14 February 2002

Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism

Strategy of choice for world governance

-- / --

Introduction

The manner in which the 'war on terrorism' has been justified and developed calls for reflection on the use of singular threats as a preferred strategy in response to the many dilemmas of world governance.

The past decade has seen much focused concern on the challenge of world governance in the light of the multiplicity of interdependent problems faced by society and the planet. This has been associated with the articulation of a multitude of strategies to deal with them. Some efforts have been made to articulate these strategies within global plans, such as Agenda 21, but with relatively little success.

It is recognized that the need for new approaches to world governance are urgent if the crises are not to interact to engender a chaotic uncontrollable situation. At the same time the democratic governance processes in many industrialized countries are themselves becoming problematic in unforeseen ways -- to a degree that causes many to suspect that key services are becoming unmanageable. Coping has become problematic, notable in the case of utilities (railways and health service in the UK; energy and health services in the USA). Not only is it now a real question as to whether individual countries are governable in any meaningful sense, but the reflection of this challenge on a global scale has become daunting.

In this context the 'war on terrorism' has come as a real relief to many in that it provides a way of simplifying the complexity through radical deprioritization of many of the factors that have proven to be an impossible strain to manage. The wide variety of 'health' and 'poverty' issues, for example, are easily framed as of secondary consideration in the face of the dramatic issues of 'terrorism'. The question is whether this approach should be understood as the key to future world governance.

Complexity of abandoned approaches to world governance

In exploring the potential of a singular threat, the problematic nature of responding to the *problematique* should be recognized:

- **Absence of strategy tracing**: There has never been any lack of comprehensive strategic plans in response to global, regional, national or local challenges. More are generated every year, notably by major United Nations conferences. It is not clear whether any international agency tracks commitments to such plans. No systematic record appears to be kept of action taken on the multitude of resolutions by international conferences. Few governments have the resources to keep effective track of their obligations with respect to international agreements.

- **Ignoring previous or coexisting strategies:** Difficulties arise because each such plan tends to be formulated in a context which effectively ignores the previous plans to which adherents have usually made long-term pledges. New strategies may endeavour to respond to new understandings of the global challenge by effectively updating the strategic elements of previous plans. Whether this process removes the obligation to adhere to previous commitments is usually quite unclear. Often the implementation of past

commitments is quietly forgotten.

- **Continuing generation of strategies:** In this context the status of any new global, comprehensive plan easily becomes an exercise in wishful thinking for some and an exercise in extreme cynicism for others. Neither position will prevent the continuing generation of such strategies, however limited the constituency to which they appeal over any extended period of time.

In this confusing dynamic environment, it is no wonder that coherent consensual strategies are both difficult to engender and difficult to sustain -- even though they may focus on sustainability. Worse is ahead, as recognized by the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century [more]:

> New opportunities notwithstanding, the challenges ahead will include traditional and novel threats. A growing web of financial, cultural, technological, and political interdependence now characterizes the world. While this web promises more freedom, security, and prosperity overall, it also means that novel and serious security problems now lay at America's doorstep. "Americans are far less secure today than they believe themselves to be," Co-Chairman Warren Rudman stresses. (April 2000)

In this light there is a strong case for an alternative approach that offers greater opportunity of success. Rather than becoming a victim of the unpredictable quality of novel threats such threats can be exploited to focus and sustain coherent strategies.

The promise of single-factor policy-making

The various International Development Decades, and the global strategies formulated under the auspices of individual UN Specialized Agencies of the UN, or Agenda 21 itself, have all demonstrated in practice the inability of global society to 'get its act together.' The international community has been strong in its rhetoric and vision and weak in its ability to follow through on implementation or the respect for commitments made. This might be said to have been the track record of the 'positive' approach to global strategy and governance.

The 'war on terrorism' is an illustration of a 'negative' approach to world governance. A single factor is selected as the necessary focus of global attention. It is framed, in the case of the dramatic attacks of 11th September, as a 'challenge to civilization', and a war against 'evil' forces -- notably sustained by an 'axis of evil'. The credibility of the challenge and the necessary response is rendered unquestionable through the logic of 'if you are not with us, you are against us' backed up by the implicit threat to any groups that fail to associate themselves with the logic of that single threat. This has the effect of suppressing dissenting opinion, whether within the world's superpower, amongst allies variously persuaded of the merits of this logic, and amongst those opposed to this perspective. Those failing to accept this logic can easily be framed as dangerous -- if not 'evil' in their own right. If necessary allegiance or loyalty tests can be imposed to ensure early detection of opposition.

The case for isolating a singular threat may also be made by generalizing the *Peter Principle* first introduced by L. Peter in a humoristic book (of the same title) describing the pitfalls of bureaucratic organization. The original principle states that in a hierarchically structured administration, people tend to be promoted up to their "level of incompetence". The generalization proposed in the *Encyclopedia Cybernetica* is that in evolution systems tend to develop up to the limit of their adaptive competence [more]. Focusing on a singular threat ensures that the threat remains within the scope of the organizational system responding to it, rather than being beyond its collective comprehension as in more complex responses to global governance. Conceptual effort is usefully bypassed and any latent paranoia can be usefully harnessed. As the old adage might put it: 'if all you have is a strategic hammer, every problem can only look like a nail'.

At one stroke, many of the factors inhibiting effective global action are eliminated or marginalized. World governance becomes an operational reality. Issues and concerns that might otherwise have been considered vital to the design of any approach to governance of a civilized world are set aside as irrelevant. A credible case can be made for benevolent imperialism led by the world's superpower with 'very big teeth' -- *Tyrannosaurus usa*? Any anomalies can be covered up by appropriate news management and media gag orders -- preferably self-imposed as a demonstration of loyalty and patriotism. The opportunity can be used for the further 'dumbing down' of the news.

