

Strategic morality

The relationship between political aims, military strategy and military technology

**Paper for the conference on “Emerging military technologies, ethics and leadership”
(5-7 November 2008)**

Netherlands Ministry of Defence, Amsterdam

Drs. Karel Koster

Research department Socialist Party Netherlands

October 2008

Contents

Summary	2
I. Developments in warfare, military technology and morality	3
II. Consequences in the war zone	7
III. Consequences on the home front	10
Conclusion	13
Notes	14

Summary

Technological advances have increased the distance between military personnel and the consequences of the application of their weaponry. The use of long-distance weapon systems has gravely corroded ethical constraints that tend to limit the full-scale application of such weapons. Such rules of engagement as do exist tend towards force protection, rather than the saving of civilian lives. This is particularly relevant in guerrilla warfare situations, where distinctions between combatant and non-combatant disappear. Today an increasing proportion of conflicts is intra-state, rather than between nations. The long-term 20th century trend towards increasing numbers of civilian casualties is therefore continuing into the present century, at least in relative terms. Media perceptions to the contrary, the average uniformed soldier is today much safer than a civilian in a conflict zone.

There are also far-reaching consequences for the citizens and soldiers in the countries deploying those soldiers elsewhere. Increasingly, the citizenry of industrialised states is far less inclined than in the past to undertake work involving even a limited risk to life and limb. This is true for armies based on conscription, as well as those based on volunteers. The present shift towards increasing dependence on military contractors for many military functions will therefore continue. This shift, together with the deployment of long-distance weapons will further increase the distance between military and the civilian population of the countries where they are deployed. Therefore the chance that the civilian population will be injured or their property damaged will also increase.

Long-term changes within the countries deploying the military are also inevitable. Conscript armies were firmly rooted in the societies from which they were recruited. Volunteer armies less so and contractors not at all. That has consequences for the political involvement of the civilian population and the way it relates to the military involved in far-off wars and, crucially, the consequences of those wars. Whereas under conscription returning casualties impressed on the citizens the extreme seriousness of the enterprise in which their government was involved, the modern-day situation involves at best, small communities of the military and their families while in no way influencing the lives of the majority of the population, except for possible increased taxation.

The combination of both trends, the increased use of long-distance weaponry and the increased distance of the home front from the consequences of the actions of armies acting in its name, has the effect of increasing the political freedom of the government to wage war when and where it pleases. As a result the shared responsibility between government and population for such warfare, underpinned by what I would describe as *strategic morality* (or the morality of the *casus belli*), has been seriously, perhaps fatally undermined.

As a consequence of the coincidence of the long-term trends described above waging war is becoming a more common instrument of policy than in the recent past.

I. Developments in warfare, military technology and morality

If warfare is a natural part of human existence (which some would dispute), it then follows that it is also influenced by social developments. These are determined by the economic development and increasing wealth of society, which opened the possibility of a better life for all. The immense increases in productivity and the application of improved technology to both the civilian and military spheres run parallel. This fact – the inevitable development of the war-making capabilities of society and the way it influences its members, as well as the reverse process, is as important as the external function of war: namely as an extension and instrument of foreign policy.

Assuming this is so, it stands to reason that the methods of waging war are also influenced by social developments, for example in the rule of law as applied to warfare and the increased support for humanitarian ideals. An increased standard of living generally speaking encourages a peaceful lifestyle and less enthusiasm for military endeavours.

That is in a nutshell the long-term development of most industrialised societies during the last two centuries.

However, a number of parallel developments have worked in the opposite direction. The most important of these have been the growth of the nation state and its accompanying nationalism, which resulted in confrontations between competing powers or alliances striving for a varied number of foreign policy aims. That is, the old political rivalry between the nation states simply continued. The national interest and the extent to which the population of the industrialised states has supported it led to a series of wars. The economic imperatives of this competition resulted in the colonisation of a large part of the world, primarily by the European nation states (including Russia) and later the United States. Between 1800 and the 2000 these developments reached a series of climaxes settled by war and revolution, setting the stage for a new world order.

Civilians and combatants

The industrial development which in the course of two centuries created a higher standard of living for the largest part of the population, also made it possible to apply the methods of mass production to warfare. Through conscription a large part of the working populations was made part of the highly organised machinery for waging war. Those who remained on the home front ran the industrial base necessary to support the armed forces. During the first hundred and fifty years of this process the conscripted soldiers were recruited under the flag of nationalism and to some degree, ideology. These developments, from the Napoleonic wars onwards meant that a substantial part of society was mobilised to wage war. In the course of the 19th century the civilian population became part of this machinery and therefore also the target of the enemy's military operations. An early example of this was the US Civil War and the infamous 1864 'March to the Sea' by the Union general Sherman.

