

GLOBAL CONFLICT

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The Globalization of Conflict: A Case Study

This morning, as I began to write this essay, a senior military commander in Sri Lanka was killed by a suicide-bomber on the outskirts of Colombo. The typical government response to such tragedies is to order aerial attacks on 'Tamil Tiger (LTTE) bases'. Civilian casualties from such attacks are high, but rarely reported in the southern Sinhalese or English press.¹ Youth with identity cards showing that they were born in the predominantly Tamil-speaking parts of the island (the northern Jaffna peninsula and sections of the eastern and northwestern coastal belt) are rounded up security forces, and some detained indefinitely. The number of internal refugees, as well as those fleeing by boat to south India, increases.

What began as a legitimate struggle for civil rights in the 1950s and later developed into a violent demand for a separate state for Tamils, has now descended to a 'tit for tat' spiral of revenge. Neither side takes the value of civilian lives seriously. While the atrocities committed by the LTTE over the past two decades are well known around the world, war crimes and other human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan armed forces have never been seriously investigated by the government (despite being highlighted by human rights activists and Church leaders, local and foreign).

Ever since the civil conflict in Sri Lanka first came to the attention of the global media twenty-three years ago, it has been routinely described as an 'ethnic conflict'. But conflicts in the complex societies of Asia are rarely this simple. The Tamil movement for a separate state has splintered over the years into several factions warring with each other. These factions are based on caste, or ideological differences, or personalities and power-struggles. The Tigers (LTTE), who are the most powerful and best known internationally, have assassinated every Tamil public figure who has dared to question their methods or political agenda, and many Tamils have been killed in indiscriminate bombings by the Tigers in crowded areas. The poorest Tamil communities, who have had nothing to do with the Tamil Tigers struggle for a homeland in the north, are the indentured labourers (still referred to as 'Indian Tamils') brought by the British in the nineteenth century to work on tea and rubber plantations. Most Sri Lankan Tamils have shown little interest in the plight of the latter.

The main source of funding for the Tamil Tigers has been the affluent Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. While sending their own children to prestigious schools and universities in the West, and even continuing to hold property in Sri Lanka, they profess to be 'oppressed' and hail the Tigers as 'our boys' fighting for self-government. Poorer Tamil refugees in Europe, who still have relatives in Sri Lanka, have been intimidated and coerced into funding the movement. Oslo was for many years the propaganda base for the Tamil Tigers in Europe, which is one reason why the present Norwegian effort at 'brokering' a political settlement is viewed with suspicion - and indeed outright hostility- by many Sinhalese in the south. In those parts of Sri Lanka under

¹ In this instance, the government seems to have acted with restraint and not launched aerial attacks.

the control of the Tigers, a system of compulsory taxes and tariffs on goods has also helped to raise revenue for arms and other equipment.

In 1983, a vicious pogrom against Tamils living in the south by Sinhalese mobs was orchestrated by some senior politicians and abetted by the police and army who simply turned a blind eye to acts of murder and arson. In the aftermath of the huge refugee influx to India, the Indian intelligence services began to train Tamil Tiger recruits in secret camps in south India. There is evidence that the Tigers also had links with terrorist groups operating in other parts of the world, and arms have been smuggled by boats from various ports in south-east Asia. The Sri Lankan army looked to Pakistan, the USA and the Israeli Mossad for its own training and armament needs. Wanting to flex its muscles as the regional superpower, the Indian government unilaterally sent its army as a peacekeeping force to Jaffna in 1989. The move sparked anti-Indian riots all over the south. However, unable either to persuade the Tigers to surrender their arms or the Sri Lankan government to make significant political concessions, the Indian army found itself besieged and engaged in guerilla war with the Tigers while the Sri Lankan army looked on with interest, no doubt tinged with some amusement. A humiliated Indian army pulled out of Jaffna. In bitterness at what they perceived as betrayal by the Indians, the Tigers assassinated the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in Madras, a year later. The Indian government has since proscribed the Tigers as a terrorist group and demanded the extradition of their leader, if ever caught, to stand trial in India. But they have been wary of any further involvement in Sri Lanka.

Following 9/11 and the launch of the 'war on terror', Western governments, led by the USA and Britain, have proscribed the Tamil Tigers as a terrorist organization and cracked down on their fund-raising and propaganda activities in the West. Expatriate Sinhalese have welcomed these moves, while Tamil cultural organizations in the West (some, though not all, of which are fronts for the Tigers) have lobbied politicians in their countries to lift the bans and to see the Tigers as a legitimate political movement. Sinhalese and Tamil professionals who may have lived and worked side by side in Sri Lanka before they emigrated West, are often more fiercely chauvinist abroad and fan the flames of hatred from a safe distance.

Having witnessed the brutality both of the Tamil Tigers and the armed forces, the venality of local political parties, and the sheer inability of successive Sri Lankan governments to break free from narrow, communal politics and to treat Tamils living in the north and east as equal citizens of Sri Lanka, I see little hope on the horizon. Lacking political statesmanship, every Sri Lankan government has allowed southern extremists to dictate policy and has failed to explain to the people that a federal system of government, with a substantial measure of autonomy to the north, is the only viable solution. When neither the government nor the Tamil Tigers are open to listening to local voices, Churches and human rights groups are compelled to look to influential foreign governments and donor agencies to exercise economic 'leverage' on both sides. To argue that this is an 'interference' in local affairs is to forget not only that where human rights abuses are concerned no conflict can be regarded as local, but also that the Sri Lankan conflict has never been purely local. If it had been, it may never have dragged on for so long.