In the management literature, and at every business school, criticism has traditionally been voiced regarding the non-strategic inadequacies of what is caricatured as a 'fire-fighting' strategy. This is management in response to the emergence of problematic exceptions without any effort to anticipate or plan strategically. However, as with the 'war on terrorism', fire-fighting has the considerable advantage of focusing everyone's attention on immediate necessities and framing any other concerns as dangerously irrelevant. It places control in the hands of professional fire-fighters who 'know what to do' and have the right to eliminate any obstructions to doing so. It is perhaps no accident that the 11th September attacks framed the New York firefighters as heroes and in doing so provided a new set of role models for the American people.

Perceived complexity can thus be usefully transformed into threat -- reinforcing dependence on leadership to deal with the resulting conceptual confusion (see *Being Bushed*). The level of threat can be easily maintained at very low cost by judicious use of suitably publicized scares -- as demonstrated by the use of anthrax subsequent to the 11th September attacks. This has the further advantage of dramatically alleviating the currently widespread political apathy and building a new level consensus.

Need for a threat

A number of authors have recognized the need for a viable threat as a means of giving coherence to policies of industrialized countries. For example, as stated by Hermann Goering at the Nuremburg Trials (1946):

> Why of course the people don't want war... But after all it is the lmeaders of the country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship... Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.

The political theorist Carl Schmidt, for example, believed that sovereignty is not founded upon the elevated principles of law and order, but rather upon the ability of a chosen few to implement decisions at crucial moments, including, rather ominously, installing a dictatorship. Schmidt believed that political liberalism had failed to supply an effective alternative to the inefficient apparatus of the modern state. He defined politics as the search for enemies.

The comments of Pakistani scholar-activist, Eqbal Ahmad, in November 1998, are particularly useful:

> After the Cold War, the West had no viable threat around which it could organize its policies. All powers, all imperial powers -- especially democratic ones -- cannot justify their uses of power only on the basis of greed. No one will buy it. They have needed two things: a ghost and a mission. The British carried the White Man's Burden. That was the mission. The French carried *la mission civilisatrice*, the civilizing mission. The Americans had, first, Manifest Destiny, and then found the mission of "standing watch on the walls of world freedom," in John F. Kennedy's ringing phrase. Each of them had the Black, the Yellow, and finally the Red Peril to fight against. There was a ghost. There was a mission. People bought it.

> Right now, the United States is deprived of both the mission and the ghost. So the mission has appeared as human rights. It's a very strange mission for a country that for nearly 100 years has been supporting dictatorship, first in Latin America and then throughout the world. And in search of menace, it has turned to Islam. It's the easiest because the West has encountered resistance here: Algeria, then Egypt, Palestinians, the Iranian revolution. And a portion of it is strategically located: It's the home of the oil resources for the West. [more]

See also *Needing Evil Elsewhere* (https://www.laetusinpraesens.org/musings/nevil.php)

Single factor threats: past experiments

It is useful to trace the history of single factor threats since it is from previous efforts that the coherence of this reductionist approach to world governance can be better understood. Presumably it is from such historical experiments that the keys to a successful implementation of a single factor governance strategy emerged.

Possible examples include:

- **'Yellow Peril':** The Chinese -- and the Japanese with them -- have been presented for over a century as a threat to western civilization, notably with the term Yellow Peril [more; more; more; more]. Laws were enacted in 1889 in the USA to contain the threat. In 1922, the US Government further enacted fear of the Yellow Peril as law, passing the Cable Act, which revoked the citizenship of any woman who married a foreign national [more; more]. The Yellow Peril remains an active concern in the form of the threat to American economic security emanating from East Asia.

- **'Black Peril':** The threat from black-skinned races has been the subject of considerable preoccupation by various right-wing groups, notably the Klu Klux Klan and the John Birch Society. It was a concern of the Nazis, but especially of the Afrikaners in South Africa to whom it was known as the *Swart Gevaar*, and legitimated the overriding policy of *apartheid*. This involved symbolically closing their wagon trains to defend against the "Black Peril" of spear-wielding "savages" -- an image often used to symbolize the siege mentality of many modern Afrikaners. There has been a suggestion that Israel should learn from South Africa's experience in this respect: 'It is not coincidental that Israel was one of apartheid South Africa's few friends. The two cooperated extensively militarily, not least in the development of nuclear weapons. This comradeship was partly born of a shared sense of vulnerability: both saw themselves as minorities under threat of annihilation from hostile neighbours. In South Africa, it was the *swart gevaar* or black peril: the African hordes who would sweep all Christian whites into the sea if given half a chance. In Israel's case, many in the Arab world are thought to resent its very existence. Both depended heavily on superpower indulegence' [more].

- **'Red Peril':** From 1920, this has been the much documented communist conspiracy to subvert western civilization [more; more]. An argument has been made that China is the new 'red peril' of the 21st century [more], although some claim that it has now been transformed into a 'Pinko Peril'.

- **'Green Peril':** With green being the colour of Islam, that peril is symbolized by the Middle Eastern Muslim fundamentalist armed with a radical ideology, equipped with nuclear weapons, and intent on launching a violent *jihad* against Western civilization. The Islamic threat argument is becoming increasingly popular with some segments of the American foreign policy establishment. They are encouraged by foreign governments who, for reasons of self-interest, want to see Washington embroiled in the coming West vs. Islam confrontation. The result is the construction of the new peril, a process that does not reflect any grand conspiracy but that nevertheless has its own logic, rules and timetables. [more; more; more].

