delicate dynamic balance can be maintained in the future. Recent arguments regarding the Kyoto Protocol illustrate how difficult it is to implement even minimally economically damaging restraints should science not be able to offer an immediate way out of the problem. Many feel that the open—ended race cannot continue forever, and that growing resource shortages and environmental pressures in the 21st century will cause dangerous social and economic tensions, and may well trigger 'resource wars' as antagonists compete to seize a larger slice of the Earth's limited bounty.[5]

Globalisation

Ever since the advent of the chariot and the sailing ship, technology has been increasing interaction between distant communities. This trend has accelerated enormously in

recent years, due to advances in transport and communications, and also due to the growing human impact on the environment. Already, multinational companies and criminal enterprises, free—flowing trade and capital investment, international travel and the wide-ranging impact of atmospheric pollutants mean that states may be profoundly affected by developments beyond their borders, and this interdependence can only increase further in the years to come.

Globalisation challenges the adequacy of traditional concepts of 'national' security. States are no longer able to protect their interests simply by defending their territory with armed forces. However, the impact of this on the propensity for armed conflict is decidedly double—edged. On the one hand, the diffusion and erosion of traditional state power, and the emergence of a higher global consciousness, discourage resort to anything as crude as naked armed might, as happened in the early 20th century. On the other hand, growing interdependence and more immediate mass awareness of developments in other parts of the world increase the propensity for states to intervene

abroad to protect their interests, by heading off economic tremors, refugee flows and perceived abuses of human rights or national minorities at their source. The controversial nature of globalisation itself provides a further source of tension, as seen in the violence at recent G8 summits. Hence, the disjunction between an increasingly interdependent global community and the continuing self—help system of national security is likely to prove as potent a source of conflict as of consensus—building in the years and decades to come.[6]

The Information Revolution

Technology has made the dissemination of knowledge and ideas a more and more important component of human existence, first through the advent of printing and mass literacy, and now through the rise of the broadcast media, telecommunications and networked computer systems. Information technology is becoming ever more crucial to our economies and to our mastery of our environment, to the point where many talk of a three stage progression within human development, from agricultural to industrial to information age societies. Since progress along this path

is highly uneven, and brings the different elements into collision both within and between societies, the ongoing information revolution will profoundly shape the strategic environment of future conflicts.[7]

The most direct consequence for security planners is, of course, the so—called 'Revolution in Military Affairs'. Military exploitation of the microchip is making possible the development of increasingly 'smart' precision—guided weapons, and the evolution of sensor and data—processing systems which deliver a real—time electronic picture of the battlespace to all units. Given the growing lethality of munitions themselves, many analysts now see the key element in high technology war as being the struggle for 'information dominance', so that one may identify and destroy enemy targets while disrupting the enemy's command and sensor network to prevent him doing the same to you, as in the 1991 Gulf war. Some go still further, and suggest that the future networking of lethal miniaturised robotic weapons and sensors made possible by nanotechnology and by the ease of duplicating software programmes will progressively make traditional manned

weapons platforms like tanks, ships and aircraft so vulnerable as to be obsolete. This is in fact unlikely to happen anytime soon, given continuing asymmetries in technological capability, the greater flexibility of manned platforms, and straightforward inertia in weapons procurement, but clearly aerial firepower and the associated command and sensor networks (including more and more use of satellites) will be a very prominent feature of 21st century conflicts.[8]

As has happened so often with technological developments in the past, it is the broader societal aspects of the information revolution which will do at least as much to shape the future of conflict. Three aspects in particular stand out. One is the networking of global society through the internet, which gives individuals or groups unprecedented power to organise, to gain information, to propagandise and even to conduct 'cyber—warfare' entirely independently of traditional state boundaries. The second key aspect is the inexorable rise in surveillance capabilities through electronic and video monitoring and more efficient data storage and retrieval, which is giving

states and commercial organisations the ability to track individuals in advanced societies as never before. The final important aspect is the ability of modern media networks to amplify individual local occurrences into global spectacles, and thereby to create a world in which the strategic significance of an event can vary hugely, depending on the presence or absence of the media spotlight. I will argue later that trends such as these are likely to have even more influence on the face of future conflict than will the RMA itself.[9]

Political Relationships

Technological development, and its impact on society, may be the primary driving force behind the changing face of conflict, but it is a grave mistake to focus too exclusively on this aspect. Those who do so tend to produce sterile and artificial forecasts wholly divorced from the real human passions which prompt men to fight and die. Hence, it is vital to integrate our understanding of technologically driven trends into a political model of the current and likely future strategic environment within which conflict will take place.