Historical Amnesia and Selective Grief

Reasons for conflict vary, and no two conflicts are ever the same. Some countries have managed to live peacefully with religious and ethnic diversity for centuries, others have been incapable of developing into pluralist democracies. It is very rarely that ethnic, cultural or

religious differences *per se* lead to conflict. It is when such differences are perceived within a wider matrix of social, political or economic discrimination that cultural and religious traditions provide ideological resources for militant struggle. Ignorance of the history behind specific conflicts often leads to popular caricatures such as ‘the clash of civilizations’ or ‘secular reason versus religious zeal’.

The historically distinct conflicts of Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir and other places, have (since 9/11) been conflated and depicted as a common Muslim struggle against the imperialism of the West. This is to mobilize popular support for networks like Al Qa’ida against the US and its allies. Understanding ‘Islam’ by itself does not help us understand what has been happening in these countries in recent times. The ‘clash of civilizations’ approach to analysing global conflict actually serves the propaganda of those Islamists who want to disguise their local struggles for power as a pan-Islamic confrontation with a decadent and corrupt Western world.

Several of the most protracted conflicts in the world are a direct legacy of British imperialism - for example, Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Myanmar, Zimbabwe. With their modern mania for classification, colonial rulers also hardened ethnic identities and divisions: what are called ‘ancient hatreds’ usually turn out to be offshoots of colonial policies. History continues to dominate the present. Who can understand Middle Eastern politics today without knowing the manipulative policies of the British and the French during and after the collapse of the Ottoman empire? British administrators carved out the modern state of Iraq, drawing its boundaries in such a manner that all its huge oil reserves would belong to them and not the Turks, and denying the local puppet regime that they installed in Baghdad access to the sea by creating a buffer state called Kuwait. Every attempt since the early 1960s by the Iraqis and Iranians to nationalize their oil supplies and become democracies were met with force by the British and Americans in defence of their oil companies. Hunger for resources and geostrategic dominance continue to be driving forces behind many contemporary conflicts.

John Stuart Mill wrote the classic essay on humanitarian intervention in 1859, in the aftermath of an event that British historians used to call The Indian Mutiny and Indian historians the First War of Independence. An uprising of Indian soldiers in the ranks of the British East India Company’s army quickly spread throughout north and central India and was eventually put down by the British with extreme violence. It led, ironically, to the dissolution of the East India Company and the formal annexation of India by the British Crown. Mill’s essay was a well-timed apologia for British imperial rule. He argued that Britain’s uniqueness in the world lay in the fact that, while every other nation acts out of selfish motives - for military or commercial gain, the British act out of benevolence. Their overriding concern is the benefit of the natives, their conquests intended to share with the latter the divine blessings of liberty, the rule of law, free trade and markets:

‘Any attempt [this nation] makes to exert influence over them, even by persuasion, is rather in the service of others, than of itself: to mediate in the quarrels which break out between foreign States, to arrest obstinate civil wars, to reconcile belligerents, to intercede for mild treatment of the vanquished, or, finally, to procure the abandonment of some national crime and scandal to humanity, such as the slave-trade. Not only does this nation desire no benefit to itself at the expense of others, it desires none in which all others do not as freely participate... If the aggressions of barbarians force it to a successful war, and its victorious arms put it in a position to command liberty of trade, whatever it demands for itself it demands for all mankind.’²

² John Stuart Mill, ‘A Few Words on Non-Intervention’, *Collected Works: XXI: Essays on Equality, Law and Education* (1859, to be found at

It is interesting to read Mill and other apologists of past empire alongside the new apologists of empire. For instance, Michael Ignatieff, Director of the Carr Centre at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, in a *New York Times Magazine* cover story, wrote: 'America's empire is not like the empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man's burden...The twenty-first century imperium is a new invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known.'³

It is an occupational hazard of intellectuals like Mill and Ignatieff that, in their aspiration to be seen in the vanguard of progress, they deceive themselves by the power of their own rhetoric. All empires in history have camouflaged their brutality behind hi-faluting talk about a 'civilizing mission'. The Romans boasted of the *Pax Romana*, and the British and French imitated their language in the colonies they ruled. Even Hitler and Lenin spoke powerfully of democracy, freedom, of bringing peace to ethnically divided societies, and were able to impress many intellectuals and woo them to their cause. When the Japanese fascists were conquering China and carrying out huge atrocities like the Nanking Massacre, they claimed to be creating an 'earthly paradise' in which the peoples of Asia would work together. Japan would protect them from the Communist 'bandits' and would sacrifice itself for their benefit so they would all have peace and prosperity.⁴

Historical amnesia is what we are up against, in our educational systems no less than in the media. Many American Christians are brought up on myths about the superiority of their political institutions and America's anti-imperial 'essence'. Hence the political naïveté that marks so much of US church life and 'Christian' college education. Many find it impossible to believe that they may be ruled by an oligarchy, and so they support illegal aggression and sit idle while the constitutional safeguards against arbitrary executive power are shredded by their 'born again' President. They cannot see connections between, say, the US involvement in today's Iraq or Venezuela and the way that Texas and large parts of Mexico were annexed in the 1840s in order to wrest the monopoly of cotton- which was the nineteenth-century industrial revolution's equivalent of oil- from the British, their main enemy at the time.

