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Global Security in the Third Millennium of the Common Era

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The primary purpose of this short essay is to catalyze discussion among security professionals about how perspectives on ‘global security’ and ‘wise civilizations’ might affect military affairs during a time of great, interdisciplinary stresses that impact everyone on earth today.

Global civilization faces two main existential threats this century. The first is a quick death from general thermonuclear war or release of other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) like exotic, genetically engineered biological weapons. The second is a slow death from incremental destruction of the living system that supports all civilizations, wise or unwise, by mechanisms like deforestation, desertification, climate change, and general loss of biodiversity.¹

The first threat from WMD is relatively easy to deal with (in theory – setting aside obvious and profound political obstacles) because there is only one good reason to retain nuclear weapons from a global perspective. That is to protect earth-based civilizations from dangerous asteroids or other objects approaching from space. That mission would require 10-20 nuclear weapons and appropriate delivery systems retained by some global authority with the ‘protect earth from asteroids’ mission only. The current “MAD” doctrine that prevails among nuclear powers today (Mutual Assured Destruction) promises to protect world peace by threatening all of the children on earth with a nuclear holocaust if that fails. Forever, because MAD dares not fail even once.

This could be a special definition of terrorism, a ‘type case’ of security planning that completely ignores the interests of the “seventh generation” of descendants of leaders today. Advocates of MAD seldom write about seventh generation consequences, but often note that we have not seen nuclear weapons used in anger since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945. True, but they conclude this means that MAD works well.

They typically do not note that MAD is critically undercut by something called the “rational actor assumption” which certainly does not apply to all world leaders all of the time. Furthermore, none of the ways that nuclear war could start have been reduced to zero (for example -- by accident, computer failures, irresponsible leadership, rogue commanders with control over WMD, or “terrorist” attempts to get nuclear powers to fight each other).

The second existential threat of incremental destruction of our living system is much more complicated, partly because it is not a traditional military threat, and most militaries are very poorly equipped to deal with environmental issues. But militaries still consume the lion's share of resources devoted to security issues including fossil fuels, and they guard those 'equities' with great professional attention and skill. This is one reason the USA and Russia have essentially ignored climate change and its many, vast security consequences for about three decades.

The most important tap root of all environmental problems today is population growth and the relentless pressure of too many people trying to live modern lives on too little land to support that. But population issues are toxic to most practical politicians in democracies; they are always entangled with other issues like immigration, and there are many other factors that affect climate change, such as deforestation.

Corruption of governance constitutes the second most crucial factor in the incremental destruction of the living system that supports all civilizations. But that is also politically very difficult. So, practical politicians are often eager to expose corruption in other governments, but blind to corruption in their own. Therefore, we will focus here on global security consequences of continuing to ignore the developing global crisis in our environment.

The most important of these will likely be a relentless increase in migrations of millions of people fleeing desperate conditions in their home countries, and violent conflicts within them. One response is building walls or militarizing borders to keep out the unwanted poor. But no wall can stop the relentless increase in heat and ocean acidity that is killing corals in all of our oceans, fueling huge wildfires in many countries worldwide, causing deserts to spread, storms to metastasize, and increasing conditions that result in emergent diseases like the Covid-19 pandemic that has killed more Americans than all of the wars in our history combined.²

Nuclear weapons, like all other WMD, have zero utility against such problems. Yet every nuclear weapons power on earth is currently modernizing their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems, spending scarce financial and technical resources on echoes of World War II instead of on the emerging threats of the third millennium.³ While they build bigger and allegedly better bombs, the living system that supports us all is bleeding away every day.

The nation states of earth today are terrified by WMD, and even more so by the thought that "terrorists" might acquire some to lash out at established powers. It is easier for many people to believe that all of the desperate people fleeing failed and failing states are potential "terrorists" than to deal with the root causes of so much distress.

Of course, there are some genuine terrorists who have become remarkably dangerous (like ISIS or Daesh) and who are relentlessly opposed to all things modern, which they blame for their undoubtedly limited life opportunities.

Therefore, many militaries and internal security services in developed countries already consider “terrorism” to be among their top security concerns. OK – almost everyone supports spending serious resources to protect innocent people from random violence intended to terrorize them and their governments. But focusing on symptoms like terrorism has resulted in neglect of the causes of failed and failing states. And failure to distinguish very clearly between actual terrorists and millions of desperate people fleeing awful conditions in failing states has shown that modern militaries can create more new terrorists each year than they can ever kill. Meanwhile, the underlying causes of failing states, like population pressure and corruption, continue.