The interactions of several billion people are inevitably far too complex for us to grasp, so we devise simplified intellectual models to help guide our decision—making. In the decades after the Second World War, the dominant such paradigm was of a 'Cold War'—a global contest between capitalism and communism, pursued through military brinkmanship and through proxy conflict in colonial territories and other countries of the developing world. This model was powerful enough to prompt the expenditure of much blood and treasure in distant lands such as Vietnam, but gradually the limitations of simplistic notions such as the 'domino theory' became apparent with the fragmentation of the Asian communist bloc. The end of the Cold War in 1989-91 shattered the last vestige of this straightforward bipolar paradigm, and ever since then the search has been on for a new model to help guide our thinking about security in the contemporary world.

Various such models have been proposed, but none has so far gained predominance. This may actually be a good

thing, since the models are not in fact mutually exclusive. All of them capture some part of the highly complex reality, and the best way forward may be for us to try to hold them simultaneously in our minds, rather than relying on any single, inevitably simplistic, paradigm. Five models stand out as worthy of consideration, as follows:

Power Politics

The most traditional model is that of power politics among a multiplicity of unitary states, each seeking to protect its individual interests in the absence of an effective international authority. This model draws on the 'realist' theory of international relations, and emphasises ideas such as power balancing and non—interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign states—indeed, inter —state conflicts can often help to unite states internally by fostering nationalistic sentiments.[10] Conflicts generally occur over disputed border territories or when the balance of power is upset, as with Thucydides. classic analysis of the causes of the Peloponnesian War 24 centuries ago.[11] More recently, the two World Wars offer another classic illustration of power politics in action, with the shifting alliances of the USSR prior to and after the German invasion demonstrating the kind of pragmatic calculations involved.

The model retains significant relevance in the modern world. The wars in the 1980s between Britain and Argentina and between Iran and Iraq fall most easily into this 'power politics' model, and there are plenty of simmering territorial conflicts like those between Greece and Turkey, Israel and Syria, India and Pakistan, or China and its neighbours, which could give rise to similar clashes in the future, with possible competition for dwindling resources such as oil and water offering a further *casus belli*. At the great power level, the recent *rapprochement* between Russia and China as a counterweight to American hegemony, and the sharper focus of the Bush administration on protecting US vital interests, indicate the continuing importance of power—based calculations as ideological influences wane. However, nuclear deterrence and globalisation have removed much of the force from the Hobbesian competition for national survival which characterised previous eras, and the relative internal

harmony among the dominant liberal democracies of the West means that other factors besides naked power politics have at least equal importance in setting the framework for future conflicts.

Internal Strife

Analysts such as van Creveld have argued that wars between states are in fact very much the exception in recent history, and will become even less prominent as the spread of destructive military capabilities deters conflict initiation. These analysts focus instead on tribal, ethnic, political and criminal violence *within* states, pointing out that the vast majority of the conflicts since 1945 have been civil wars like those raging recently in the Balkans and Africa.[12] Van Creveld goes so far as to argue that the state as an institution is dying, due to its inability to cope with the twin challenges of globalisation and the rise of internal violence and lawlessness.[13]

Internal fighting within states certainly does seem likely to persist as a very important component of conflict in the 21st century. The difficulty of carrying through recent peace initiatives in Israel, the Balkans, Northern Ireland and the Basque country illustrates how intractable such local conflicts can be, even after the various states involved have reached a greater consensus about the need for a resolution. However, to deduce from this that stales themselves will become increasingly impotent and obsolete is implausible. The pressing desire of citizens for security against internal and international anarchy will probably lead as in the past to periodic reactions in favour of strong national government, even if this means restrictions on personal liberty and freedom of trade. Even the extremist Taleban movement in Afghanistan was welcomed at first as offering a respite from decades of internal strife. Not only is state power likely to persist, but civil wars are likely to attract intervention by other states, thereby making the conflicts as much international as internal in character. It is noteworthy that NATO's first active involvement in combat operations, including a direct military clash with another state, came not during the fifty year inter—state confrontation of the Cold War, but during the subsequent civil wars in the former Yugoslavia. Hence, future conflicts cannot be envisaged purely in terms of

local tribal hostilities, however prominent and enduring such hostilities are likely to be.