Because the advances in technology were also applied to the war making tools, especially through the development of delivery methods for high explosives, it became theoretically possible to destroy a substantial part of enemy armies. This process reached its apotheosis in the First World War, when the use of this firepower against massed infantry resulted in mass slaughter. In the same war this enhanced firepower was used against industrial and populated areas as a separate strategic goal for the first time.

That particular strategy was a turning point in modern warfare. The industrialised and mobilised states now not only waged war against each other's armies but also the civilian population. Between the two World Wars this strategy was developed further. The underlying aims were twofold: to damage, perhaps decisively the military industry of the opponents, and

through demoralisation of the population, indirectly affect the war-making will of the enemy leadership.

The British pioneered this practice during revolts of the population of British Somaliland (1920) and Iraq (1921) against colonial rule, when the nascent Royal Air Force was used to bomb tribesmen into submission. In the industrialised world the bombing of Guernica in 1937 by the German Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War, marked the continuation of the bombing strategy applied by both sides in the First World War. In the Second World War strategic bombing became standard practice: first by the Germans against a number of European cities, second, at a more intensive level by the allies against Germany and Japan. The ultimate weapon, the nuclear bomb, provided the means of wiping an enemy population and war making capacity off the face of the earth, as illustrated by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Out of this context the concept of ‘collateral damage’ was developed to explain the damage done to civilian property. The reasoning was that the killing of civilians resulting from this strategy was an unfortunate but necessary price to pay. It was in fact a continuation of the official wartime reasoning to justify the bombing of populated districts in enemy cities: the aim was to hit the war industry and it was unavoidable that civilians were hit. For many of the aircrew of the bombers this was a nonsensical explanation: the population was a part of the war-making machinery and therefore a legitimate target – military in civilian uniform so to speak. But even in World War II this doctrine, pursued to its logical conclusion in the fire-bombing of cities like Dresden, led to public protest, in this particular case in Great Britain. This scale of destruction has not since been repeated in wars between industrialised countries. However, there have been further massive bombing campaigns aimed at civilian populations in the non-industrialised world. The civilian populations of Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Chechnya, among others, were struck in this manner. It was no accident that the post-war targets were in the non-industrialised world. The Cold War more or less froze potential conflicts between the main protagonists and their allies, because none wanted to risk a nuclear conflagration. People elsewhere were not so lucky, despite the opposition of substantial parts of the population of the industrialised countries, who were against the large-scale use of firepower. This opposition, also based on the development of war crimes legislation and the conventions regarding the treatment of non-combatants has had some influence on military doctrine. Even so it is debatable whether the limits placed on the use of firepower were the result of public indignation and pressure, rather than the result of advances in targeting technology. Perhaps it was a combination of the two.

Changing modes of recruitment

In the development of warfare sketched cursorily above, the social background of the people doing the fighting was of crucial importance for the legitimacy of a war. Conscription was not just a method of mobilising the manpower of a nation to wage war: it also involved a large part of the civilian population in a war. This took place in Europe for the first time during the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century and had huge repercussions on civil society. The ‘nation in arms’ was affected in many ways by the process of recruitment and the disciplining of the country’s youth, a vital aspect of the war-making machinery. The developing nationalist fervour also played a key role in recruiting soldiers, for example in Britain from 1914-1916 and in Germany in 1914 as illustrated by the enthusiasm for the Kaiser’s war.

However, the experience of the First World War was so horrifying that for most of the interbellum there was a distinct rejection of war. Anti-war and even pacifist movements were greatly strengthened because of the collective European memories of the horrors of trench warfare. This effect translated into a great reluctance to engage in a new armed conflict. The

1914-18 war resulted in conscript armies, which had to pay some attention to the problems of recruitment. Hence the improved living conditions and pay of the troops.

The late nineteenth and twentieth century developments also meant that a substantial part of the economy became militarised, which made the battle for production an integral part of the war-making capacity and therefore a part of the war: a target.

