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MILITARY TECHNOLOGY - TOO DESTRUCTIVE

In two world wars which both started in Europe, both victors and vanquished in Europe suffered grievously and gained little or nothing. (Seven million deaths in WW1 and 55 million deaths in WW2. Enormous destruction of cities and countryside.) As a result of their experience, Europeans are most unlikely to go to war again against each other. But neither Western nor Eastern Europe fully trusts the other to be rational, so each side has made preparations, including nuclear bombs, to deter and repulse any attack by the other. This preparedness and the terrifying destructiveness of war have kept the peace in Europe.

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The nature of modern conventional weapons makes wars devastating and ruinous even between unequal middle-sized countries like Iran (pop: 54 mil/area: 1.65 mil sq km; 1979 GNP: US$82 bil) and Iraq (pop: 18 mil/area: 430,000 sq km; 1979 GNP: US$35 bil). Over a million people died, including civilians far removed from the battlefront. Many towns and cities were destroyed. Apart from loss of life, which is irreplaceable, it will cost US$30-40 billion for each side to repair the damage suffered.

Because only the major powers could supply the sophisticated weaponry, they were able to influence the outcome. Neither side was allowed to win. But this does not mean that the Iran-Iraq war may not be resumed. However, if countries like Iran and Iraq go through several such wars with inconclusive results but massive loss of life and property, then even middle-sized countries will conclude that war as an instrument of national policy does not pay.

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Even superpowers, like the Americans in Vietnam and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, were unable to subjugate and subdue smaller countries where the people were determined to oppose them, through guerrilla forces which are supported by the people and armed by the opposing superpower. Indeed in Cambodia, guerrillas with only modest arms support from China and even less from some ASEAN countries prevented Vietnam's military occupation from

being successful and have forced a withdrawal. Both in Afghanistan and in Cambodia, guerrilla resistance plus international diplomatic support, isolated the occupying Soviet in the Afghanistan and occupying Vietnamese in Cambodia. Both found their efforts led to a painful waste of lives and resources. Eventually they had to withdraw.

Pakistan is the more secure today because it supported the Mujahideen and allowed US weapons to flow through Pakistan to help the guerrillas drive out Soviet forces. So, also, Thailand is safer today, because successive governments from Prime Minister General Kriangsak in 1978 to General Prem in 1980 to General Chatichai in 1988, have protected Thailand's interest by policies designed to ensure that Vietnamese troops have to withdraw from Cambodia.

It will take some time for all these lessons to sink home, but eventually these lessons will be learnt. Meanwhile, to ensure peace, it is necessary to have armed forces to maintain a credible deterrence. There must be a real danger to the aggressor of getting bogged down in a protracted and unwinnable conflict. Potential aggressors must see that it is not worthwhile.

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Weapons are ever more accurate and longer in range. So the destruction that each combatant can inflict on the other especially on civilians, plus, in the

last resort chemical weapons for the poor, and nuclear weapons for the powerful, will make wars unprofitable and unacceptable.

The danger, however, is that a great disparity in size may still make some wars profitable. For example if Iran or Iraq were to attack any of the wealthy Gulf Emirates with their small population and enormous oil wealth, like Kuwait, Qatar, the Emirates, and if the major powers do not intervene, war will be extremely profitable. It is because such aggressions will lead to great instability that the big powers have contrived a stalemate in the Iran-Iraq war. Thus aggression against the small Gulf States has become less likely, because the medium countries know that if they embark on it, the major powers are likely to intervene.

Unfortunately, not all governments in Southeast Asia accept these perceptions of the non-profitability of wars. Otherwise the Indo-Chinese peninsula would not have been at war continuously since 1945. So the region has suffered and may again suffer from irrational or ill-conceived behavior.

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In recent history, Thailand has been involved in wars with Burma on her west and Vietnam on her east. She has fought many wars with the Burmese, in

1568-1569, 1663-1664, 1760, 1765, 1766, 1774, 1774-1776, 1785. The wars stopped only after the British occupied Burma in the early 19th century.

Thailand has had less wars with Vietnam. There were hostilities 1832-1834, 1841-1845. Vietnam wanted to gain influence and control over Cambodia. After 1845, Cambodia came under the joint influence of both. Later the French intervened and occupied Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia).

