

Foreword

The parameters and dimensions of conflict and power in the modern world are being transformed dramatically by technology and by the consequent strategic and tactical adaptations necessitated by the dizzying pace of change. Both domestic and international structures of power have been radically destabilized across the world, with long-established equations disintegrating, creating spaces for a range informal – often malignant – power centres that exert significant influence on events and developments, but find no recognizable space in the institutional arrangements of nations and the world. Terrorism and terrorist organisations have long been perceived as one such entity, operating, at once, as proxies of states, as well as renegade and autonomous organisations with agendas of their own. Progressively, organised criminal groups – long in existence and with varying histories of influence in political affairs – are assuming a scale and diversity of operations that construct altogether new threats to traditional structures of power. Their potential danger is magnified manifold when these groups team up with terrorist formations and with private military corporations to create an amalgam well beyond the capacities of many lesser nation-states to control, and that is difficult even for the most powerful states to cope with.

These threats compound an environment where national power is under relentless threat from what are being described as ‘new ways of warfare’ that lie well below the threshold of declared armed hostilities, but can have an impact that is as devastating. Wars today, increasingly, are without beginning and without end,

lacking the clarity of objective and outcome that characterized the wars of history, existing before and continuing well after, and even in the absence of, any armed hostilities, and lacking even a meaningful notion of victory and defeat. The nations and peoples of the world find themselves locked into unending struggles, unconstrained by any norms of civilized conduct, with the entire structure of society and governance under unremitting attack, and with the capacities and strategies of response often, if not invariably, lagging well behind the inventiveness and variety of the attack.

While there is much talk of global cooperation and a coordinated response to these augmenting and often shared dangers, the world is yet to evolve beyond the now anachronistic doctrines of the primacy of 'interests of state', with both the great and lesser powers engaging in actions that further undermine whatever remains of the crumbling 'international order'. The vaunting edifices of international organisations are now being rapidly supplanted by opportunistic 'bilateral' and 'regional' cabals that yield fitful, often dubious, advantages for their members, but do little to stem the corrosive tide.

Even as new dangers emerge, traditional threats to security persist. Managing these cumulative challenges requires levels of understanding and political sagacity that are increasingly rare. Indeed, the political response across the world has been regressive, with a resurgence of atavistic, xenophobic, and extreme ideologies increasingly occupying the political space. Such perspectives have no potential to address the growing hazards to the contemporary world order, but have met with great success in a milieu of increasing inequality and the marginalization of large proportions of the world's populations. However, with environmental and resource crises mounting globally, these ideologies of blind rage and their corollaries of economic appropriation and capture, have little to offer by way of solution.

Solutions do, of course, exist. But they demand that mankind step back and away from the recklessness of the past centuries of accelerating ‘progress’ – a progress that has ravaged the earth and that has now put the survival of the species at risk. To do this, we will have to re-examine the malign ideologies that have underpinned these processes, and to which the world’s leaders remain obdurately attached. Such a re-examination is, however, difficult even to imagine at anything but the margins of the current and fraught environment.

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