Rich and Poor Worlds

For many years there has been concern about the gap between 'North and South' or between the developed and developing worlds.[14] Some analysts now see this division as the key strategic feature of the post—Cold War era. The wealthy democracies of the developed world enjoy internal harmony and stable populations, and focus their energies on economic competition and technological advance. War among them has become almost unthinkable. On the other hand, the rest of the world is afflicted by explosive population growth and a spiral of poverty and resource depletion—classic circumstances for endemic internal and inter—state conflict.

In this paradigm, the key security priority for the rich nations will be to maintain their good fortune and insulate themselves from the turmoil elsewhere, by curbing weapons proliferation, resisting waves of migrants and refugees, and minimising the economic and environmental

fallout from distant problems. Conversely, the poorer citizens of the world (increasingly aware through telecommunications of how the other half lives) will have the contrary aim of bettering their lot, through migration, increased economic integration, or indigenous development regardless of the environmental consequences. This stark division of the world into rich and poor is obviously far too simplistic, since there are many nations which do not fit easily into either camp, and since huge differentials exist within many nations themselves. However, the model does have the merit of drawing attention to a major parameter shaping the security calculus of different countries as we enter the new millennium.[15]

A New World Order

Less selfish than the previous paradigm is the model put forward by the first President Bush after the 1991 Gulf war, of a 'new world order' of international cooperation. The end of the Cold War has broken the impasse which previously hamstrung the United Nations Organisation, and several conflicts in the 1990s have witnessed a much more active UN role. In this paradigm, the focus is on

coordinated action by the world community to tackle whatever challenges may emerge, be they aggression by 'rogue states' like Iraq, bloody anarchy within 'failed states' like Somalia or Bosnia, the spread of dangerous weapons, or the threat posed by global phenomena such as international crime, terrorism, or environmental degradation.[16]

Experience in the 1990s has revealed some of the limits of this cooperation, in the absence of a governing international authority. The different interests of the many states involved make it hard to agree on common policies, and when a leading power (usually the United States) takes the initiative itself in order to overcome this immobilism, its actions can be divisive in the extreme. The very mixed results of US and British attempts to contain Iraqi power since the Gulf war illustrate these contrasting problems very well.[17] Regional organisations such as the EU or ASEAN may have a somewhat better chance of building a policy consensus, but their leverage tends to be correspondingly limited, and their record in resolving recent crises has been no better than that of the UN as a whole.

However, as globalisation develops further, it will be hard for states to resist the need to cooperate to tackle common problems, since narrow attempts to protect individual interests will be even less productive. The overwhelming power and internationalist impulses of the United States will also militate against purely regional approaches to security challenges. NATO's Kosovo campaign in 1999 remains highly controversial, and its long term success cannot yet be gauged, but it stands alongside the 1991 Gulf war as a striking instance of collective military intervention to redress a perceived challenge to international norms. Hence, although cynics were soon talking of a 'new world *dis*order', the model espoused by President Bush a decade ago remains an important paradigm for us to bear in mind alongside the other rather bleaker images of the future strategic environment.

A Clash of Civilizations

The final model we should consider is that put forward by Huntington, which envisages future security being

determined by the competitive interaction of several great 'civilizations'. Huntington points out that many of the recent conflicts both within and between states have occurred along the fault lines between these civilizations, in particular on the fringes of the Islamic world.[18] His analysis is a useful corrective to the ideas of scholars like Fukuyama, who predicted the universal triumph of liberal democratic values.[19] In fact, the dissemination of such values (with their emphasis on human rights, sexual permissiveness and so on) through global telecommunications is a major irritant in the West's relations with other cultures in Africa and Asia.

Huntington claims (not surprisingly) that his civilizational model is superior to all of the other four paradigms which I have discussed.[20] In fact, it has several important weaknesses of its own. It does little to explain the numerous conflicts *within* civilizations, does not fully account for the tangled international alignments in recent wars in the Gulf and former Yugoslavia (where western states have sometimes found themselves fighting on the same side as Muslim zealots), and gives little guidance as to

how to tackle the common problems posed by globalisation. However, when used in combination with the other models, it does contribute a very useful perspective which reminds us of the importance of cultural and religious solidarity in shaping international reactions to conflict, especially within the Islamic world.[21]