Historical amnesia is also why we never talk about President Kennedy's use of chemical weapons against South Vietnam in 1962 but only of Saddam Hussein's use of them (procured with the help of Western companies) against the Kurds. Why has Henry Kissinger not been arraigned before a War Crimes tribunal for prosecuting a secret, undeclared war against Laos in 1971? If Srebrenica 1995 can become a symbol of crimes against humanity, why not the Russian army's assault on Groszny in 1999 or the American army's actions in Falujua in 2004?

http://oll.libertyfund.org:81/Texts/MillJS0172/works/vol21/PDFs/0223.21_Pf11_Non-Intervention.pdf

³ Michael Ignatieff, *New York Times Magazine*, 5 January 2003. See also Ignatieff, *Empire Lite* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)

⁴ See Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Pantheon, 1969)

The only war crimes schoolchildren learn about are those of their defeated foes, not of the victors. The furore raised in China and Korea over the ‘whitewashing’ in Japanese school textbooks of Japanese atrocities during the Second World War has been widely covered in the British and American media. But the latter have been largely silent over the massive scale of war crimes the British and American airforces committed against German and Japanese civilian populations in that same war. The story is only now being told of how heavily-populated cities were intentionally targeted by the Allies for ‘saturation bombing’. For instance, four months before the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, most of Tokyo was razed to the ground in a hellish firestorm generated by sustained American bombing. More than one hundred thousand people lost their lives. Tokyo was selected as a target precisely because it was very densely populated and made mostly of wood. The bombing of densely populated urban centres, even when there were no military targets, was removed from the category of war crimes at the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, simply because the Allies did it much more than the Axis powers.

Often we are victims of deliberate disinformation. Winston Churchill observed in a private paper submitted to his cabinet colleagues in January 1914:

‘We are not a young people with *an innocent record and* a scanty inheritance. We have engrossed to ourselves... *an altogether disproportionate* share of the wealth and traffic of the world. We have got all we want in territory, and our claim to be left in the unmolested employment of vast and splendid possessions, *mainly acquired by violence, largely maintained by force*, often seems less reasonable to others than to us.’

However when Churchill made the paper public in the 1920s, in his book *The World Crisis*, he deliberately removed the italicized phrases which would have offended his reading public.⁵

Since 1998 terrorism has been responsible for nearly 20,000 fatalities globally; and since the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 not a day passes when the global media does not report on the insurgency in that country. Meanwhile, conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo is estimated to have caused nearly 4 million deaths, some 7% of the population, the vast majority from malnutrition and disease. In Sudan a two-decade long civil war between the north and the south claimed more than 2 million lives and displaced 6 million people. As that conflict ended, a new state-sponsored humanitarian tragedy erupted in the western region of Darfur. It has claimed victims on a scale that dwarfs the threats facing rich nations, yet it flickers only intermittently on our television screens.

The Human Costs of Conflict

The full costs of conflict cannot be captured by statistics alone (and, in any case, data are often least reliable in countries undergoing violent conflict). The immediate human costs, though enormous, represent a small fraction of the price countries pay for conflict. In protracted conflicts, whole generations of children and youth are brutalized by the effects of war. Families and communities pass on the trauma of rape, looting and violent deaths to posterity. Natural habitats are devastated, food production and local markets are disrupted, leading to widespread malnutrition and undermining gains made in health and education.

⁵ Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Sevenson, 1994) p.132

According to the UN Human Development Report of 2005, nine of the 18 countries whose Human Development Index (HDI) declined in the 1990s experienced conflict in the same period. Per capita incomes and life expectancy fell in virtually all of these countries. About 25 million people are currently internally displaced because of conflict or human rights violations. Nine of the 10 countries ranked at the bottom of the human development index (HDI) have experienced violent conflict at some point since 1990.⁶

The nature and geography of conflict have changed. At the start of the twenty-first century most conflicts are *within* states, rather than between them, and most victims are civilians, rather than soldiers. Of the 3 million deaths worldwide related to violent conflict since 1990, children account for about 2 million. Even though the number of conflicts is falling, today's wars last longer. Also, poorer nations are more prone to conflict. While in the period 1946-89 low-income countries accounted for just over one-third of all conflicts, during 1990-2003 low-income countries accounted for more than half of the territories that experienced violent conflict. Nearly 40% of the conflicts are in Africa, including several of the bloodiest of the last decade and a half. The UN Development Report, cited earlier, states categorically: 'Few things in the future are certain. But one certainty is that preventing and resolving conflict and seizing opportunities for post-conflict reconstruction would demonstrably accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.'⁷

The Report also draws out the connexions between poverty and recent wars: 'Infectious disease, hunger and environmental degradation are still far bigger killers than armed conflict and each of these killers is both a cause and an effect of violent conflict. While there is no automatic link between poverty and civil conflict, violent outcomes are more likely in societies marked by deep polarization, weak institutions and chronic poverty.'⁸

Violent conflict gives rise to chain reactions that extend the suffering of ordinary people. Schoolteachers and medical personnel flee conflict areas, thereby worsening the conditions for those left behind. The latter have no option but to join rebel groups or volunteer for the army in the hope of scraping a meagre living. One survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone found that an overwhelming majority of those who joined the brutal rebellions were youths who had been living in difficult conditions prior to the onset of the war. Based on interviews with 1,000 ex-combatants, the survey found that half had left school because they could not afford the fees or because the school had shut down.⁹ A slowing economy and an uncertain security environment represent powerful disincentives for investment, domestic and foreign, and a powerful incentive for capital flight on the part of local elites.