- **'Blue Peril':** Efforts to give form to a conservative peril have been less successful as a global policy focus. Mustafa al-Tawil

wrote (*Al-Wafd*, 1 Nov. 2001): "The real danger is the 'Blue Peril' [blue for the Israeli flag] of global Zionism, because it has been able to colonize Western countries, especially the United States, economically, politically, and in the media. The West should understand how Israeli views manipulate and control Westerners'. Other efforts have focused on right wing parties, notably in Europe [more].

- **'Brown Peril':** Some efforts have been made to define a Brown Peril. In the case of the USA, this is framed as the serious problem of Mexicans 'streaming into our society and polluting our cultural landscape' as a result of NAFTA [more]. In Australia the 'yellow peril' from Asia has been cleverly transformed into the 'brown peril' of the Middle East -- the subterfuge being national security [more]. However Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia has contested the rhetoric of the West, seeking to counter the Western process of "othering" by addressing Asian values and has argued that Asia will likely regain its position as the dominant economic region in a global economy, with a share of income that will far exceed that of the less populous West. This prospect may frighten many powerful constituencies in the West. Thus, says Mahathir, "to the yellow peril of yesteryear will be added the brown peril. The Europeans will be overwhelmed. Genghis Khan will ride again. . . . " [more].

- **'White Peril':** Ironically some Asians have their matching vision to the Yellow Peril in the form of a White Peril [more], which was first articulated in 1905 in relation to the Russo-Japanese war [more]. The Asian values argument allows them to brandish the threat of the white peril in which its opponents are portrayed as members of a new, insidious international conspiracy of liberal democracy [more]. With some irony, the ANC in South Africa, and the other liberation movements, used the threat posed by whites (*Wit Gevaar*) as an election platform to match that of the Nationalist Party's *Swart Gevaar*.

- **Racial degeneration:** Implicit to some degree in the above 'perils', is a more general concern regarding racial degeneration and the need for eugenic practices. It has been of concern to Australian whites [more], Anglo-Americans [more], Nazi (and neo-Nazi) preoccupations with the purity of the Aryan race [more; more; more], Andean Indians [more], as well as the Chinese and the Japanese. It may be considered one continuing justification for the Hindu caste system.

- **Infidels and unbelievers:** Most of the main religions have at different times been concerned with the threat from infidels and the urgent need to act in response. This may be understood as one of the original reasons for the Crusades, for *jihad*, and for their modern equivalents, most notably those articulated by missionary groups, or by George Bush [more; more; more; more; more] -- raising the issue as to whether the recent campaign was a 'war against terrorism' or a 'crusade against Islam' [more]. Like George Bush, missionary groups of all religions take particularly seriously the number of those who fail to believe in their particular truth.

- **'Jewish Conspiracy':** There is a long tradition of concern at such a conspiracy [more], on which the Nazis were able to develop their anti-Semitic policies. Henry Ford was instrumental in its articulation [more]. Belief in this conspiracy remains very active [more] and is strongly associated in the Middle East with belief in a Zionist conspiracy [more] to divide the Arab world [more]. Jewish conspiracy was a preferred explanation for the plague in medieval Europe [more]. A modern variant has been elaborated to involve fundamentalist Christians [more].

- **Secret elites:** Conspiracy theorists have for many decades been highly creative in presenting evidence for the threatening influence of secret elites on society -- and the web is a natural medium for the development and proliferation of such rumours. These elite networks have variously included and combined: the Freemasons, the 'Jewish conspiracy' (see above), Opus Dei, the Club of Rome, the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, etc -- occasionally extended to include the United Nations ('black helicopters', etc). Some variants focus on the Illuminati and esoteric secret societies.. To what degree such groups, or others, act as rumoured would however seem to be irrelevant to the argument of this paper since it is questionable (in the light of the history of this perspective) whether this possibility can be presented as an effective singular threat.

- **Invaders:** Also implicit in the above perils is the threat of 'invasion' -- which for Europeans dates back to the Vikings and the Mongol hordes. The 20th century saw the emergence, especially in the USA, of widespread concern with the threat of invasion by extraterrestrial aliens. This fear has been associated with that of the arrival of Satan on Earth [more]. Use of the term 'aliens' easily leads to confusion as to whether reference is to foreigners (one of the above 'perils') or extraterrestrials arriving in UFOs and epitomized by widespread concern with UFO invasion and suspected cover-ups [more]. It is entirely questionable to what degree there is any operational distinction in the popular American imagination between infiltration by 'terrorists', infiltration by 'illegal alien workers' [more], and infiltration by extraterrestrials.

- **'Rogue States':** This category, known also as 'crazy states' (Yehezkel Dror, 1980), emerged with the decline of the threat that could be effectively associated with Eastern European and other countries that had come to be declared as normal members of the international community governed by the rule of law. Their ability to act independently, irresponsibly and unpredictably was presented as especially dangerous -- despite recent efforts to define the USA in those very terms [more; more]

- **Mass destruction:** The threat of 'nuclear warfare' and 'weapons of mass destruction' was maintained at a high level of visibility throughout the Cold War, notably as continuing justification for military expenditure. Following the Cold War, 'rogue states' have been used to sustain the threat under a new guise -- notably by repeated reference to fissile materials that have somehow escaped from high security installations. The 'Axis of Evil' is important to the continued perception of this threat which has been further developed to include biochemical warfare.

- **Epidemics:** Like the European plague centuries ago, the threat of AIDS has been used to completely reframe social relations. In

this case the focus has been on sexual relations. Its proliferation to epidemic proportions in African countries has been seen by some as a convenient indirect method of addressing the population problem without involving any authority. Like cancer it has been a focus of major concern but has now been effectively assimilated as of secondary priority -- despite the tens of millions that will die of it.

- **Y2K crisis**: The degree of hype associated with the Y2K crisis on 1st Janury 2000 [more; more; more], has already been well-forgotten, but the threat it was perceived to constitute to 'modern civilization' was presented in many ways as similar to that of terrorism. However in this case the perpetrators were not 'evil' terrorists acting deliberately but computer nerds (mainly in the USA) who had presumably acted inadvertently to progressively lock computer users into a vulnerable configuration of hardware and software.