Likely Characteristics of Conflict

What does all this tell us about the likely shape of conflicts in the years and decades to come? As I said at the outset, predictions in this area are extremely difficult, as one can see from our failure to predict in advance the kind of challenges we have actually faced in recent years.[22] This is in itself a very important conclusion, since it means that security preparations need to be as flexible as possible, in order to cope with the unexpected. However, since no security, arrangements can be infinitely adaptable, we must do what we can to anticipate some general trends and characteristics in the kind of conflicts we may face. I will suggest four such generic characteristics, as follows:

Diversity

We know from recent experience how diverse modern conflicts can be. They may last weeks, like the Falklands and Gulf wars, or drag on for years, like the Iran—Iraq war and the fighting in Afghanistan, Bosnia and elsewhere. They may involve the latest high technology equipment, or be waged with knives as in Rwanda and Algeria. They may take the form of a set battle between opposing armed forces, a fight between ethnic militias, a struggle between guerrillas and counter—insurgency forces, or a coercive duel of sporadic terrorist bombings and punitive airstrikes like that between Israel and Hamas or between the USA and the followers of Osama bin Laden. Several individual states, such as the UK, have been involved in almost all of these different types of conflicts over the past decade alone.

This diversity seems unlikely to diminish in the years to come. Van Creveld's claim that the spread of nuclear deterrence will progressively rule out high—tech 'conventional' war is dubious, since modern weapons and sensor systems allow far more discriminate use of conventional force than in the era of the World Wars.[23] Although growing fear of international condemnation means that we are less likely to witness surprise invasions of another state's territory, like those launched in 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1990, there will be ample opportunity for conventional forces to become embroiled gradually in tangled situations of intervention or reprisal, perhaps provoked rather than deterred by an adversary's threatened acquisition of mass destruction capabilities. Technological developments will also provide even more varied ways in which conflicts may be prosecuted, with the growing potential for 'cyber—warfare' taking us even further away from the traditional situation where battles were limited to duels between military forces along a clear 'front line'. Hence, future conflicts will probably become even more diverse in character than those of the recent past.

Asymmetry

Conflict has historically tended to occur between fairly evenly matched adversaries who fought in much the same

way (as happened in the World Wars). During the Cold War, this equality was even codified through arms control agreements which sought to even out the minor imbalances between the two sides' military arsenals. Future antagonists may still be fairly evenly matched, but this is much more likely to be an indirect balance of major offsetting asymmetries. Raw military power is only one element of the equation, and not necessarily the decisive one, as illustrated by the traumas suffered by the United States over the past thirty years in Vietnam, Iran, Lebanon and Somalia.

One reason for the increased asymmetry is clearly the demise of bipolarity and the easing of great power tensions. The various states, alliances and sub—state groups which now interact around the world vary enormously in size and power, with the United States being so far ahead by most conventional indicators that many talk not of a multipolar but of a unipolar world. Regional wars like those in the Gulf and the Balkans are no longer proxy reflections of great power rivalry as in previous Middle eastern and Asian conflicts, so the lack of

balancing intervention means there may be huge imbalances in the power involved. The shift towards asymmetry is partly also a consequence of technological trends, especially in air power. The most important element here is the 'double—edged' contribution of modern military electronics—giving huge 'force multiplier' effects in terms of enhanced intelligence and weapon accuracy, but exposing less advanced or less skilful users to crippling disruption of their entire military panoply through electronic countermeasures (as happened to the Syrians in 1982 and the Iraqis in 1991).[24]

A third reason for the increased asymmetries in modern conflict is that the antagonists may have very different levels of commitment and ruthlessness. This is partly because of the rise of 'altruistic' motives for military intervention by asymmetrically dominant western powers, who have few real interests at stake in the conflicts concerned, and who may therefore be discouraged by too much spilling of blood on either side as a consequence of their intervention. It stems also from differing cultural and ideological perspectives about the value of human life—

some groups such as Islamic fundamentalists, often from poor regions with burgeoning populations, see even suicidal and self—sacrificial tactics, perhaps targeted deliberately against opposing civilians, as justified in pursuit of their higher cause. It is primarily these differing levels of commitment and ruthlessness which can offset gross variations in military power, and so balance what would otherwise seem to be entirely one—sided and hopeless confrontations.