Women and children are especially vulnerable. Women suffer the brutality of rape and abuse, both during and after conflict. In recent years mass rape during war has been documented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda. Many of these women continue to suffer from serious long-term trauma that is compounded by ostracization at the hands of family and the wider community. It is now recognized that

⁶ *United Nations Human Development Report 2005* (New York: UNDP, 2005), p.154

⁷ *Ibid.* p.151

⁸ *Ibid.* p.152

⁹ Cited in *Ibid.* p.159

violence against women is an institutionalized strategy adopted by warring factions, including government forces, in many situations of conflict.

The Challenge of Conflict-Prone States

Many of the African states that resulted from the colonial ‘carve-up’ of Africa and the subsequent dissolution of the British, French and Belgian empires, are landlocked, with limited possibilities for trade. They may boast all the accoutrements of a modern nation-state (a national airline, a large standing army- albeit poorly equipped and trained), but they lack much of what we expect of modern states: the rule of law, educated electorates, an independent judiciary, territorial control, effective tax-collection mechanisms, the management of public resources and the provision of basic services for its citizens. Such dysfunctional states are prone to deploying violence against their own people; or, lacking political authority, become safe havens for warlords, rebel factions from neighbouring countries and criminal networks involved in drug trafficking and arms running.

Once started, conflicts can spill over into neighbouring states, undermining security and creating cross-border cycles of violence. The West African regional war that began in Liberia in 1989, migrated to Sierra Leone, returned to Liberia (where it undermined a disarmament process in 1997) and then moved into Guinea. In September 2002 combatants from Liberia and Sierra Leone were involved in the fighting that erupted in Cote d’Ivoire.

Conflict-prone states are often enormously rich in resources. This has led some development economists to speak of these countries as suffering from the ‘resource curse’. The combination of weak governance and huge natural resources that offer the promise of speedy lucre to those who control their production and export is a major cause of violent conflicts. Between 1990 and 2002 the world saw at least 17 such conflicts in which natural resource wealth was a primary factor. Diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone, timber and diamonds in Liberia, gems in Afghanistan, and copper, gold, cobalt and timber in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have all been at the centre of civil conflict. In Cambodia the Khmer Rouge insurgency was financed in large measure by exports of timber. Angola boasts the second largest oil reserves in Africa and the fourth largest diamond reserves in the world. But it ranks 160 of 177 countries on the HDI, with a life expectancy of 40 years. Its massive natural wealth was used to fuel a civil war that killed or maimed 1 million people between 1975 and 2002 and left another 4 million internally displaced.¹⁰

An independent panel of experts reported to the UN Security Council in October 2002 of how 85 transnational companies based in Europe, the United States and South Africa (including household names such as Barclays bank, De Beers and Anglo-American) had transgressed ethical guidelines in dealing with criminal networks that have pillaged natural resources from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A scramble for gold, diamonds, cobalt and copper by army officers, government officials and entrepreneurs from the Congo and neighbouring countries generated billions of dollars that found their way to mining companies and financial institutions. The report named an additional 29 companies and 54 individuals, mostly African and Belgian, which it said were directly involved in the plunder. So ‘lucrative and elaborate’ was the plunder that there were attempts to prolong the fighting by stirring conflict between rival militias and rebels. These elite criminal networks, comprising military officers,

¹⁰ Ibid. p.167

government officials and businessmen had ‘built up a self-financing war economy centred on mineral exploitation’.¹¹

The UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change warned in 2004 that, in an interdependent world, collective security cannot be developed on a purely national basis.¹² People in rich countries are directly linked to communities in poor countries where lives are being devastated by conflict. International drug trafficking and illicit arms transfers provide the financing and the weapons that fuel violent conflicts. The steady exodus of refugees puts enormous pressure on the infrastructure of neighbouring countries which are as poor as those involved in the conflict. The entry of refugees and asylum-seekers on the doorstep of the rich fuels the racist elements in rich nations and lead to a breakdown in community relations. The fortunes of those who make huge profits from war and local conflicts are often stored in the international banking system owned and controlled by the rich nations of the world, or in tax havens which are protectorates of the US and Britain. So tackling local conflicts usually requires a coordinated global response.

An International Response

Violent conflict seems a perennial feature of the ‘fallen’ human condition, and will not be eradicated until the final triumph of the Reign of God. But we are called to bear witness to the presence of that peaceable Kingdom, inaugurated through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, through concrete actions that proclaim God’s will for justice and reconciliation among peoples. There is indeed much that we can do to transform the conditions that act as incentives to violence and war-making.

Overcoming Poverty. Overcoming poverty not only saves millions of lives, but makes more amenable to peaceful resolution the social and economic tensions that create conflict. Freedom from fear and freedom from want are twin aspects of human freedom that cannot be separated. Yet there is a very real danger that the rhetoric surrounding the so-called ‘war on terror’ is distorting national priorities in many countries. It is being employed to justify the brutal violation of human rights, the curtailment of civil liberties, and military responses to problems that arise from social and economic injustice (as in Nepal and Aceh until recently).