- **Internationalism / Globalization / Anti-globalization:** This is a complex case of the evolution of a threat. At the beginning of the 20th century 'internationalism' had many positive connotations [more] as a contrast to excess nationalism (perceived as a threat) -- and was basic to many of the more valuable features of socialism. The use of the term by the Communist 'Internationals', and the many excesses of that experiment, transformed it into a disguise for insidious totalitarianism, so that it became framed as a threat strongly associated with the 'Red Peril' (above). Much attention was given to anti-Communist efforts to block this threat. However 'internationalism' continues to be perceived as a threat, notably in the USA (by those suspicious of the hidden agendas of the United Nations) [more; more]. It is extremely ironic that an equivalent term, 'globalization', has been promoted by market capitalism and the United Nations and is itself now perceived as a threat -- after the failure of decades of development policies inspired and constrained by the Bretton Woods institutions, and the self-serving arguments presented by multinational corporations. This threat is now opposed by an increasingly well-coordinated movement that has seriously affected 'business as usual'. Ways have been sought to reframe such opposition as undermining healthy globalization essential to improvement of well-being around the world. Efforts to label anti-globalization as a threat are being increasingly associated with efforts to reframe any form of democratic protest or dissent as supportive of terrorism [more].

Single factor threats: terrorism as threat of the moment

'Terrorism' may be understood as the strategic device of the moment to enable the world's superpower to manage global society. Whether or not the 11th September attacks were deliberately instigated or evoked to this end by al-Qaida agents, Mossad, rogue segments of the US government, or others, is essentially irrelevant.

The key point is that the 'war against terrorism' can be, and is being, effectively used to deploy a 'fire-fighting' mindset and to deactivate the complexities of the socio-cultural ecology that is the qualitative basis for planetary society. As Gregory Bateson pointed out: If you destroy the pattern that connects, you destroy all quality. This is however irrelevant to ensuring control of global society by the world's superpower -- the modern emergence of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) [more; more], as envisaged by Yehezkel Dror (*The Capacity to Govern: A Report to the Club of Rome*, 2001) [more].

Rather than requiring the world's strategists to rise to the complexity of a globally interdependent society, it reduces that complexity to the simplistic capacities of the strategists in power. In cybernetic terms (cf Ashby's Law) it is a reduction in the perceived complexity of a system to the capacity of those charged with controlling it.

The Foreign Minister of France, Hubert Vedrine indicated (7 February 2002):

> "We are friends of the United States, we are friends of that people and we will remain so. But we are threatened today by a new simplism which consists in reducing everything to the war on terrorism. That is their approach, but we cannot accept that idea. You have got to tackle the root causes, the situations, poverty, injustice." [more]

As Denis de Rougemont said rightly with regard to the complexities (envisaged as necessary for global governance): "Federalism is marked by its love for complexity, in opposition to the rough simplism of totalitarian regimes".

Addendum: September 2003
Comment by the former UK environment minister (May 1997- June 2003)
Michael Meacher (*This war on terrorism is bogus*, *Guardian*, 6 September 2003),
following Gore Vidal (*Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Bush-Cheney Junta*, 2002) and
Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed (*The War on Freedom: How and Why America was Attacked, September 11*, Tree of Life Publications, 2002),
in the light of public domain documents

None of this assembled evidence, all of which comes from sources already in the public domain, is compatible with the idea of a real, determined war on terrorism. The catalogue of evidence does, however, fall into place when set against the PNAC blueprint [*Rebuilding America's Defenses*, 2000]. From this it seems that the so-called "war on terrorism" is being used largely as bogus cover for achieving wider US strategic geopolitical objectives. Indeed Tony Blair himself hinted at this when he said to the Commons liaison committee: "To be truthful about it, there was no way we could have got the public consent to have suddenly launched a campaign on Afghanistan but for what happened on September 11" (*Times*, July 17 2002). Similarly Rumsfeld was so determined to obtain a rationale for an attack on Iraq that on 10 separate occasions he asked the CIA to find evidence linking Iraq to 9/11; the CIA repeatedly came back empty-handed (*Time Magazine*, May 13 2002)....

The conclusion of all this analysis must surely be that the "global war on terrorism" has the hallmarks of a

political myth propagated to pave the way for a wholly different agenda - the US goal of world hegemony, built around securing by force command over the oil supplies required to drive the whole project. Is collusion in this myth and junior participation in this project really a proper aspiration for British foreign policy? If there was ever need to justify a more objective British stance, driven by our own independent goals, this whole depressing saga surely provides all the evidence needed for a radical change of course.

Single factor threats: provisions for the future

Identification of the above threats may be seen as individual attempts to focus strategic debate and tie it to a single issue. Whether such novel threats have been fabricated, deliberately or inadvertently, is irrelevant to the learnings that they each provide for the use of single factor threats as a means of managing the challenges of global governance -- freed of some of the inhibiting constraints of human rights and freedoms. It is obvious to all that when faced with a 'fire', the niceties must be set aside until the 'fire' is brought under control. If the heroic fire-fighters inadvertently cause harm or damage in the process this is only to be regretted as unfortunate 'collateral damage'.

The end must necessarily justify the means. The most helpful articulation of this attitude is Madeleine Albright's response (12 May 1996), as US Secretary of State, to a query as to whether the death of 500,000 Iraqui children was justified in order to further US policy. She indicated: "the price is worth it" -- an attitude that has been the subject of commentary in relation to the 11th September attacks [more]. The same might be said of the US avoidance of intervention to prevent the Rwandan genocidal massacre in 1994 [more].

