

## **General Sir Rupert Smith, 'The utility of force in an age of insecurity'**

We are in an age of insecurity because the international order which was established at the end of the Second World War, and the global and regional institutions based on it, are no longer able to provide security. Since the Cold War ended in 1989 we in the West have found ourselves living through a slow revolution of our circumstances. This revolution offers rewards and risks.

### **What does the revolution consist of?**

- Modern communications (internet, and travel by air, sea, and land) are increasingly rapid and comprehensive, allowing for a globalised economy, but also global terrorism, the global spread of disease, and the spread of dangerous ideas.
- In this globalised world nation states are weakened and find it increasingly difficult to act alone or independently (as with the recent collaboration between the USA, Russia, France and Britain to deal with chemical weapons in Syria)
- There is no longer any fit-for-purpose global settlement (global rules for how we govern ourselves).
- We can no longer use war as a means of resolving international tensions and arriving at a new and clear settlement.

In this revolution the context of action is changing. As a result, what worked last time does not necessarily work this time, and it is impossible to return to the state of affairs we knew earlier. For example, the effective remedies for our current financial and economic difficulties cannot be those we used earlier.

### **What caused the slow revolution?**

The factors are inter-related. They are: environmental change, scarcity of resources; demographic change; changing consumer choices; dependence on systems. These factors produce both opportunities for change for the better (less poverty, mortality, and war), and the prospect of change for the worse.

In greater detail:

- Global warming is causing climate change, the consequences of which are unknown. The world's natural resources (oil, fish and so on) are being depleted. The effects of climate change and depletion of resources are likely to compound each other. Those least able to handle the change will face the greatest change.
- The global population is increasing, putting greater strain on the environment. In 1975 Iran had a population of 35m, and now it is 75m; in Egypt it was 40m and is now 85m. The increase is greatest in societies with the least productive economies, resulting in large populations of unemployed young men. The average age of the populations of the more established states is increasing and fertility is decreasing, so there are fewer young people to support the old people. In 2015-16 Britain will have more people aged over 65 than under 15. The world's urban population is growing, and now 50% live in towns. People migrate to towns for work, better health care, clean water, and better food supplies. Those who remain in rural areas and produce the food need to become more productive, but agriculture and distribution may not be improving fast enough. The inequality between poor and rich increases, along with the probability of disease and famine, leading to an increased probability of political confrontations and violence. The inequality between rich and poor states is also increasing.
- The expanding economies of China, India and Brazil and their huge populations are creating new groups of consumers who outnumber the present groups, come from different societies, and are younger. They will not necessarily want the same manufactured goods and services as the older consumers. The wants of the West may be minority choices attracting rising prices. Food choices are changing, so that as people become richer they move from a diet of bread, rice, and fresh vegetables to a more varied diet including meat in increasing quantities. As people move to towns they rely more on processed food.
- We are increasingly dependent on systems (power, transport, logistics, GPS, finance). This is partly thanks to modern communications and because of migration to urban areas. These systems are complex, they cross state, administrative and functional boundaries, and no one body is responsible for a whole system. There is a danger of system failure. The earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011 disrupted supply of spare parts to manufacturing here. These systems are vulnerable because of their design, management and maintenance. They can be attacked for

purposes of profit, mischief, or antagonism. Failure of systems, if the society cannot be resilient to it, leads to hardship, powerlessness, loss of confidence in administrative and governmental institutions, and can lead to civil disorder and violence. These systems can also be used for surveillance and invasion of privacy.

Change is altering the context of our lives and therefore remedies that worked in the past are no longer working as well as before, or at all. **What does this mean for the use of armed force, the application of violence?**

In our daily lives we see that the global rules of how we govern ourselves are being reconsidered, and the rules are often not agreed. This has given or might give cause for using armed forces. Some examples:

- In 1945 it was agreed that one state should not interfere in the internal workings of another. But in 1999 NATO bombed Serbia to get it to change its policy to Kosovo, one of its provinces. Subsequently Kosovo's independence was recognised by many states. The borders of a state were thus altered. We also intervened in Libya, ostensibly to protect the people but in practice to remove Gaddafi, in spite of the opposition on the part of Russia and China. Disagreement as to interfering in another state explains the difficulty the members of the UN Security Council have in reaching a coherent policy on Syria.
- Long-standing leaders of some states (in North Africa and the Middle East) are being challenged or deposed by the people, demonstrably the middle class, who want a government to represent their interests. These revolutions are in part enabled and stimulated by information flowing through modern communications links. If rulers attempt to close down internet communications and to transmit only their own message, rumour and information thwart the blocks.
- The social contract which operated since 1945 in the UK and Western Europe has broken down. There is growing inequality between the haves and the have-nots, both within states and between states. Only the rich are getting richer. The have-nots are falling behind and getting deeper into debt.

In the past when we had a political problem that we could not solve by diplomacy, we went to war, war was supported by the whole industrial and human resources of the nation, and the winner dictated the political solution. Peace was disrupted by a crisis, war was declared, the conflict was resolved, and peace was restored. War was won by accumulated successful battles. But in my book *The utility of force* I argued that **nowadays armed force is unable to resolve political differences, and can only create the conditions for a resolution to be achieved in other ways**. The form of war has changed. Now we have continual confrontations (wars) and conflicts (battles, fights, engagements, a fleeting contact between a few men, the mining of a vehicle, or a clash between major formations). The war, or confrontation, gives meaning to the battle, or conflict, which would otherwise be apparently senseless and criminal. Military forces act in the conflict to support other ways and means (politics, economics and so on) of achieving the desired outcome of the confrontation. In this form of war (which I call 'war amongst the people', to be explained shortly) you can win all the battles but lose the war. Examples are Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

All our institutions of defence and security were developed to deal with the previous form of war, Industrial War. Now that it has been replaced by War Amongst the People, all these institutions need to change the way they think about war and work in a different way, but they are reluctant to change. These institutions include governments of nations, intergovernmental organisations, multinational organisations, development agencies, and the armed forces.