The future is difficult to predict. There is no doubting Vietnam's prowess in waging war. She is the Prussia of Southeast Asia. Vietnam has been continually at war since 1945, against the French up to 1954; Americans up to 1975; they invaded and occupied Cambodia in 1978 and have yet to withdraw. She has been at war for so long that she has forgotten the arts of peace, and has not been able to make peace profitable.

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The Burmese have less exposure to modern science and technology because they have been more isolated from the outside world since independence in 1948. Their economy is thus technologically less advanced. Hence it is likely that Vietnam will become stronger because they will modernise their economy faster than Burma, especially if their refugees and boat people (about ¾ - 1 m),

many of whom have become successful entrepreneurs in the US, Europe (especially France) and Australia, return to invest.

FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE, AGGRESSION MUST NOT PAY

People and governments learn more from experience than from theory. If there is no profit from aggression, they will not commit the next act of aggression. When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978, she believed that with a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, she was safe from intervention from a bigger country like China; that in a few months, she would subdue Cambodia; that after a few years, the government she had installed in Phnom Penh would be accepted in the United Nations. She was wrong. The treaty with the Soviet Union did not prevent China from teaching her a lesson although at a high price in Chinese lives and resources.

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She failed to establish complete control of Cambodia even after 10 years, and the regime she installed in Phnom Penh is recognised only by the Soviet bloc and India. If Vietnam can get away with a partial settlement of the Cambodia problem and win through the peace process what she has failed to gain on the battlefield, then it means aggression is profitable. This will encourage aggression again sometime in the future.

Hence for the longer term peace and stability of Southeast Asia, Vietnam must not gain from her act of aggression. The solution most likely to lead to a peaceful future is a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia problem. If Hun Sen can win the right to rule Cambodia through fair and free elections, without controlling the administration, and without rigging the results, then he would have derived power through the support of the Cambodian people, not through Vietnamese force of arms. Any other way of leaving Hun Sen in charge would mean that aggression does pay.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MAKE GROWTH EVER BIGGER PIE, NO LONGER A ZERO SUM GAME

Scientific discoveries in agriculture, medicine and industrial production have made economic growth and plenty realisable for all countries. The only limit is the capacity of the earth to withstand the assaults of human intervention on its nature balance, through pollution as in acid rain, the green house effect through the burning of fossil fuels, of the destruction of the ozone layer over the Antarctic through use of CFC's.

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National (ODA, Exim Bank) and international institutions (FAO and WHO) exist, which can spread this knowledge, capital, expertise and experts to all countries that need and can benefit from them. New grains, fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides, new methods of animal husbandry, they can defeat hunger and privation. Famine over vast areas like the Sahel in West Africa has been defeated by world food stocks plus good transportation. Climatic setbacks like drought or floods need no longer be the disaster they used to be.

Furthermore, the MNCs are spreading industrialisation worldwide. With the help of international agencies like the IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, this process can be quickened through improving the infrastructure of developing countries especially in transport and communications, education and training.

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The lessons of the last 44 years since the end of World War II are simple and conclusive. The difference between the abundance of goods and services in America, Western Europe and Japan and their scarcity in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba is obvious. So is the great difference in the quality of life between the two blocs. Nobody can still doubt the superiority of the free market - free enterprise system over the

communist command economy after visiting North and South Korea, East and West Germany, China and Taiwan or Vietnam and Thailand.

There is no doubt that comparative advantage between different people occupying different lands, is best maximised by private enterprise working through the free market. In this way, goods are produced in countries best favoured to produce a particular kind of product. The products are transported and distributed to satisfy the needs of people even in the remotest parts of the world better than if people in these countries or those nearer them but without the same comparative advantage, had attempted to do so. In turn, these remote countries can concentrate on those products in which they have the comparative advantage and similarly reach the widest range of customers through the free market.

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But a first pre-condition for this to happen is the existence of peace and stability within and between countries. Only then can this comparative advantage be exploited. A second pre-condition is that within each country, the people have to establish a government which will enable constructive endeavour to be rewarded in commensurate manner.

The main obstacles to progress are those difficulties connected with how a people are to organise themselves, to ensure honest and efficient government which can provide education, training for their workers, health, housing, and investments to provide work which is rewarding. Some peoples cannot reconcile their differences of race, language, religion, or class. They cannot achieve the cohesiveness and the common interests to hold them together. Take for instance the tragedy of Lebanon - the failure of the Druze, the Shiites, the Sunnis, all Muslims, to control their hatreds for each other and for the Maronite Christians. They have created chaos. In chaos and disorder, nothing can be achieved. All the world's knowledge of science and technology plus capital and expertise, cannot bring peace and plenty to Lebanon.