The problem with the threats listed above is that they each seem to have a relatively short life span as credible threats -- even though they may be presented as requiring that a country be on a war footing (possibly 'for the next 50 years'). George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) [more] has however provided indications of measures to be taken to render threats sustainable:

- One approach is for coalitions to reform in order to isolate one of the erstwhile members as an 'enemy' that is a source of novel threat and justifies targetting. This role can be rotated every years or so between the key players -- even between selected permanent members of the UN Security Council.

- Another approach, where the previous one fails to raise the level of threat sufficiently, is simply to arrange for discrete (terrorist) bombing of one's own population. Conspiracy theorists have not failed to envisage the possibility that the attacks of 11th September and some of the 'terrorist' attacks by 'Palestinians' were of this nature. Indeed Osama bin Laden may himself be a totally fabricated exercise in global deception to enable the Taliban to be removed to allow the oil pipeline to be constructed as required by American oil interests -- with a tolerable (but credible) level of regrettable collateral damage. Consideration was already been given in 1962 to establishing Cuba as an external military threat to the USA by fabricating an aircraft accident reminiscent of the 11th September attacks [more].

Orwell's approaches may however quickly lose their novelty value. The challenge for world governance is then to envisage a series of novel future threats whose level of threat can be enhanced whenever earlier threats lose their credibility. Already 'in the pipeline' are:

- **Biochemical terrorism:** The potentials of this form of terrorism have been widely publicized [more]. The experiments by the Aum Shinrikyo movement using sarin gas in a Tokyo subway have given credibility to the possibility [more] as have the consequences of the earlier activities of Japan's Unit 731 in China [more], and the complaints of those suffering from Gulf War Syndrome. Whether or not the result of an isolated terrorist, or an 'inside job' by a rogue governmental unit, the dissemination of anthrax to USA targets following the 11th September has been seen as an exercise in heightening and maintaining public perceptions of threat at very low cost. The social consequences of such threats remain to be exploited for their full potential [more]

- **Social unrest:** The escalation in the nature, globalization and media coverage of social unrest suggests that this could be successfully promoted to the status of a singular threat -- as many revolutionary practitioners have explored. Such unrest has been widely predicted by futurists and is an important argument in sales of security equipment of all grades.

- **Financial system collapse:** As a result of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, there is continuing concern about the imminent collapse of the financial system sustaining global economic society [more].

- **Climatic catastrophe:** Considerable attention has been given to building up 'global warming' as a singular threat, whilst indicating the potential of other climatic threats such as a new ice age and geomagnetic reversal -- possibly linked to asteroid collision with the Earth (see below).

- **Appearance of the Anti-Christ:** This future event is a strong belief of Christian fundamentalists in anticipation of the 'end times' scenarios predicted for the present period [more; more]. However other interpretations [more] have resulted in many different individuals [more] being labelled as the Anti-Christ, including the Pope [more; more], and even George Bush [more]. The difficulty in this case is that an 'evil' phenomenon of this sophistication is likely to be virtually indistinguishable from its opposite -- dividing people in ways that prevent it from being effectively defined as a singular threat [more].

- **Extraterrestrial alien invasion:** As noted above, there is considerable scope for this strategy as an ultimate threat. It is claimed to have been an obsession of Ronald Reagan [more; more]. Segments of the population have already been psychologically well 'prepared' for it in various ways through many movies. Some speculative 'archeological' exercises, such as those of Zecharia Sitchin (*12th Planet*) already predict the return of aliens associated with a lost planet on a highly elliptic orbit [more; more; more; critique]. These concerns have been framed in terms of a rogue planet for which there is some evidence [more; more]. Given the

widespread concern in the USA with abduction, notably by 'gray people' [more], it might be useful to label this as the 'Gray Peril'.

- **Invasion by foreigners:** In a globalized society the possibilities of massive uncontrolled invasions of 'civilized society' by refugees, asylum seekers, and 'boat people' have considerably increased as demonstrated in the case of Australia, Mexico, and to a lesser extent Italy and Spain. It is already of considerable concern in Germany and the UK. This is related to the 'social unrest' threat (above).

- **Earth-crossing asteroids:** Certain groups of asteroids have elliptical orbits that cross the orbit of the Earth and other inner planets. Thus, these asteroids can come dangerously close to the Earth. There are many other known asteroids that cross Earth's orbit (about 300 have been identified at present). In principle, as demonstrated by mass extinctions of past epochs, these may well destroy major portions of flora and fauna on Earth [more; more; more]. As such they offer very credible doomsday scenarios already explored by Hollywood.

- **Enhanced humans:** Science fiction (notably the movie *Blade Runner*) has actively explored the consequences of the infiltration of human society by 'enhanced' humans -- with the resulting threat to humans portrayed as archetypically analogous to that of the pre-historic encounter of the Cro-Magnon and the Neanderthals. Much has been made of the potential of genetic modification and bionic implants in this respect. This is also seen as leading to a new form of eugenics -- revisiting some of the 'perils' noted above [more; more; more]. A variant of this is the electronic cyborgization of humans that may already be considered to be underway and effectively engendering the 'digital divide' [more] through their intimate relationship to knowledge systems (suggesting the variant 'dig-it-all'). In the light of their envisaged physical perfection, this might be termed the 'Bronze Peril'.

- **Nanotechnology:** As the ultimate convergence of computers, networks, and biotech, nanotechnology will enable creation of products never before even imagined [more] with equally unimaginable threats. Uncontrolled, such technology has been envisioned as leading to what is known as the 'grey goo scenario' [more; more]

- **Artificial intelligences and global brains:** There is continuing speculation about the dangerous consequences of interaction between artificial intelligence (of a significantly higher order) and human society [more]. These have notably been explored in science fiction.