The consequence of these asymmetries is that future antagonists will often prosecute conflicts in very different ways from one another, and with very different strengths and weaknesses. Air forces will fight surface forces (as in Kosovo), soldiers and police will confront terrorists and popular demonstrations, intelligence agents will combat computer hackers, and targeteers will face 'human shields'. This does not mean that armed forces will never be called upon to fight their like, and neglecting to maintain the capacity to do so will give a potential adversary even greater strategic options. However, in the asymmetric conflicts of the future, dissimilar confrontations are likely to be the norm rather than the exception, and victory is likely to go to whichever side is more successful in dictating the terms on which the conflict is fought.[25]

Sensitivity

Success in war used to be measured in terms of overall statistics such as relative enemy and friendly losses, or the amount of territory captured. This statistical focus persisted during the Cold War, as in the preoccupation with 'body counts' in Vietnam and with the raw numerical size of the conventional and nuclear arsenals of East and West. However, as conflict has become more complex and asymmetric, the increasing dominance of televisual imagery has shifted attention away from the statistical and towards the anecdotal. This was seen clearly in the Gulf war, when television coverage was dominated by PGM videos and Scud missile attacks, even though these weapons were only a tiny minority of those employed overall. The media often focus their spotlight on perceived injustice or on things going wrong, as with the bombing of the Amariyah bunker in Baghdad and of the Serbian

television station during the Kosovo campaign. The result has been to increase the sensitivity attached to tactical mishaps, through the constant potential to magnify them into public relations disasters and thereby into strategic events.

One consequence of the growing pervasiveness of live TV coverage is that weaker antagonists can seek to dramatise individual events for political effect, however isolated or unrepresentative the events may be. This works best when publicising 'innocent' casualties inflicted by the adversary, especially when the opponent is a democratic state engaged in a 'peace support' intervention designed to save lives rather than threaten them. However, public outrage is a double—edged sword, and weaker antagonists may forfeit more sympathy than they foster if they themselves are seen as the authors of the misfortunes concerned. This is why terrorist attacks and hostage taking do not always achieve the desired ends, even though both are precisely tailored to exploit the magnifying lens which the media provide—in the case of Chechnya, such behaviour was instrumental in alienating the international community and provoking rather than deterring the recent Russian attacks. The media can also foster outrage about breaches of human rights, and so strengthen the consensus behind outside intervention. This is what happened with the Serbian expulsion of Kosovar Albanians in 1999, TV coverage of which helped to bolster NATO resolve despite mishaps such as the accidental bombing of a refugee convoy.[26]

A more specific consequence of media anecdotalism has been to increase the sensitivity of advanced nations such as the USA to even the most minor friendly casualties. The combination of discretionary interventions for altruistic purposes, the 'revolution of rising expectations' associated with asymmetric military dominance, and the media spotlighting of individual mishaps such as the shooting down of a single F16 in Bosnia or an F117 in the Kosovo campaign, has produced an unprecedented sensitivity to friendly losses. This sensitivity can have real political effects—in the earlier US interventions in Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia, as well as in the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Israeli intervention in Lebanon in

the 1980s, it was the accumulation of friendly casualties, combined with feelings of pointlessness about the ongoing campaigns, which eventually triggered withdrawal.

One should not assume too readily that casualty sensitivity in democratic nations will continue to increase in future conflicts to the point where such nations dare not employ anything except robotic 'stand—off' weapons and where all that an adversary has to do to neutralise western power is to impose a small price in blood.[27] Democracies have in the past been far from squeamish about taking casualties in a good cause like defeating the Axis powers, as long as the sacrifices they made were felt to be justified in terms of clear progress towards a worthwhile goal. This having been said, current western sensitivity to combat losses is just one aspect of a 'blame culture' which has become markedly and irrationally preoccupied with remote risks such as air and rail crashes, child abductions, and infected meat, simply because (unlike real scourges such as hand guns, traffic accidents and lung cancer) they attract a disproportionate amount of media attention.[28] Hence, a key strategic question for the future is whether the Revolution in Military Affairs will give richer nations the defensive dominance they need to offset their vulnerability to the growing absolute level of destructive capabilities available to poorer nations and terrorists through weapons proliferation.