The US invasion of Iraq, and the continuing ‘counter-insurgency’ operations in that country have cost to date more than the combined GNI of most of sub-Saharan Africa. It is the US taxpayer who paid for the military-corporate system of weapons manufacturers and technology companies that destroyed Iraq. And it is the same taxpayer who now pays those companies allied with the Bush regime to re-build Iraq! There is a massive transfer of wealth from the general US population into the pockets of corporate CEOs who earn, at the latest estimate, 262 times what the average US worker earns annually. Is this how American capitalism actually works? And, if so, why are other nations coaxed and coerced into accepting it as the most ‘efficient’ and ‘rational’ system around?

¹¹ ‘Multinationals Scramble for Congo’s Wealth’, *Guardian Weekly*, October 31- November 6, 2002, p.25

¹² *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (New York: UN Dept of Information, 2004) <http://www.un.org/secureworld/report2.pdf>

Whenever foreign aid is delivered into conflict-prone environments it can exacerbate tensions between groups- as happened in Rwanda and is happening again in Afghanistan. Development assistance benefiting one sector of the population and ignoring others can fuel resentment and deepen structural violence. Foreign NGOs that bypass governmental agencies in a paternalistic approach to development ('You are corrupt and wasteful, so will do everything ourselves') can unwittingly contribute to long-term instability by failing to help governments do what only they can do.

Breaking the Resource Curse. The UN Report cited earlier points out that while national governments must shoulder the main responsibility for effective governance of natural resources, much can be done internationally to sever the link between violent conflict and natural resources. The challenge is to increase transparency and reduce the corrupt practices of both national governments and transnational corporations in the oil, timber and mining industries. In Angola more than 30 transnational oil companies have paid the government for rights to exploit oil, without disclosing either to Angolans or to their shareholders how much they paid or to whom. In the Caspian region oil exploitation rights are governed by multinational partnership agreements between governments and foreign investors. These have all been negotiated in secret, but have now become a target of special investigation in US courts. It is difficult to prosecute a transnational company headquartered in one country for corrupt practices in another country. But other major economies can follow the US lead and strengthen their laws to make corruption by transnational companies overseas a crime at home. 'Lack of transparency weakens government accountability and can exacerbate the underlying distrust that fuels conflict'.¹³

The Report also notes that proper certification can be used to 'restrict consumer access to illegal products by informing potential buyers and custom authorities of the legal standing of commodities'. In early 2000 southern African governments led efforts to prevent the export of 'conflict' diamonds from Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The outcome was the Kimberley process- 'a scheme under which importing and transit countries agree not to take rough diamonds whose legal status is not confirmed by an official certificate. It is still too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the process, but indications are that it has had some success; it now covers 42 countries and almost all global production of rough diamonds.'¹⁴

Controlling the Trade in Small Arms. Many of the fifty million dead of the wars that have followed the Second World War have been killed by the cheap, mass-produced assault rifle. So abundant are cheap weapons, especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, that even societies emerging from decades of conflict (such as South Africa and El Salvador) experience continuing violence as the availability of small arms facilitates political and criminal violence.

There are no fully reliable estimates for the number of small arms in circulation. One authoritative source puts the figure at 639 million.¹⁵ Global production of small arms runs at

¹³ *UN Human Development Report 2005*, op.cit. p.172

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Small Arms Survey 2002: Counting the Human Cost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

7-8 million pieces a year, some 1 million of them military-style weapons. The United States, Russia and China dominate production, but there are at least 27 other significant sources of supply. Worldwide at least 1,249 companies in 92 countries are involved. The largest exporters of the arms that eventually claim innocent lives in the world's poorest countries are the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

What the world lacks is a comprehensive international arms trade treaty that establishes legally binding agreements on arms brokering and common standards on enforcement. The present arrangements are not legally binding, and they focus solely on illicit arms rather than on state-authorized transfers. The lack of effective end-user certification is a major loophole. States can buy weapons from sources with less than scrupulous reporting procedures. Countries also require better stockpile management and security procedures to reduce weapons pilferage. While it is now more difficult for governments to authorize arms transfers to regimes that do not respect basic human rights, a recipient government's willingness to sign up for the 'war on terrorism' can often override scrutiny of its human rights record.

The 2006 UN Small Arms Review Conference - which brought together 2,000 delegates from governments and civil society organizations for two expensive weeks in New York in order to review the implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action - ended in disarray. Powerful gun-lobbies and arms-exporting states overrode the desires of the majority. And, ironically, the Chair of the conference was the ambassador to the UN of a country that has made minimal progress in curbing the spread of small arms among criminal gangs and paramilitary groups- namely, Sri Lanka.

We should not, however, delude ourselves that the progressive restriction of arms production and distribution will *of itself* rid the world of war. Disarmament is a necessary step in that direction, and in those regions where significant arms control and reductions in the size of armed forces have been achieved, the likelihood of war has indeed receded. However, those who want weapons will usually acquire them - by improvisation, bribery or via the black market. Machete-wielding mobs were largely responsible for the carnage in Rwanda in 1994, and the hijackers of 9-11 were armed with nothing more sophisticated than box-cutters and penknives.

Caring for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. The movement of peoples caused by violent conflict or environmental degradation is one of the biggest challenges facing the world community in the present century. People who would otherwise seek safety in neighbouring states are more frequently compelled to remain within the borders of their own country, most often in similar conditions to refugees. Internal displacement is one of the world community's biggest failures in terms of humanitarian action. There are now some 25 million internally displaced people who do not fall under the 1951 Refugee Convention but who cannot live in their own homes.

