Peace and Human Rights Are Overdue

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Why we need a European Network for Peace and Human Rights

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On January 31st and February 1st 2002, there gathered the inaugural meeting of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights in which some 300 people from more than thirty countries met in the European Parliament and agreed to set up a permanent liaison to advance their joint efforts for disarmament, peace and human rights. Ken Coates delivered this speech to the opening session.

Since we agreed to work towards the convening of this Conference, the whole world has been shaken to its foundations, first by the atrocities in the United States on September 11th, and then by the American response, which was to proclaim a 'war against terrorism', and to launch the first instalment of that war in Afghanistan.

Critics at the time argued that terrorism ought properly to be understood as a criminal offence, and that a declaration of 'war' against an enemy which was often shadowy and ill-defined, involved not only logistical but also logical problems which would cause serious difficulties as the project unwound.

The subsequent bombardment of Afghanistan has of course created a large number of civilian casualties. By the end of 2001, as many or more innocent civilians had been killed in Afghanistan by high altitude bombardment as perished in the Twin Towers in New York in the September attacks. But more sinister still was the constant official whispering about subsequent targets.

Since terrorism is so difficult to pin-point with precision, it can be identified here, there and everywhere. Its pursuit has led Allied Governments to impose serious restrictions on conventional civil liberties, and to exert intimidatory pressures on a wide variety of other authorities. The slow collapse of colonialism took place amidst great turmoil, and in some countries, this turmoil generated genuine terrorism. Israel, for example, was

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born after a prolonged terrorist struggle against the British occupation of Palestine. Many other countries took shape in a cauldron of rebellion and war. Their political culture can be expected to reflect that fact.

Be that as it may, there have today been credible threats of United States military action of different kinds against Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Sudan, the Philippines and possibly Syria. There have been dark murmurings about the need for better behaviour on the part of Iran.

Previous 'terrorist wars' have now been reclassified in the hope of cementing the American alliance which is embroiled in the conflict in Afghanistan. The war in Chechnya for instance, now seems to be understood in the United States as at least partly a terrorist offensive, involving Bin Laden supporters in the struggle to overthrow Russian rule. Chechen activities in Georgia and other allied territories have already been restrained as a result.[1]

Conflict in the Islamic world has been heightened from the Philippines and Indonesia all the way cross to the Mahgreb. New wars may well be gestating over the whole immense region.

All this fits uncomfortably snugly with the doctrine of Full Spectrum Dominance, which was announced by the United States military during the earlier years. The ending of the Cold War clearly left the United States in possession of the military field, as by far the most potent power in the world. The National Command Authorities in the United States had no wish to cede this position, which they found highly desirable.

'For the joint force of the future', they announced in their *Joint Vision 2020*, published in June 2000, 'this goal will be achieved through full spectrum dominance - the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations'.[2]

Continued dominance depends upon continued superiority not only in the area of military technology overall, but in particular upon military 'information superiority'. The American military vision 'is firmly grounded in the view that the US military must be a joint force capable of full spectrum dominance. Its basis is four-fold: the global interests of the United States and the continuing existence of a wide range of potential threats to those interests; the centrality of information technology to the evolution of not only our own military, but also the capabilities of other actors around the globe; the premium a continuing broad range of military operations will place on the successful integration of multinational and interagency partners and the interoperability of processes, organisations, and systems; and our reliance on the joint force as the foundation of future US military operations… The label full spectrum dominance implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronised operations … in all domains - space, sea, land, air and information.'

Awareness of this enables us to appreciate the significance of 'missile defence', a completely misnamed operation for the military invasion of space. It became more and more evident that the threatened repudiation of the Anti-

Ballistic Missile Treaty was not in aid of the prevention of missile attacks on the United States, but was designed to facilitate the development of American military technology in space, involving huge new experiments in laser techniques, the refinement of space-based information gathering, and of the capacity to destroy 'enemy' satellites which might be gathering their own intelligence. Star Wars were to facilitate a whole new step beyond nuclear technology, towards the ultimate destructive capacity. This would be the necessary sanction to enforce global dominance.

We have already pointed out the direct application of such doctrines in the terrestrial field by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who identified the domination of Eurasia as the necessary first step to global dominion. When Alexander conquered the Persians, he learned that their kings kept amphorae of water from the Nile and from the Danube, as evidence of their mastery of the world. Brzezinski favours no such timidity or half-measures.

> 'For the United States, Eurasian geostrategy involves the purposeful management of geostrategically dynamic states and the careful handling of geopolitically catalytic states, in keeping with the twin interests of America in the short-term preservation of its unique global power and in the long-run transformation of it into increasingly institutionalised global co-operation. To put it in a terminology that hearkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.'[3]

Extrapolating from this theme, Brzezinski tells us that against his schema

> 'The most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an antihegemonic coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances.'[4]

The strategic plans of the American forces have been refined in a very ingenious framework, which is deep-going. Colonel John A. Warden III of the US Air Force, summed up much of this thinking in his paper 'The Enemy as a System'.[5] This represents a thorough-going revision of the thinking of Clausewitz and Napoleon, and begins with a severely rational examination of how to achieve the objectives of the United States.