Legitimacy

In the previous Hobbesian world of naked power politics, or the ideologically divided world of the inter—War and Cold War periods, states tended to align themselves based on commonality of interests or ideology, and not through objective judgements of who was in the right in a particular conflict. Today, how democratic states react to local conflicts depends much more on how their governments and publics perceive the legitimacy of the combatants' actions—apoint clearly illustrated by the fact that NATO bombed Serbia in 1999 to protect the Kosovar Albanians, but now finds itself more at odds with Albanian militants who are seen as the main disturbers of the peace in Kosovo and Macedonia. Partly as a consequence of this trend, and partly through the awesome discipline imposed

by nuclear weapons, there has been a shift from military to constabulary ethics in the western use of force—away from the pure 'war fighting' emphasis on surprising opponents and inflicting total military defeat, and towards an ethos of predictability, limitation, consent, and safeguarding of the innocent. The stakes today are far lower than in the mid—20th century, when it was seen as legitimate for western air power to threaten or even to carry out the incineration of entire urban populations in the interests of achieving military victory.[29] Modern media —aominated western societies are much less tolerant of perceived injustice, especially if their own armed forces are seen to be responsible for it.

In one sense, conflicts in recent decades have become even less 'legitimate' than hitherto. Formal declarations of war and subsequent peace treaties have disappeared, the line between combatants and non—combatants has become even more blurred, and dreadful massacres and atrocities continue to occur, especially in vicious civil wars. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the current western preoccupation with legitimacy and constraint may be an

asset as well as a handicap when dealing with less restrained regional adversaries. Operation *Allied Force* in Kosovo in 1999 eventually succeeded in its coercive objective, despite severe constraints on NATO air action and an inability to agree on an accompanying build—up for a ground offensive. Critical to this success was the enduring NATO consensus that restrained air attacks were justified, and a continuing dialogue with other states such as Russia (whose withdrawal of support from Serbia on June 3rd seems to have played an important role in Milosevic's eventual decision to concede).[30] This contrasts strikingly with the very limited success of other attempted coercive campaigns conducted on a more unilateral basis, like those of the US in Vietnam, the USSR in Afghanistan, and Israel against the Palestinians, even though those campaigns were much less restrained in nature.

Participation in a coalition, ideally with UN endorsement, not only boosts the resolve of the nations concerned, but may also play a significant role in undermining the assurance of their adversaries, who might otherwise see themselves as facing a self—interested unilateral assault by

one or two ill—disposed states in the face of opposition from others in the international community. Milosevic's recent election defeat and extradition for trial as a war criminal at last break the oft—remarked pattern established by Kim Il Sung, Fidel Castro, Colonel Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein, whereby authoritarian rulers subjected to coercive attack tend to become enduring martyrs, outlasting the democratic leaders who confronted them. We must beware of basing too many deductions on the Kosovo experience, and other factors such as sheer tribal hatred or cold calculations of self interest will undoubtedly play far more of a role than sincere considerations of legitimacy in many future conflicts (as they have done in the past). However, with increasingly pervasive media coverage bringing the actions of belligerents directly before the 'court of world opinion', combatants will be more and more concerned for practical political reasons to have their actions judged as legitimate, and the constraints which this imposes will become increasingly important in restraining resort by frustrated belligerents to the ever—more frightful options which technological advances will provide.[31]

Conclusion

If the likely characteristics of future conflict had to be summed up in a single word, that word would surely be 'complexity'. The days are long gone when security planners merely had to prepare national military forces for symmetrical clashes with the armed forces of another state. Not only will different conflicts take very different forms, but individual contests will also tend to become more complex and multi—dimensional and to shift in character over time, as has already happened recently. Very few conflicts are likely to follow the classic 'chivalric' image of a cleanly-fought duel between opposing armed forces, as in the Falklands war. Instead, the weaker antagonist may well resort to hostage taking, terrorism, indiscriminate bombardment, environmental damage and so on, as did Iraq during the Gulf crisis. This may even succeed in turning the tables, as with the terrorist counter—offensive after Israel. s victorious blitz into Lebanon in 1982.

Conflicts have also become more complex in several other ways—the involvement of outside intervention forces to try to 'enforce peace' as in Bosnia and Kosovo, the close links between armed factions and criminals such as drug smugglers as in Latin America, and the rise of episodic violence such as recent US airstrikes without the existence of formal hostilities. As the RMA proceeds and as capabilities for information warfare and for massive reprisals through missile or terrorist means continue to develop, we are likely to move even further away from the traditional situation where set—piece conflict took place along a clear 'front line', to one in which antagonists have a growing range of coercive options, almost independent of distance, and in which multiple actors with multiple interests interact in ways very different from the classic bipolar duel.