This ran counter to the existing laws of war, which distinguished between combatants and non-combatants. If now two industrialised and mobilised countries waged war it became quite possible for all of society to be involved. The Second World War marked a turning point. Although initially internal socio-economic policies of the warring states attempted to maintain a basic standard of living for civilians the intensification of the conflict finally resulted in a 'total war'. That is to say, a war in which the standard of living was subsumed to the war aims.ⁱ

War and race

There was another, seldom-discussed element to the war making that was of huge importance: this was the question of race distinctions, a product of centuries of colonialism. The technological superiority of the colonising powers, which underpinned the conquest of large areas of the world, not only brought with it a racist colonial administration, but also played a role in the views on race in the homeland. This attitude was so deeply ingrained that the occasional defeat of the colonial armies by mass levies of poorly armed tribesmen, as the British suffered at Isandhlwana in 1879 by the Zulu's led by king Cetshwayo, for example, brought about a huge cultural shock and a powerful reaction. The events in the empire influenced political opinion on the home front, often enflaming nationalist feelings. An intermediate step in this process was the genocide of the Herrero people of South West Africa committed by the German colonial authorities from 1904-1908.

The fatal mixture of racial superiority and war reached its horrendous climax in the ideology of Nazi Germany, which before and during the Second World War defined entire ethnic and social categories such as Jews, gypsies and Slav peoples as inferior. This concept provided a legitimisation for the wholesale starving of Soviet prisoners war and the civilian population and ultimately the mass genocide of the Holocaust. A similar racist ideology predominated amongst the Japanese versus the Chinese, and a relatively milder form amongst the Americans concerning the Japanese and internally amongst the Americans against blacks and the British against the subject peoples of their empire. In fact racism and its concomitant, the assumed legitimacy for the Western domination of colonial empires, were widespread.

The liberation movements which arose after the Second World War were a logical reaction to the defeat of the Axis powers, Since the war had at least partially been fought to liberate people from occupying powers, it was entirely reasonable for the liberation movements of the colonies of the European powers – Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, among others - to adopt this logic. Attempts by the colonial powers to reverse these "winds of change" as the British Prime Minister Macmillan called them, resulted in a series of liberation wars that took on the form of guerrilla warfare.

To win a war – guerrilla warfare

It is this form of warfare which has dominated the second half of the twentieth century as well as the beginning of the twenty-first. The political context of these wars changed after the end of the Cold War– the aim changed from liberation from a colonial power to civil war, rebellion and ethnic based confrontations. Nevertheless guerrilla war was a strategy of choice

for groups which otherwise had no chance of winning a conventional war. Instead they opted for the long-term strategy, which required that they not lose set-piece engagements while steadily creating a political and long-term presence amongst the population.

Because of its nature, this form of warfare inevitably involved a confrontation between the warring sides and the population. If the guerrillas were recruited from the local population and the government soldiers perceived as occupiers, confrontation between the latter and the people became inevitable, because it was impossible to distinguish between the combatants and the non-combatants. This basic fact is the prime causal factor for the massive casualties amongst the population.

Morality and the law of war

Modern developments in the laws of war, such as the Geneva conventions distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants have run head-long into the post-World War II reality of guerrilla warfare. As the distinction between soldiers and civilians faded in the post-WWII world so it has become difficult to protect the population from the consequences of war. Given the fact that many of the post-1945 conflicts were guerrilla wars, the increase in civilian casualties was inevitable.

In the industrialised countries peculiar types of schizophrenia developed. Those who wanted to save the civilian population from the vagaries of war inevitably ran into very basic political choices. If one chooses to wage war in a foreign country and there is substantial opposition amongst the population the question of the legitimacy of one's presence there comes to the fore. Whoever ignores this quickly runs into the moral questions related to the application of the Geneva conventions in irregular warfare. The Algerian war of independence from France, for example, was a grim illustration that there was no way around this. One has to claim a higher or 'strategic morality' or an imperial sense of mission to legitimise the application of naked power, inevitable in an occupation against the will of the population. Either that or one must resort to self-delusion, perhaps encouraged by a completely misleading picture on the home front of the war being waged abroad.

II Consequences in the war zone

Guerrilla

The new, globalising world consists not only of nation states, but also of regional movements formed by armed insurgents who do not recognise the authority of their own government. Because such situations imply involvement of large numbers of civilians the distinction between combatant and non-combatant in a war-zone where a guerrilla war is being waged is a vague one.

The involved parties may be supported in various ways by outside powers, ranging from economic to military. The industrialised states may through various mechanisms (UN, NATO, “coalitions of the willing”) be involved in such warfare and therefore in confrontations which do not differ all that much from the old-style colonial wars. Although there are many types of foreign intervention or involvement in a conflict situation, the one with which we are concerned here is the insertion of thousands of troops into a situation in which guerrilla warfare has been initiated. A case in point would be the war in Afghanistan, which – official propaganda to the contrary, is not a reconstruction mission but a classic counter-guerrilla war. The reason for being involved in that war is not at issue here. It is mentioned simply as an example of the type of warfare in which armies from industrialised nations are nowadays involved and can expect to be involved in the coming years.