Other threats that may play a singular role in the near future are those associated with the dramatic consequences for the increasing generational divide -- with the increase in the number (and proportion) of elderly and with the increase in the frustration of young people made responsible for supporting them through fragile social security systems. The threat to older people by younger people might be usefully labelled as the 'Golden Peril' whilst that of older people to younger people might be labelled as the 'Silver Peril'. Homosexuality, as a lifestyle preference widely perceived as threatening (notably by those focused on singular threats), might be labelled the 'Pink Peril'. Another perceived threat deriving from lifestyle preferences is that associated with hippies, drop-outs and travellers -- possibly to be labelled the 'Orange Peril'.

Avoidance of global social issues

It is important to contrast the selected singular global threats (Class A threats) with those of world problems in general (Class C threats), and those particularly identified as major (Class B threats) [see database on over 30,000 world problems]. The singular threats legitimate the 'fire-fighting' response which allows action on the the other problems to be 'temporarily' set aside. The singular threats allow for simple 'silver bullet' responses like carpet bombing and political assassination -- achieving the kind of 'success' associated with the campaign against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The other problems are essentially intractable and interwoven. They confront society with many strategic dilemmas [more] which do not lend themselves to resolution -- and indeed undermine collective resolution to change.

To be a useful strategic basis for world governance, the singular threat should ideally permit resources to be allocated in a controlled manner to reinforce the integrity of the controlling regime. It should minimize any allocation of resources to efforts to change the social structures and behaviours engendering the threat. Thus in the case of terrorism it is vital to focus on investments in the military industrial complex that enables the creation of new security systems (cf. intelligence resources, Echelon, etc). Token humanitarian investments can be allocated for rebuilding, although the emphasis should be made on rhetorical support for such rebuilding. But investment in any effort to actually remedy the engendering conditions should be minimized behind a screen of stirring public relations and commitments that are in no way associated with any intention to fulfil them. In these respects, the responses of George Bush and Tony Blair to terrorism have been exemplary.

It is useful to identify some of these intractable problems and to recall attempts made by those most sensitive to them to promote them to the status of singular threats -- whilst recognizing the ways in which they have been reframed to minimize the resources and attention accorded to them. Of particular interest is the degree of avoidance of any effort to reconcile the conflicting priorities amongst them and the dramatic requirements for social change that they call for:

- **Overpopulation:** This threat has been successfully reframed, with the considerable support of Vatican diplomats, to the degree that it is now barely on any international agenda.

- **Poverty:** This threat is proving to be a non-starter as a motivating singular threat for global governance. Like unemployment it is however ideal as a rhetorical theme for repeated national and global summits, notably at the United Nations. However the poverty of others is a phenomenon to which people have long been inured -- even to the point of being able to live alongside them. Just as the UN progressively switched from 'economic **and** social' development to 'development' of a primarily economic nature, the

current switch of the World Bank from 'poverty' to 'poverty **and** terrorism' may well pave the way for a further switch to 'terrorism' alone.

- **Disease:** This threat has been proven to be relatively useless for the strategic purposes of world governance. Particular diseases like cancer and AIDS do provide a temporary focus in some regions, but since they only affect portions of the population they do not have the plague-like qualities of an epidemic. Disease in the abstract has been successfully reframed as one calling for funds whose allocation to medical safety nets can be successfully avoided. It appears unlikely that emergent diseases will change this significantly.

- **Food shortage:** The hunger issue has also proven, over many years, to be of little value in sustaining a sense of singular threat capable of mobilizing efforts within a new approach to world governance.

- **Water shortage:** Unlike food shortage, because of its transboundary characteristics, this may have the potential to constitute a singular threat, especially if water supplies are theatened in any way, notably through biochemical contamination, whether deliberate or as a result of pollution.

- **Injustice and discrimination:** Much has been made of this threat, but it is clear that it is unlikely to serve the strategic function of a singular threat, despite its continuing value for political rhetoric. Indeed it might be argued that it was the effective isolation of the USA in 2001 (notably at the UN Conference on Racism), because of its human rights record in the Middle East and Latin America, that helped to condition the response to terrorism.

- **Unemployment:** This constant threat is frequently used by politicians to support any and every other initiative -- whilst effectively failing to address the core issue to any significant degree. It no longer has the dramatic qualities required of a singular threat, although its potential contribution to social unrest is not to be neglected.

- **Environmental degradation:** This threat, even in the presence of obvious environmental pollution, is perceived as so diffuse that it can no longer be promoted to the status of a singular threat -- except possibly in association with biochemical terrorism, with dangerously proliferating genetic mutation, or with some phenomenon like a 'nuclear winter', a supervolcano, or displacement of the Gulf Stream..

- **Nuclear warfare:** This threat has been present for such a long-time as the singular threat of the Cold War period, that it has lost its urgency for the generations that have lived with it -- however much it remains a reality.

- **Evil:** It is extremely interesting that 'evil' has been used to focus strategic preoccupations by George Bush and Tony Blair -- but it is questionable whether it can in its own right be elevated to the status of a universal singular threat (especially since it is not a driving core concept in many non-western religions). The consequences of sin (in the afterlife, hell-fire, etc) have been primarily associated with religions. Retribution for sin worked as a means of reinforcing governance in societies dominated by particular belief systems closely linked to the state -- in fact it provides a useful model for the role of singular threats in future world governance. But, like nuclear warfare, it has lost its significance for many who have been exposed to the arbitrary, hypocritical, and manipulative manner in which it can be used.

- **Corruption:** As with crime, this threat has remained a non-starter as a singular threat because of its omnipresence -- from the highest to the lowest levels of society. Most of those who might mobilize efforts to attack against it are themselves too intimately associated with it (for example as in the situation of tax avoidance and tax havens). Serial media exposure of the scope of international criminal networks, and their hold on policy-makers, demonstrates that this is now perceived to be a predictable situation that does not constitute a driving threat.