In these highly complex and unpredictable conflicts, it will not be enough for antagonists simply to 'do their worst' to the opposition in order to prevail. Every action will have to be carefully calculated, lest it be magnified by the media into a political liability far outweighing any tactical advantage gained. Western states will have to tread very carefully because of the sensitivity of their publics to undue friendly or enemy casualties, while their opponents will have to make delicate judgements as to whether responses such as hostage taking and terrorism will successfully exploit this sensitivity or will provoke outrage and so make their adversaries even less constrained. Asymmetric contests will be the norm rather than the exception, objectives will be tangled rather than straightforward, and success will depend more on commitment and perceptions of legitimacy than on raw military power. Internal security will become an increasingly significant consideration, and governments will have to strike a careful balance in exploiting the growing potential for surveillance, so as to inhibit subversive and terrorist activity without creating an Orwellian 'police state' which forfeits societal consensus.

So what factors will determine the future security of societies faced with these diverse, asymmetric and highly politicised conflicts? Perhaps the best way of approaching this issue is to return to my earlier discussion of

alternative strategic paradigms. In the context of power politics, the need will be for strong and effective national military power for deterrence or for defence of one's interests against other states. Against the threat of internal strife, the best safeguard is careful and consensual maintenance of social cohesion, and the absence of the kind of ethnic, religious or political divisions which have caused so many states to tear themselves apart in recent decades.

Insofar as security is something enjoyed primarily by rich states, the key priority will be to enhance the prosperity of one's citizens, thereby curbing the tensions fostered by poverty and overpopulation. Within the model of a 'new world order', the main requirement is for international cooperation, to tackle increasingly global challenges such as weapons proliferation, terrorism, crime, environmental damage and economic interdependence in a way that separate national responses cannot. Finally, to the extent that the world is witnessing a 'clash of civilizations', the key thing is to maintain the unity, vibrancy and self—confidence of the peoples who make up one's own civilization, and to avoid the kind of stagnation, decay and

internecine conflict which have presaged the decline of many civilizations in the past.[32]

States which have focused their security policies too narrowly within this range of paradigms, especially through an over—emphasis on military power, have often come badly unstuck. The best example is the former Soviet Union, which built up a fearsome military arsenal, but neglected the need to maintain prosperity, lost its ideological force, and gradually forfeited social and civilizational consensus both internally and among its satellite states. If states do succumb to such pressures, the military hardware they acquired for their security can actually have precisely the opposite effect, as in the exacerbation of recent conflicts in Albania and the former Yugoslavia by the widespread availability of weapons intended for militia resistance to external attack.

The best way of maintaining security is thus to pursue a broad and balanced approach which recognises the importance of all the various paradigms I have discussed. For example, states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt must

very carefully balance their military strength, their internal social and economic policies, the way they handle dissidents, their cooperation with the United States, and their display of Muslim fervour and solidarity, if they are to avoid the kind of traumas suffered by Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait and Algeria over the past few decades. Security in the 21st century will be an increasingly complex and multi-dimensional challenge, and it will take subtle balancing of the many factors I have discussed if societies are to avoid or prevail in the diverse conflicts which may occur.

(1) This point comes across very well in Martin van Creveld, *Technology and War* (New York:Free Press, 1989).

(2) See Kevin See Hoo, Seymour Goodman & Lawrence Greenberg, 'Information Technology and the Terrorist Threat', *Survival* 39/3, Autumn 1997, pp.135-55; Richard Falkenrath,'Confronting Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Terrorism', *Survival* 40/3, Autumn 1988, pp.43-65.

(3) See, for example, Martin van Creveld, *Nuclear Proliferation and the Future of Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

(4) See Michael Krepon, 'Moving Away from MAD', *Survival* 43/2, Summer 2001, pp.81-95.

(5) See, for example, John Orme, 'The Utility of Force in a World of Scarcity', *International Security* 22/3, Winter 1997/98, pp.138-167.

(6) For more on this issue, see Jean-Marie Guehenno, 'The Impact of Globalisation on Strategy',*Survival* 40/4, Winter 1998/99, pp.5-19.

(7) For some views on this impact, see Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War* (New York:Little, Brown & Co., 1993), and Robert Pfaltzgraff & Richard Shultz (eds.), *War in the Information Age: New Challenges for US. Security Policy* (London: Brassey's, 1997).