Rich nations are leaning towards disproportionate approaches to the undoubted abuses of their immigration systems. Instead of addressing those abuses governments are increasingly abolishing justice and due process, thereby criminalizing men and women who are not terrorists but victims of terror.

Building Regional Capacity for Conflict-Resolution. Neighbouring countries usually have an immediate interest in minimizing conflict, since it can block their trade routes or create an influx of refugees. 'The problem is that the poorest countries facing the gravest regional

security challenges lack the financial and institutional capacity to mount an effective response. Building that capacity is a vital art of building a more secure world.’¹⁶ In April 2004 the African Union, along with the European Union and the United States, mediated a ceasefire agreement between the Sudanese government and rebels in Darfur. But its mission to oversee the ceasefire is constrained by a lack of financial support from developed countries.

‘Most fragile states are trapped in cycles of temporary ceasefires and resumed conflict: half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse into violence within five years. Breaking the cycle requires decisive action to seize the opportunities that peace creates by providing security, rebuilding institutions and supporting social and economic recovery... Peace settlements are typically followed by surges of humanitarian aid, which soon dry up, leaving large gaps in state capacity to meet basic needs’.¹⁷

Exposing the Hypocrisies of the Powerful. In the light of Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Falluja, the other horrors of the Iraq war, and the continuing revelations about so-called ‘extraordinary renditions’- a fancy phrase for kidnapping and torture- it is impossible for many in the Muslim world to accept that talk about the ‘rule of law’ and ‘human rights’ on the part of the US is anything more than self-serving hypocrisy. The real test of our commitment to democracy and human rights is when the espousal of these ideas contradicts our own military and commercial interests. The US and UK have repeatedly failed this test.

Seven years ago, the American ‘establishment pundit’, Samuel Huntington, warned that much of the world regards the United States as a ‘rogue superpower’, and ‘the single greatest external threat to their societies’.¹⁸ He was criticizing the Clinton administration’s policies that were leading other countries to build up coalitions against United States hegemony. A rogue state is one that openly flouts international law, and commits aggression against other states. It is extremely difficult for many American Christians to understand this perspective, and most simply dismiss any such talks as ‘anti-Americanism’. However, the US has repeatedly sought to undermine the authority of the United Nations Organization and has refused to recognize the authority of the International Criminal Court to try any American citizen. It has openly breached the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention on Torture, to both of which the US is a signatory. Even before 9-11, the US was spending more on ‘defence’ than the rest of the world put together. While all the signatories to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons have violated the terms of that agreement, the US has gone further: since 9-11, it has resumed the development of more advanced, tactical nuclear warheads for battle-field use, and is actively pursuing the militarization of space.¹⁹ It has supported Israel’s acquisition of such weapons. Yet it is Iran and North Korea who are ostracized by the US and its allies and harangued in the Western media.

¹⁶ *UN Human Development Report*, op.cit., p.174

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.175

¹⁸ *Foreign Affairs*, 78, No.2 (Mar-Apr 1999), cited in Noam Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations on the Post-9/11 World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005) p.62

¹⁹ John Steinbrunner and Nancy Gallagher, *Daedalus* 133, no.3, summer 2004, cited in Noam Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions*, *Ibid.* p.168

It has long been the official US National Security Strategy, but only made explicit during the Bush administration, that the US reserves for itself alone the right to carry out military attacks against countries it regards as a potential security threat. In recent years the Bush administration has extended this to include states 'harbouring terrorists'. Which states harbour terrorists? Many Central and South American states can easily point out several thousand terrorists who have found refuge in the US, especially in Florida. They have often been funded and armed by the CIA.

Undemocratic regimes have used the language of the 'war on terror' to pursue their own repressive policies, secure in the belief that their excesses would be ignored. New laws and detention practices have been introduced in a significant number of countries, all broadly justified by the new international war on terrorism. They are used to suppress political dissent and to stifle expression of opinion of many who have no link to terrorism. Majority rule by itself, and legality on its own, are insufficient to ensure a civil and just society. Hence the need to strengthen international law and to insist that no state should be allowed to regard itself as an exception to the rule of law.

Rethinking the Just War Tradition

We are heirs to an ancient and rich tradition of Christian reflection on war and peace, known as Just War theory, and to which I personally subscribe. But traditions have always to be interpreted and formulated afresh in changing contexts, local and global, and the Just War tradition is no exception. Post-World War II theological reflection on the just war criteria of *proportionality* and *discrimination* in the conduct of warfare (*jus in bello*) has paid a great deal of attention to weapons of mass destruction. The great majority of Christian just war theorists would rule out the development and deployment of such weapons and call for their universal prohibition.

However, the issue of who decides and how that going to war is justified (*jus ad bellum*) has received comparatively less attention. The tradition asserts that a fundamental criterion for a war to be just is that it is embarked upon by a 'legitimate authority', i.e. a sovereign government. While the tradition did insist on the importance of both the individual conscience of those who fight and the prudence and truthfulness of the sovereign who prosecutes a just war, it has tended towards a presumption of deference to the wiser judgments of the civil authority. The question of who has the right to use force has overshadowed considerations about how decisions to go to war are made and by whom. It also assumes a pre-modern, top-down model of political authority.