Furthermore, the most corrupt and authoritarian governments on earth often label mere political critics or opponents as criminals or even “terrorists.” The “terrorism” label has been so broadly misapplied to include scores of millions of people who are merely desperate for a chance at a meaningful life, that we suggest an adjustment of strategic thought worldwide.

In a world concerned about global security in the third millennium, it would be appropriate and helpful for professional security services to see themselves as guardians of civilization against barbarism.

If so, and if they are wise, they would have to acknowledge that barbarism occurs in every country and religion rather than suggesting some racist idea that only “others” are barbaric, while “we” are blessed with civilizational wisdom. That is simplistic, Darwinian thinking, which cannot solve the problems before us today. But it is also as common as dirt in populist politics.

People who study civilizations carefully have long been concerned about why some decay and die quickly, while others endure for extended periods of time, adjusting as conditions change and embracing encounters with other civilizations rather than clashing in conflicts that often result in genocides for the losing side.^{4,5}

“Wisdom” is one of the ingredients that matters at times like that, but it is not possible to achieve any true consensus on what “wisdom” actually is. Working on cultivating “wisdom” and seeking clarity about what that means, is one key to survival.

All of the great problems mentioned in this short essay require wisdom to resolve peacefully, and the presence of WMD means that we cannot wait forever to get this right.⁶ Poisson statistics assure us that if the probability of general nuclear war is greater than zero, and prime parameters do not change, then it will eventually occur.

Therefore, we have been encouraging for many years the goal of zero, or nearly zero global nuclear weapons for maximum civilization security, as did eventually some of the prime architects of modern “MAD” nuclear arsenals.⁷

The history of nuclear weapons control is filled with wise steps forward and unwise steps back.

- For one example, the landmark nuclear weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970 promised help for smaller countries to develop nuclear power in return for strong pledges by those nations not to produce nuclear weapons and to allow very intrusive inspections by UN agencies to monitor and enforce that. That was wise.
- But Article 6 of this key treaty also pledged that then-nuclear weapons powers would eventually get rid of them, soon. The text of Article 6 is unambiguous. “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

Ignoring this part of the NPT was not wise, in my opinion.

Article 6 has been violated by both the USA and Russia, who are both modernizing their nuclear arsenals as we write. So are all seven other nuclear weapons nations, in a mad race to mutual destruction. When the largest countries with the largest nuclear arsenals do not honor their own commitments to the international community, why should smaller nations? It is not wise to undercut this valuable tool for peaceful transition to a world committed to long-term survival.

We have already mentioned other profound problems that produce the developing global crisis, like population pressure, corruptions of governance, authoritarian police-state politics, climate change, and militant “religions” that violate teachings of founders about peaceful coexistence with the much larger world we all inhabit for our brief moments in time. All of these are very difficult problems even to discuss, much less to solve. Yet someone must, or the “half-life” of human civilization will be much shorter than any rational and humane person wants.

Therefore, we commend the scholars of the first *World Congress of Civilizational Studies* and especially security professionals among you to consider these thoughts on what might constitute “wise” security for the entire global community for the long term. And then, we pray that you improve upon these early, simplistic thoughts, while you extend this discussion to politicians and others who have some power to implement them.

All errors of any kind apply to the first draft author, who invites improvement by anyone.

Notes

¹ United Nations annual report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, 2022.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Covid Data Tracker” accessible at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home> . This showed US deaths from Covid 19 at 1,129,573 on 26 April 2023. That exceeds all US deaths in all of the wars we have fought over 240+ years

³ Federation of American Scientists, “Status of World Nuclear Forces,” 28 May, 2023, accessible at: <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

⁴ Diamond, Jared, Collapse: How Societies Chose to Fail or Succeed, Penguin, 2005.

⁵ Tainter, Joseph A., The Collapse of Complex Societies, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁶ See Andregg, Michael, “The Developing Global Crisis and Survival of Human Civilizations,” in *Comparative Civilizations Review*, No. 86, Spring 2022, pp. 40-65, available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol86/iss86/7>. This shows in particular why Poisson statistics can estimate civilization half-lives assuming various probabilities of a general nuclear war occurring, and more generally why environmental destruction is the greater long-term threat.

⁷ Shultz, George P., William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” in The Wall Street Journal, 4 January, 2007.