(8) For more on this issue, see Cohn Gray, *The American Revolution in Military Affairs: An Interim Assessment*, Strategic & Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper 28, (London:The Stationery Office, 1997), and my own article on 'The Shape of Future War: Are Traditional Weapons Platforms Becoming Obsolete? *Royal Air Force Air Power Review* 1/1, Summer 1998, pp.44-57.

(9) Some of the best literature on the RMA is that which

takes a broader View of the human and technological factors underpinning the changes concerned. See, in particular, Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 318, (Oxford University Press for the International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1998).

(10) On the linkages between internal tensions and external conflict, see Kurt Dassel, 'Civilians, Soldiers, and Strife: Domestic Sources of International Aggression' *International Security* 23/1, Summer 1998, pp.107-140.

(11) In his words, 'What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta'. See Thucydides I.23.

(12) See Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London : Brassey's, 1991).

(13) See Martin van Greveld, 'The Fate of the State', *Parameters* 26/1, Spring 1996, pp.4-18.

(14) See, for example, *North-South: A Programme for Survival*, the Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, chaired by Willy Brandt (London: Pan, 1980).

(15) For a detailed discussion of the issues involved, see Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

(16) See, for example, Roy Godson & Phil Williams, 'Strengthening Cooperation against Transnational Crime' *Survival* 40/3. Autumn 1998, pp.66-88.

(17) See Marc Weller, 'The US, Iraq, and the Use of Force in a Unipolar World', *Survival* 41/4, Winter 1999-2000, pp.81-100.

(18) See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

(19) See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon, 1992). Some of the problems with this approach are discussed in Roland Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism', *International Security*, 22/2, Fall 1997, pp.54-89.

(20) Huntington (op cit), ch.1.

(21) For a different perspective on the vexed relationship between Muslim governments and fundamentalist movements, see Ibrahim Karawan, The Islamist Impasse. Adelphi Paper 314, (Oxford University Press for the

International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997).

(22) Illustrative 'scenarios' for possible future wars have a vivid immediacy, but often become obsolete soon after they are written. See, for example, John Hackett et al, *The Third World War : August 1985* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), Francois Heisbourg, The Future of Warfare (London: Phoenix 'Predictions', vol.2, 1997), ch.2, and Huntington (op cit), ch.12.

(23) Van Creveld's argument a decade ago that modern weapons are 'too Expensive, too Fast, too Indiscriminating, too Big, too Unmanueverable, and too Powerful to be very useful in real-life war' sits rather uneasily with the increasingly discriminate and successful use of such weapons by western powers in the Gulf war, Bosnia and the Kosovo campaign. See the photo captions in his *Technology and War* (op cit).

(24) For a more detailed analysis, see my articles in Andrew Lambert & Arthur Williamson (eds.), *The Dynamics of Air Power* (Bracknell: RAF Staff College, 1996), chs.2 & 11.

(25) See Edward Luttwak, 'A Post-Heroic Military Policy', *Foreign Affairs* 75/4, July/August 1996, pp.33-44, and Paul Rogers, 'Responding to Western Intervention: Conventional and Unconventional Options', *Defense Analysis* 14/1, Spring 1998, pp.41-54.

(26) For more on the strategic dilemmas facing weaker adversaries, see my article on 'Air Strategy and the Underdog' in Peter Gray (ed.), *Air Power 21: Challenges for the New Century* (London: The Stationery Office, 2000), pp.69-97.

(27) Saddam Hussein told the US Ambassador in 1990 that 'Yours is a society which cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle', but in fact there were only 240 Coalition deaths in the Gulf war, despite fears of much greater casualties. See Lawrence Freedman & Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), chs.20, 21 & 29.

(28) It is also the case that western politicians and military commanders suffer from a 'zero defect' mentality and find it hard to ask any of their subordinates to risk making the supreme sacrifice in pursuit of the less than vital interests involved in peace support interventions. See Charles Hyde, 'Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Commanders',

(29) See John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

(30) On the vexed question of why the Serbs eventually came to terms, see Daniel Byman & Matt Waxman, 'Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate', and Barry Posen, 'The War for Kosovo: Serbia's Political—Military Strategy', both in *International Security* 24/4, Spring 2000.

(31) I discuss these issues in a little more depth in my article on 'Western Strategy in the New Era: The Apotheosis of Air Power?', in Andrew Dorman, Mike Smith & Matt Uttley (eds.), *The Changing Face of Military Power* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

(32) Huntington (op cit), ch.12, sees worrying historical symptoms of decline in contemporary Western culture, and suggests how this might be reversed.