In a guerrilla war the strategy and the operational doctrine for conventional warfare are inapplicable. The central issue is the interaction between one's own soldiers, the insurgents and the local population. The concealment of insurgents amongst the civilian population – often the same individuals – has far-reaching consequences for military doctrine. If traditional tactics such as maximum fire-power at long range are applied, then casualties among the civilian population are inevitable. The Israeli military strategist Martin van Creveld notes that in a guerrilla war, where a part of the population is on the side of the insurgents, there are two solutions.ⁱⁱ The first is to apply mass terror, for example by extensive bombardment of the civilian population in order to spread fear and dread, and exact cooperation. The alternative is to deploy large numbers of soldiers in order to promote intensive interaction with the population. This involves running numerous risks and means that relatively greater numbers of dead and wounded amongst one's own troops must be accepted. Such acceptance depends on the morale of the deployed soldiers and of the home front. The development of a high standard of living in the industrialised countries providing the soldiers, have made such sacrifices improbable.

The case of Afghanistan

The preconditions, within which the NATO forces and their allies must operate, preclude the application of von Creveld's precepts. Assuming that extreme repression is not an option (if only because the home front would strongly oppose it) the only viable alternative is the long-term strategy of extending and reinforcing a national and legitimate administrative structure to provide the security necessary for development. However, such a policy, which would amount to a colonial occupation, is on the whole not being pursued.

The reasons are manifold and complex: poppy cultivation and how to combat it, the security of people and the local culture and customs, warlords and their local power base, religion and tribal ties are all important. The talk is of winning *hearts and minds*. Most war-waging countries recognise the importance of this concept. The US army even employs cultural anthropologists as advisers to work alongside fighting units.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nevertheless and self-evidently, the influence of the Taliban is spreading. A substantial part

of the Pashtun speaking population now wants a national government that at the very least includes substantial Taliban participation and influence. Clearly a number of the countries participating in ISAF agree and are encouraging negotiations. However the influence of the 'total victory' wing of NATO, which would seem to include both the present and any future administration of the US^{iv}, is lending momentum to a military solution to the war.

In the Netherlands there seems to be a crucial misunderstanding of the basic situation. The government and military leadership officially embraces the so-called *3D concept*: diplomacy, development and defence.

However, the term 'diplomacy' is defined as winning the support of the people by reaching their 'hearts and minds'.^v The definition of these concepts is regarded exclusively from the military perspective of counterinsurgency: how can we act 'diplomatically' to win the people's support? Such actions are viewed as part of the operations of the army against the guerrillas. Interpreted this way the core of diplomacy, negotiations between two warring parties with different political goals in order to arrive at a compromise acceptable to both, is undermined.

In a comparable fashion the winning of *hearts and minds* is seen as part of the military campaign. This interpretation is given expression in the incorporation of aid policy, including the work of aid NGOs, in the counterinsurgency strategy. In Afghanistan, independent NGOs understand this subordination. They rightly fear that cooperation with the military, who consider this to be part and parcel of counterinsurgency doctrine, is fatal for their relations with the population.^{vi} This is seen by the NGOs as an extension of the military strategy. In practice it seems obvious to the military that their NGO contacts should be used as sources of information on the guerrillas. From the military standpoint this is completely logical, but from the standpoint of humanitarian organisations it is fatal. After losing some of its staff *Médécins Sans Frontières*, for example, left Afghanistan five years ago for this reason. The *3D* and *hearts and minds* concepts are in fact the practical application of the principles of counterinsurgency warfare, described on the home front as 'reconstruction'. In the Netherlands this amounts to the revival of the collective memories of the Dutch army of its last large-scale counterinsurgency campaign, in the late 1940s, against independence fighters in the Dutch East Indies.

The concept of involving the ngo community is closely related to classic counterinsurgency doctrine, but not officially recognised as such. These approaches amount to a rejection of realistic negotiations. If one frames one's strategy within the framework of military victory, then there is no room for realistic political negotiations. Such a position, given the extent of the Taliban resistance, implies a long-term military presence in Afghanistan, which amounts to an occupation that itself would increase Afghan resistance to the foreign presence.

This is an unrealistic policy: as already noted the major NATO participants are divided on their strategy and are therefore working at cross-purposes. The large-scale German presence in the north, for instance, will make no difference to the war being waged in the south. But for the immediate future the disconnect between political strategy and aims and short-term military operations on the basis of too few troops, means that there is no perspective of success. Since the troops are there anyway and involved in continuous operations, there are consequences for the well being of the civilian population. As there are too few troops and those that are there are constrained in their rules of engagement and operating under the priorities set by force protection, the widespread use of firepower, mostly from the air, is almost automatic, especially in reaction to the increased strength and intensity of Taliban attacks.