**What is the new form of war, War Amongst the People?**

- It takes place amongst the people. **The opposing sides may operate amongst the people as guerillas and terrorists do. They depend on the people for concealment, moral and physical support, and information. The commander needs to tell and act out the most convincing story**, and convince the people that his story is more

compelling than that of his opponent. He needs to use information and public relations, as well as firepower.

- Its ends are different from those of Industrial War. Instead of armed forces aiming to take and hold targets, destroy and defeat forces, the intention of War Amongst the People is to create conditions in which the confrontation can be resolved, eg to create a safe and secure environment. **The object is to form or win over the intentions and the will of the people.** Even though the military may be asked to solve the problem, they cannot do so: the solution needs other kinds of experts. Armies can create order, but not justice or resolution. What the military does do is to carry out acts of force which contribute to the efforts to win the confrontation, so fights and battles are still required.
- **War Amongst the People is usually fought in multinational groupings.** Because no one state is strong enough, we want to gain legitimacy and share the risk by setting up coalitions, eg NATO, the UN, and the Iraq coalition. Coalitions can in effect and informally include non-state bodies such as UNHCR, Oxfam, or Médecins sans frontières (this is another example of change). The arrangements for these alliances are often inadequate, and lead to lack of resources, lack of direction, divided priorities, hesitant action, and so on. These make it difficult to conduct operations against determined and thinking opponents, and to win the will of the people. If we are to do better we must make institutional changes to the way we conduct our multinational operations.

The consequences of War Amongst the People include:

- The difficulty of applying the law (which law? Whose justice? Humanitarian law, domestic law, international treaties...)
- The difficulty for coalitions of deciding on a strategy
- The problem of foreseeing the effect of a particular action in the conflict on those who are dealing with the confrontation.
- The difficulty of analysis and explanation
- In this kind of war the way you use force and the means of force are just as important as the end result and sometimes more important. Assad in Syria, by using chemical weapons, gives us an example.

### **What may the future hold?**

The slow revolution I described earlier can have complex outcomes, which can be simplified to **two broad alternatives**; the actual outcome will be a balance between the two. These are: a nationalistic protectionist zero-sum world in which winner takes all; and a world with reordered global and regional institutions which allow a safe co-operative effort.

Political and economic confrontations will continue. We can expect confrontations between states and within them. They might relate to water, energy, terrorism, failed states, immigration, liberation movements, internal upheavals, or the status of entities such as Gibraltar, the Falklands, or perhaps Israel. We can expect a rebalancing of state powers. States will not always be sovereign, acting alone. Individuals are gaining power in relation to the state. Because states are weaker than before they must collaborate, and form or reform institutions to handle this.

Solutions that worked last time may not do so the next time. It may be that some will consider the use of armed force to be a solution, or part of it. But violence can only achieve limited ends, and it must be more clearly understood. Nuclear weapons cannot be un-invented, they will remain with us. As we cannot get rid of them, we must learn how to manage them.

When we use armed force we affect the nature of the new global state. We, the US and its allies, have probably done more in the last ten years with our military ventures to weaken our position relative to others on the global stage than anything else. **To use violence is not to have power because violence destroys power and cannot replace it.** The US destroyed Saddam's power but could not replace it, and Libya is another example.

**What part does armed force play in achieving the overall objective, the desired outcome?** How does armed force relate to other measures for achieving this outcome?

- We need to decide whether we are aiming for defence or for security. They are not one and the same. Defence is the defeat or deterrence of a threat, an anticipated loss, by military means. You can make an objective judgment of what to do. Security is taking preventive measures to avert threats or to allow time and space to mount a defence to deal with them. These measures are not necessarily military. The judgment is subjective, and concerns striking a balance between anticipated risk and reward. Security is about creating enduring relationships. Governments must be wary of thinking too simplistically and confusing defence with security.
- We need to decide whether our opponent is directly opposed to us, or a rival. A rival is competitor for a goal that you want to obtain. He is not necessarily hostile, eg a rival in a running race. An enemy intends to defeat or destroy you, and is hostile; such as your opponent in a boxing match. For example, an armed man shooting at a patrol in Afghanistan is an enemy to the patrol. The Afghan people are not our enemies; they are the goal that both we and the Taliban are trying to gain, and we are rivals in doing this. The patrol commander aims for defence and to defeat the threat. His superiors and their political masters are aiming for security, and trying to establish an enduring relationship with their goal, the people of Afghanistan, to the disadvantage of their rivals, the Taliban. I am not convinced that this difference is understood properly by commanders and HQs which work at levels above the fight, and that they are trained, equipped and manned to handle this responsibility. If they simplify matters by treating rivals as enemies they fail to achieve the goal. This is why we can win all the fights but lose the war.

Conclusion

We are living through a slow revolution that is changing the context in which we live our lives. The more we are all in the same global boat, the harder it is to say, 'your end of the boat is sinking'. We sink or float together, and we must work together. **Economic dependency and shrinking resources mean that we must collaborate.** Collaboration can be the result of self-interest.

Changes to the context make unsafe the assumptions on which our institutions were founded and on which they operate. **War has become War Amongst the People, in which you can win all the fights and lose the war. We must consider carefully how to use violence. Violence stops things happening but does not create or change what will happen. Non-violent action, such as getting people to talk about reaching a collaborative future, can do that.** Violence remains useful in the case of a patent threat that demands defence, but even then the manner of its application is as important as the target against which it is directed. On the whole I find the prospect for the future is now more peaceful than in earlier times.

Summarised by Wendy Bartlett