'At the strategic level', says Colonel Warden, 'we attain our objectives by causing such changes to one or more parts of the enemy's physical system that the enemy decides to adopt our objectives, or we make it physically impossible for him to oppose us. The latter we call strategic paralysis. Which parts of the enemy system we attack … will depend on what our objectives are, how much the enemy wants to resist us, how capable he is, and how much effort we are physically, morally, and politically capable of exercising.'

But what is the enemy 'system'? Warden offers a simplified model of five rings. At the centre is the leadership or brain. In the next circle are the organic

essentials, food, energy, and so on. Thirdly, there is the infrastructure, of vital connections and skeletal essentials: roads, airfields, factories, transmission lines. The fourth ring is the population which is sustained by these essentials, and is necessary to sustain them. Lastly, and in fact least important for many purposes, is the circle of the fighting mechanism.

The purpose of modern war is not to confront arms, or kill soldiers. If this process could be avoided altogether, that would be fine by the controllers of modern war, provided only that they could exercise their will over enough of the other rings to bend the enemy leadership to their own purposes.

Colonel Warden explains these categories with a series of intricate diagrams. But such diagrams are not necessary for us to realise that within this model, American Generals do not give a fig whether the tanks destroyed by their rockets are made of metal or plywood, as were many of the decoys deployed in Yugoslavia. What they care about is the destruction of the system, if not by the liquidation of its leadership, then by cumulative damage to the essentials which sustain it.

> 'We must not start our thinking on war with the tools of war - with the air planes, tanks, ships and those who crew them. These tools are important and have their place, but they cannot be our starting point, nor can we allow ourselves to see them as the essentials of war. Fighting is not the essence of war, nor even a desirable part of it. The real essence is doing what is necessary to make the enemy accept our objectives as his objectives.'

Of course, such doctrines have a life of their own, and can develop mutations of various kinds. But while understanding this, the peace movements need to take stock of the implications of this thinking to our own conventional wisdom.

It used to be presumed that there exists a law of war, and that the Geneva Conventions could operate as a restraint on military misbehaviour. But the pursuit of the destruction of the enemy 'as a system' places a great deal of this thinking in serious doubt. How can the Geneva Conventions governing the protection of children, and therefore of women, stand up to high altitude bombing as a methodical principle in such destruction? How can the exigencies of war against terrorism be squared with the Geneva Conventions on the Protection of Prisoners of War, when the interrogation of prisoners is no longer restricted, and when they can be chained up, subjected to sensory deprivation, and incarcerated in unthinkable conditions, two continents away from the place of their detention?

With dominance in play, how can smaller states preserve their integrity and autonomy? How do the institutions of the UN, which once laid claim to the role of protector of the weak, escape from untold influences and pressures, in an overall context of domination? How can the international institutions be protected from the poisoning of their wellsprings by the pervasive exercise and threats of power? And how can non-governmental organisations uphold peace with human rights when both come under recurrent threat.

In short, all the architecture of peace, which was our inheritance from the Second World War, including the establishment of the United Nations, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is now undermined. The principles upon which our parents built the UN framework are no longer unchallenged, and that framework is therefore endangered. Peace movements have to make a rigorous appraisal of these new circumstances, in order to insist upon their own sustaining principles. Not dominance, but democracy, is the key to a humane world order. It is easy in such turbulent times to lose the thread, and to mistake the style for the substance. But peace and human rights are the ultimate foundations on which the postwar settlement was designed, and we need to make sure that these foundations are defended and secured. Their effective defence is likely to require their comprehensive reform, a veritable re-foundation. Our task, therefore, is not only to stop the war, but to lay the basis for a Peace which embodies human fulfilment. The other name of that Peace is Democracy.

One first step to facing this task must surely be to improve our own liaisons with one another, where possible to co-ordinate our efforts, and always to keep each other informed. Already there is a strong will in Europe to join our forces in a renewed network for human rights and peace.

But Europe is neither a fortress nor an island. Not the least of our duties must be the effort to reach out to the wider world with a message of Peace. First, we should seek dialogue with those who share our views in the United States. Perhaps we should explore the setting up of a Peace delegation to tour some important American cities and talk with those who are interested in meeting us. Second, the time is already ripe for a serious exchange of views between peace and human rights movements in Europe and West Asia. War threatens to swallow many territories in that region, and it is urgent that we should inform one another about its problems, while seeking to establish the understanding that another world is possible.

Peace and Human Rights have been possible for a long time, but now we face a true crisis, which says very loudly that they are overdue.

References

1. Since this speech was delivered, a tense situation has arisen in which the Georgian government is soliciting American intervention against alleged terrorist forces massed in the Pankisi Gorge, thus laying a challenge to Russian claims in the region.
2. Reproduced in this number of *The Spokesman* so that it can be carefully studied alongside the Russian military doctrine which we published in no. 67
3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard,* Basic Books, 1997, p 40.
4. Ibid p55.
5. *The Enemy as a System.*
   http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/warden.html