- **Energy shortage:** Whilst this remains a significant threat for industrialized societies, possibly to the degree of motivating the removal of the Taliban regime, it is more a concern for those deriving profit from furnishing the energy than from those who would be disadvantaged by its lack.

- **Reduction of biodiversity:** This threat is scheduled to remain a non-starter because few people consider the irretrievable loss of yet another endangered species to be a life-or-death matter touching themselves -- except in cases such as over-fishing where livelihoods may be affected. The contact of most people with 'diversity' is through media documentaries -- and adequate footage has been acquired for those who need further exposure to it. For the specialists, museum collections of dead specimens are now sufficiently comprehensive to enable years of future study.

- **Reduction of cultural diversity:** Despite widespread concern at cultural imperialism, language loss, and the progressive loss of cultural identity of many indigenous peoples (notably that associated with reduction of biodiversity), this threat is most unlikley to acquire that singular status.

- **Drugs:** This threat to the 'moral fibre of civilization' has also proven to be a non-starter in global governance terms. The continued use of drugs, whether legalized or not, suits too many people in an increasingly alienating urban environment -- and at every level of society. The parallel with alcohol is too obvious to arouse any adequate sense of collective threat.

- **Feminism:** This threat to male-dominated structures and mindsets over past decades has been effectively deactivated in most western cultures. It remains a strong preoccupation especially in relation to the status of women in developing societies that consequently run the risk of being further destabilized. It might perhaps be usefully labelled as the 'Purple Peril'

Learnings from personal strategic analogues

The viability of structuring behaviour in terms of a singular threat is more readily comprehensible in the case of an individual. Indeed it has been argued that the individual psychological biases of leaders significantly affect the collective strategies that they advocate and find credible.

Identifying -- or being exposed to -- an immediate threat focuses the awareness and eliminates the paralysis associated with endeavoyuring to reconcile a multiplicity of conflicting desires and obligations. It is irrelevant whether the threat is real or imagined, or simply over-exaggerated.

The important learning relates to identification of the conditions under which the response to such threat becomes dysfunctional -- as in the case of pathological obsessions and phobias. But, as has been said, the fact that a person suffers from paranoia, does not mean that someone is not 'out to get them'.

Future prospects for viable alternatives

Those promoting singular threats are inherently incapable of envisaging more appropriate responses to the challenges of world governance and are effectively threatened by the possibility that alternative responses may be viable and preferable -- to the point of denying such posibilities as dangerously naive. Elements of a more complex response might however include perspectives such as the following:

- **Beyond continuing focus on 'The Plan':** What is the reason for this desperate need to formulate a single comprehensive strategic plan of action -- that will subsume all other plans, draining resources from them because of the priority it is accorded? Military strategy formulation is usually based on the selection of a single strategy from many strategic scenarios. If one fails, there are usually fallback plans. But is there not a case for encouraging a variety of plans -- according to different styles of action -- and capable of channelling the energy and enthusiasm of different constituencies?

- **Ecology of strategies:** There is a strong case for shifting some attention to the nature of the ecology of strategies in operation at any one time. This ecology is the dynamic framework within which global strategies are born, live and pass away (however much they may continue to haunt the present after having disincorporated). Whilst most self-respecting global strategies have the ambition to be 'the plan', it is rare that this self-acclaimed status is respected from the perspective of other strategic frameworks.

- **Status of particular strategies:** As with niche-specific species, it is to be expected that any particular strategy would be designed to respond to a specific set of circumstances, however broadly conceived. As a result each such strategy tends to exclude features recognized as vital within other strategic frameworks. In this sense each strategy is of necessity reductionistic. It is relatively simple in order to be manageable within relatively simple institutional frameworks. It has to be relatively simple in order to be comprehensible to those who must allocate resources to it and ultimately to those who must approve the allocation of such resources through the political process. All this makes for a strategy which lacks the requisite variety for effective global governance.

- **Complementary strategies:** Relatively simplistic strategies elaborated by one set of institutions evoke compensating strategies from other configurations of institutions. Some strategies naturally complement each other, compensating for each others weaknesses. Some strategies take over where others leave off. Some create the foundation and groundwork allowing others to emerge. Some are parasitical on others, or provide 'piggy back' facilities allowing for other types of action. Some strategies are deliberately designed to undermine others, competing for their resources. Some strategies are simply mutually destructive and may result in total chaos in the societies in which they emerge.

- **The 'right' strategy:** Within such an ecology of strategies, the question as to which is the right or appropriate strategy begs the question as to the comprehension of the questioner. For a questioner sensitive only to a particular spectrum of social or environmental concerns, the only meaningful answer will be in terms of those concerns only. Other dimensions will be completely irrelevant, if not absurd, or dangerously misguided.

- **Challenge to comprehension:** Who can presume to understand the full range of strategies making up the ecology? How is that understanding to be approached? How are differences of opinion concerning its nature to be reconciled -- especially when such differences may be essential to the process whereby compensating strategies emerge in response to other limited strategic understandings? How can the tendency of relativism to paralyse action be circumvented?

- **Necessarily conflicting perspectives:** As with efforts to 'manage' any natural ecosystem, there will be radically different schools of thought. Some will favour a complete and detailed plan, leading to what others would perceive as a totally artificial garden or park, or even a structure of economically productive fields. At the other extreme will be those who would favour leaving the ecosystem in its wilderness state. In between will be found a variety of rationalizations for various forms of intervention.