The moral theologian Oliver O'Donovan has argued that political and military leaders in a time of war are responsible for a 'certain articulate precision in the account they give of the wrong they propose to remedy, for the way the situation is described determines the shape of the enactment which may remedy it.'²⁰

O'Donovan's call for 'articulate precision' on the part of political and military authorities goes to the heart of the moral dilemmas surrounding war and conflict in an age of political 'spin doctors', media 'hype', mass propaganda and what has been called the 'manufacture of

²⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.51-2

consent'. Weapons of mass deception employed by national governments raise moral questions as challenging as those posed by weapons of mass destruction. There is now ample evidence, for instance, that senior American government officials knowingly manipulated intelligence data to 'sell' the Iraq war to the American people, and to persuade their allies to join them.²¹ The Bush administration chose to ignore the warnings of its own nuclear weapons experts, as well as the official report of the International Atomic Energy Agency, that Iraq had no demonstrable WMD programme, and instead deployed forged documents, 'doctored' satellite photographs and skilful rhetoric to stir up panic among the American people and to persuade them that Saddam Hussein was the greatest threat not only to the US but to world peace.²²

The infamous Downing Street Memo leaked by a British civil servant in May 2005 revealed the scepticism on the part of British foreign intelligence of the tactics and intentions of the US government. The chief of Britain's MI6, having returned in the summer of 2002 from discussions in Washington with top American officials said that the Bush administration had already decided 'to remove Saddam, through military action' and that the 'intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy'.²³ All that was left was to find a means of 'justifying' the war by 'the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.' Moreover, those in Washington were contemptuous of the UN, despite putting on a public face of support, and seemed little interested in the aftermath of the war. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, also chose to ignore the warnings that war was being promoted on unreliable evidence, and added his own brand of self-righteous rhetoric to that of Bush, Rumsfeld and Powell.

The capacity of citizens to judge the legality and morality of war depends crucially on access to information. Deceit undermines the trust in public discourse that is at the heart of a democratic polity. In the case of deception in order to justify going to war, it prevents the accurate assessment of risks and benefits and forecloses alternative courses of action. Lies beget more lies and tarnish irrevocably the integrity of governments that lie to their citizens.

²¹ For a comprehensive examination of the US government's claims about the Iraq threat prior to the invasion, see John Prados, *Hoodwinked: The Documents That Revealed How Bush Sold Us a War* (New York: New Press, 2004)

²² For example, President George Bush's statements on the eve of the war: 'Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.' Also, 'The [Iraq] regime has... aided, trained, and harboured terrorists, including operatives of al Qa'ida.' - from 'President says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours: Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation', March 17 2003: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/print/20030317-7.html>. For a summary of the work of the Iraq Survey Group, which found no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, see http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004. For the 9-11 Commission's rejection of the Saddam-al Qa'ida connection, see *The 9-11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: Norton 2004) pp.228-9

²³ For a copy of the Downing Street Memo and an analysis of its implications, see Mark Danner, 'The Secret Way to War', *New York Review of Books*, June 9, 2005

They destroy the self-government of free and equal citizens and reinforce popular feelings of alienation and powerlessness.

All political lying, whether in totalitarian or democratic polities, is manifest violence: violence against reality through its systematic denial or distortion, and violence against the rights and capacity of the ordinary citizen to make intelligent choices on the best possible information. The intellectuals churning out policy papers in government-funded think-tanks squeeze reality to fit their theories of the world, thus sanctioning the actions of their political paymasters.

Thus, the *jus ad bellum* criteria should be strengthened to incorporate a *democratic* understanding of what constitutes a 'legitimate authority'. There must be a public commitment to truth-seeking and truthful speech on the part of any political authority, which would naturally involve the active encouragement of counter-evidence and counter-voices to those in government. The counter-evidence and counter-voices may come from beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. All governments have to recognize the limits posed to national sovereignty by our belonging to a family of nation-states under international law and human rights norms- so that no war in today's world can be prosecuted by a cavalier dismissal of the authority of the United Nations and other global institutions set up precisely to curb the unilateral tendencies of states. A government that failed to fulfil such a requirement would fail the *jus ad bellum* test of legitimacy.

Also troubling is the deeply anti-Christian, binary language of conflict invoked by political leaders in times of war and violent conflict- for instance, the 'evil enemy' and the 'innocent us'. 'Most soldiers do not "kill", instead the enemy was knocked over, wasted, greased, taken out, and mopped up. The enemy is hosed, zapped, probed, and fired on. The enemy's humanity is denied, and he becomes a strange beast called a Kraut, Jap, Reb, Yank, dink, slant, or slope.'²⁴ The more the enemy is caricatured and dehumanized, the easier it is to kill him. The less the sacrifice involved in killing him, the greater the risk that the soldier may take pleasure in the task. The just war criteria were developed by Christian theologians since Augustine precisely out of the profound conviction of our own sinfulness, so that we need to set up restraints in *both* directions, against evil and against the evil with which we restrain evil. The pervasiveness and self-deceptiveness of sin, even among the victims, deconstructs all such linguistic binaries. Reconciliation with the enemy is the ultimate goal of any use of armed force.