The same is true for Sri Lanka. Such countries may have to depend on some external force with UN backing to intervene and subdue their warring factions. They may take decades, if not centuries, to recover from their self-inflicted wounds.

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It is also up to each country to put its own economic system right. Whether it is China, or the Soviet Union or Poland or Hungary, it is terribly difficult and painful to break up their non-competitive collective system with equality achieved at the lowest common level of effort, and to change over to a

system of free enterprise, with incentives and rewards through the free market, and workers rewarded differently in accordance with productivity. Only they can change their own systems. Other countries can help with advice and loans, but re-ordering the system they must do themselves.

More and more leaders in government recognise that war is no longer a profitable or rational instrument of policy. When international rules allow for free flow of goods, services, capital and information, and fair and free competition on the world marketplace is open to all, prosperity and plenty can come to those who are willing to participate in it, and be rewarded in accordance with their productivity.

The pace of economic growth and the level of economic attainment depends on their competitiveness. This in turn depends, amongst other things, on their natural resources, capital invested in infrastructure and machinery and other productive equipment, and their capacity to learn and to use knowledge and skills. Other things being equal, a people who are better educated and better organised will out-perform the other. Indeed, even when other things are not equal, as is the case of Japan compared to the USA or EC countries, the Japanese by sheer concentration on education, knowledge, skills, teamwork and productivity, have out-performed the USA and EC, both with richer natural

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resources. In this era of information technology and knowledge-based industries, the advantage lies with those people who are avid and fast learners, who are flexible and willing to change and adapt to new technology and new external conditions.

CHANGES ALREADY IN MOTION

The era which we have known since the end of World War II, has ended. The threat of the Soviet Union and its Communist satellites expanding and threatening other countries, is visibly dissolving. No one can watch the changes in Poland and still believe that the Poles are loyal Communist allies of the Soviets who will fight against NATO in any war. And this is also the case with Hungary or East Germany or Czechoslovakia. No marshal of the Soviet Armed Forces can now trust his Warsaw Pact allies to fight alongside Soviet forces against NATO. No one can say what kind of Europe will emerge from what is now in the making.

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Indeed what kind of Soviet Union will emerge from glasnost and perestroika is also very much in the balance. Can Gorbachev succeed in bringing about a change to a more open society, with private enterprise and free markets? Can the Soviet Union stay one nation, or will the various non-Russian nations

break off and become independent as they once were, and still desperately want to be? Gorbachev is an extremely determined and able man, but he is confronted by a daunting array of complicated problems. We must wish him success, for if he fails, an unstable Soviet Union with such powerful weapons of war resting on so weak an economic system, will be a danger to the peace and stability of the world for as long as they have weapons that give them the power to change the course of events by force. Gorbachev's success cannot be guaranteed. But if he fails, no new Brezhnev or Stalin can return the Soviet Union to what it was. Too many forces have been let loose.

This is also the case with the changes in China. The Chinese cannot and will not go back to Mao's China. Too many have travelled, too many have met tourists, too many have watched the world through television. It is impossible for them not to know that they are technologically backward and that they are unnecessarily poor. They know that they are poor when Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan are well-off. They know that their economic system, with the central planning they adopted from the Soviet Union is wrong. And they know that the Soviet Union has admitted that the command economy is an inefficient way of organizing production and distribution. Therefore change is inevitable. Whether the change will be peaceful, or again violent, depends on the wisdom of China's rulers and the patience of the Chinese people.

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But the confrontation between the Communist countries and democracies since WW2 is over. However, the competition between big powers for influence and power in the world will go on, in a multipolar world. It has always been thus, whether it was the Three Kingdoms in China or the Warring States in Japan. The Big wants to assure its supremacy by growing bigger, and the Small tries to prevent this by alliances between themselves to block the Big, and to make him smaller. Increasing the power of the UN to uphold peace by its ability to enforce the UNSC resolutions will moderate and restrain these tendencies. Wars have become increasingly unprofitable. So the competition between nations may concentrate on economics. However no one can be sure how long this will take. Until then, there is the need for armed forces and National Defence Colleges, just in case.

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