- **Framework for strategic dialogue:** The concern at this point is not whether one or other is right but rather that there is no

suitable arena within which to explore the alternatives. Each constituency tends to be prepared to be economical with the truth in acknowledging the limitations of its own perspective or in accepting the validity of other perspectives. Parliamentary democracy highlights the weaknesses of dialogue processes in responding with sensitivity to the range of issues involved. A context is required in which truths valuable to some are 'held', irrespective of debating procedures by which such views may be overwhelmed by those with other sensitivities.

- **Beyond conceptual complacency:** There is some justification for expecting that the challenges of global governance will call for a complexity of response beyond that associated with simplistic responses to the ecosystem and its development. The conceptual complacency of those who know that their own approach is correct is a prime indicator of the inadequacy of their perspective. However any such perspective may well be vital in a strategic ecosystem dependent on a rich range of complementary and competing perspectives.

From a strategic perspective 'one-plan thinking' is necessarily doomed to failure faced with a problematique that, hydra-like, takes many forms and is in continuous mutation. The conceptual challenge is, paradoxically, to find a suitable form for the plan which is many plans, and which itself evolves over time as the ecology of those plans.

It is how the ecology of strategies is to be understood that is the challenge -- prior to, and during, any well-meaning global intervention. But paradoxically intervention there will necessarily continue to be, even in the light of necessarily inadequate comprehension. Perhaps the metaphor for what is missing is provided by the contrast between allopathic medicine and homeopathic medicine -- recognizing the threat of homeopathic medicine to the mindset of a medical profession controlled by the priorities of the pharmaceutical industry.

For related arguments associated with the Global Strategies Project with some 30,000 interlinked strategies;, see other documents on governance through metaphor

Conclusion

The shift to a singular focus offers an instant solution to the many difficulties and dilemmas of effective world governance. In the history of ideas and beliefs it may be compared with the shift from polytheistic to monotheistic systems. This shift was necessarily accompanied by the destruction of beliefs, practices and institutions associated with numerous old deities of significance to particular social groups -- but the suffering occasioned by the means employed could be considered well worth the ends achieved.

A number of eminent scholars have criticized single factor explanations in response to the widespread hope that a simple answer can be formulated to the challenge of the times. Many believe fervently that such answers exist in single-factor statements such as "peace", "love", "order", etc. Whilst a necessary feature of the psychosocial system, such belief obscures the richness and significance of the fundamental disagreement concerning the ways such conflicting answers can be implemented in practice. Edgar Morin (1981) and Kenneth Boulding (1978) both note the dangers of single factor explanations at this time. In Boulding's words:

> "The evolutionary vision sees human history as a vast interacting network of species and relationships of many different kinds, and there really is no "leading factor" always in the forefront. At times, changes in material technology are the major mutational developments and create niches for social changes of various kinds. At other times, however, intellectual or spiritual movements take the lead and create niches for new material artifacts and technologies; sometimes climatic changes dominate the scene, or sometimes biological mutations dominate, such as the disease bacteria that caused the great plagues." (*Ecodynamics: A New Theory of Societal Evolution*, 1978, p.19-20)

Despite the resources of society, and the considerable efforts deployed to identify alternatives to the singular approach, it is important to recognize that demonstrations of such alternatives have not proven sufficiently viable to attract permanent commitment to them even by their advocates. Such efforts have been significantly, if not systematically, undermined by those favouring more simplistic solutions -- notably as in the case of the Nixon regime's response to the Chilean experiment under Salvador Allende. Indeed it is debateable whether industrialized societies have given any official support to social experiments commensurate with the investment associated with technological research and development [more; more; more; more; more; more].

'There is no war on terror'
Sir Ken Macdonald, Declaration by UK Director of Public Prosecutions, 23 January 2007
'It is critical that we understand that this new form of terrorism carries another more subtle, perhaps equally pernicious, risk. Because it might encourage a fear-driven and inappropriate response. By that I mean it can tempt us to abandon our values. I think it important to understand that this is one of its primary purposes.' Sir Ken, head of the Crown Prosecution Service, told members of the Criminal Bar Association it should be an article of faith that crimes of terrorism are dealt with by criminal justice and that a 'culture of legislative restraint in the area of terrorist crime is central to the existence of an efficient and human rights compatible process'. 'We wouldn't get far in promoting a civilising culture of respect for rights amongst and between citizens if we set about undermining fair trials in the simple pursuit of greater numbers of inevitably less safe convictions. On the contrary, it is obvious that the process of winning convictions ought to be in keeping with a consensual rule of law and not detached from it. Otherwise we sacrifice fundamental values critical to the maintenance of the rule of law - upon which everything else depends.' The criminal justice response to terrorism must be 'proportionate and grounded in due process and the

rule of law,' he said. 'We must protect ourselves from these atrocious crimes without abandoning our traditions of freedom.'

Sir Ken warned of the pernicious risk that a 'fear-driven and inappropriate' response to the threat could lead Britain to abandon respect for fair trials and the due process of law. (Clare Dyer, 24 January 2007, *The Guardian*)

References

Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed. The War on Freedom: How and Why America was Attacked, September 11. Tree of Life Publications, 2002 [review | review | review]

Arden B Dahl. Command Dysfunction: minding the cognitive war. (Thesis presented to the Faculty of the School of Advanced Airpower Studies, University of Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1996) [text]

Susan George. The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the 21st Century. London, Pluto Press, London, 1999 [review | review]

Brent Heeringa and Paul Cohen. An Underlying Model for Defeat Mechanisms. 2000 [text]

Gary King, Brent Heeringa, David Westbrook, Joe Catalano and Paul Cohen. Models of Defeat [text]

Leonard C. Lewin. Report from Iron Mountain: The Possibility and Desirability of Peace. Dial Press, 1967 [review | review | review | review | review]

Union of International Associations. Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential. K G Saur Verlag, 1994-5, 3 vols. [overview]

Gore Vidal. Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Bush-Cheney Junta. Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002 [review]