The Just War tradition is also profoundly challenged by the recent development of what the British sociologist of war, Martin Shaw, has called 'the new Western way of war'.²⁵ The development of long-range delivery systems (high-altitude aerial bombing and cruise missiles launched from offshore warships) has meant that the US and its allies can now fight wars with minimal face-to-face combat. Shaw speaks of this as 'risk transfer' wars: the *deliberate and systematic transfer* of the risks in warfare from Western military personnel to local soldiers and civilians. It employs new ways of controlling the media, including 'embedding' reporters, so that the narrative of war is written from the perspective of Western forces and

²⁴ David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995) p.92

²⁵ Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War* (London: Polity, 2005)

the views of opponents are suppressed. In this way, risks have been transferred from politicians to their soldiers, then on to foreign soldiers and finally to non-combatants. This is more than ‘collateral damage’: in their strategic planning, the risk to Western soldiers is weighted more heavily than to others, including civilians. Casualties among the latter only matter if they occasion hostile media coverage and political fallout. This, as Shaw points out, is a deliberate inversion of the rules of proportionality and discrimination in the *jus in bello* criteria. According to the latter, it is armed combatants who must bear the risks entailed in reducing harm to non-combatants; and the means deployed must be proportionate to the initiating aggression that is being redressed.

Should we, therefore, rework the Just War tradition towards a ‘presumption of nonviolence’? This does not rule out the use of military force and the taking of human life in self-defence, resisting aggression or in preventing genocide. But it would put the burden of proof on protagonists of force to justify why the use of force in a particular instance is an exception to the rule. It would entail a more rigorous commitment to diplomacy, international co-operation and the pursuit of war by means other than force (e.g. selective economic sanctions that target the military-industrial capacity of the aggressor).

Those of us who favour humanitarian interventions in principle, and yet were opposed from the outset (through the application of *jus ad bellum* criteria) to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, cannot evade the thorny dilemmas of the new world order. While we are wary of the unilateral exercise of power, would we not have been grateful to see *anyone* intervening unilaterally in Rwanda in 1994 to stop the slaughter of Tutsis, just as we welcomed the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia to depose Pol Pot and the Indian army’s support for East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) against a ravaging Pakistani army? These actions were roundly condemned in the West at the time, yet they were genuine humanitarian interventions, and both Vietnam and India were also directly affected by what was happening in their neighbours.

Furthermore, who is the ‘we’ who have the capacity and responsibility to avert future catastrophes like Bosnia or Rwanda? Who is the ‘we’ that should decide to take action or stand aside? Who is intended by the term ‘the international community’ if it is not the United Nations and its agencies? The UN has its failings and critics, but its modest achievements must not be ignored.²⁶ Without its machinery, and the powers given to it by international consent in its Charter, the world would find it harder to avert, control and limit war than it is.

The main problem with the UN is neither corruption nor lack of legitimacy, but the fact that it was conceived in a world of sovereign states, a world where the overriding concern of the post-World War II settlement was the guarantee of the inviolability of national borders and sovereignty. But we have noted that today’s world is one where wars happen typically *within* states. Whole populations, or minorities within populations, need assistance against their own despotic governments. Thus the UN Charter’s emphasis on the inviolability of sovereign states poses a conundrum. Moreover, lacking an armed police force of its own, and often

²⁶ Not only have its various agencies played an indispensable role in tackling global poverty, helping refugees, fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic and restricting trade in small arms; but the UN weapons inspection process in Iraq actually succeeded in ridding that country of WMDs- a fact quickly forgotten and not acknowledged by those who went to war because they alleged that the UN process was ineffective!

hamstrung by the chronic lack of funds and use of the veto by the permanent members of its Security Council, its peace-making and peace-keeping abilities have been severely curtailed.

The political health of the USA is of great importance to the well-being of the rest of the world. However, the US seems to have lost all credibility as an influence for good. Despite the touching faith in its institutions that many American Christians still show, the fact is that the US today is a poor example of democratic values for the rest of the world. Its newspapers and television, with very rare exceptions, have been bullied into acquiescence and have allowed the executive to ride roughshod over the law and violate human rights with impunity. It has been left to groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to do what the Church and investigative journalism in the US should have been doing. But there is no substitute super-power on the horizon. Japan, the European Union and China may come to rival the US in economic power, and the US in turn is heavily dependent on Japan and China for the strength of the US dollar and the financial undergirding of its military adventures abroad; but they cannot provide what sometimes only the US can. China, with its growing energy demands, is wooing the worst regimes around the world and is more deaf than the US to human rights concerns at home and abroad. When Washington drags its feet, as it did in Rwanda and is doing over Darfur today, no one else takes its place.

There are no blueprints for preventing or resolving violent conflicts around the globe. We are a world in transition, searching for new forms of political organization, as empires and nation-states become less relevant as well as lose legitimacy. We can view the European Union as an experiment in governance which has yet no name (it is neither a federal state nor a confederation of states) and whose outcome is in doubt. The early Church, as an egalitarian, multinational, socially inclusive *ekklesia*, in which the weakest members were to be the most honoured, stood as a radical antithesis to the politics of both empire and republic. But in the ensuing centuries it was quickly co-opted by empires and republics, and even took on the characteristics of empire in many of its manifestations. If as Christians we are to contribute to the quest for a more just and peaceable world, can we proclaim the Good News of the Reign of God without a decisive repudiation of all those forms of disunity, chauvinisms, fundamentalisms, greed and petty 'empire-building' that still distort the face of Christ in his Body, the Church? Isn't this the challenge of integral mission today?

'The role of the church in the transformation of society and its democratic reconstruction does not derive from any political power which it may have, but from the redemptive power of the Cross, the message of repentance, forgiveness, reparation and reconciliation.'²⁷

²⁷ John W. De Gruchy, 'Confessing theology' in John De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Eds.), *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) p.169