The consequence of this is a growing number of civilian casualties which, no matter what the particular circumstances, are causing great anger amongst the population.^{vii} This anger forms a firm base for continuous recruitment of new Taliban fighters, as well as an effective reinforcer of the traditional antipathy to the presence of foreign armed forces on Afghan soil.

The standard 'collateral damage' explanation given to public opinion on the NATO states is meaningless in Afghanistan. If the present operational doctrine and rules of engagement, meant to counter Taliban operations, lead to an increasing number of civilian casualties, this in effect means that victory is impossible, as is now openly recognised by many military commanders and some governments,^{viii} and defeat has become a possibility. However NATO has tied its *raison d'être* to the war. The member states are divided – Germany in the north provides troops but will not fight, the Atlanticist loyalists in the south do, with France playing a double game. The consequence is an incoherent military strategy which has far-reaching consequences for the political aims

Contractors as solution?

The increased number of operations abroad has placed the professional armies of a number of NATO countries under immense strain. The result has been an extension of the deployment periods of the military and a reduction in the period between deployments. Recruitment numbers have decreased drastically in a number of countries, doubtless as a result of the relatively high number of casualties suffered in the wars. In the case of the US deployment to Iraq the quality of recruits has also suffered^{ix}, while the shortfall had to be met by deploying Reserve and National Guard units.

A possible alternative to the lack of manpower in modern guerrilla warfare is the employment of contractors.^x Although on the surface this makes the waging of a classic counter-guerrilla war with infantry more feasible, there are a number of far-reaching consequences involved which undercut this aim. The most obvious point is that contractors see themselves as participating in a private venture, run by a firm with the aim of making a profit. That is a very different position from a soldier acting as the expression of the political will of the country which has sent him or her on a mission. The last can make some claim to representing (part of) civil society. The former is there in the service of a firm operating for commercial motives. A part of the contractors are in fact paid salaries far above the rates for comparable work in civilian life or in the professional armed forces. Indeed that last fact has resulted in highly trained soldiers, whose expensive training was paid for by the taxpayer, to leave the army and engage in the same work for a contractor.^{xi} All in all, these developments have increased the distance between the soldiers on a mission and the society which sent them on it. In the country of deployment many other problems can develop: if contractors work outside the chain of command of an army in the field, this may result in communication and co-ordination problems during military activities. Furthermore contractors tend to have their own rules of engagement (or none), which may well clash with those of conventional forces. Numerous authors have also pointed at the lack of liability for the consequences of contractor actions: there are difficulties in punishing misbehaviour either by the judiciary of the home country or that of the country they are operating in. A case in point is Blackwater in Iraq, whose staff shot dead 17 civilians in Baghdad. Those responsible have yet to be brought to justice^{xii}. Public opinion in Iraq was enraged.

Because of such incidents governments of host nations have sought to extend their jurisdiction over the contractors. So far this has not resulted in a serious curtailing of their freedom. Given these circumstances the use of contractors in a counter-guerrilla war, especially in combat functions, is counter-productive.

III. Consequences on the home front

Limitations of the conscript army

Waging war has far-reaching consequences for a society. In fact one can surmise that the deployment of conscript troops in the past guaranteed that the issue of the war remained high on the political agenda, especially in democratic societies. If a substantial part of the electorate is directly affected through family and other personal ties to the conscript army fighting a war on its behalf, then the reason for fighting the war is bound to be important, especially if it drags on and involves substantial casualties and financial costs. These conditions have imposed important restraints on the freedom of governments to wage war. This is especially so if the conscripts come from the same social strata as most of the electorate does. As a general rule most governments with conscript armies will experience great difficulty in waging war with these armies, other than in direct self-defence. The most obvious recent examples of these limitations were the US-Vietnam and the Russo-Afghanistan wars. In both cases the costs of intervention on the home front rose prohibitively and led to the collapse of the national will to continue the conflict. In the case of the US there were a number of other factors involved, among them the influence of the media which created the first TV war, a very large anti-war movement and a high rate of desertion especially amongst middle class youth who for various reasons refused to fight.

Professional alternative

This potential opposition reduced the possibilities of waging war and therefore the policy options of strategists and planners. A switch to a professional army based on voluntary recruitment seemed to offer an alternative. It was implemented in the US during the Cold War and in a large number of other NATO countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The ensuing series of UN interventions operations, such as on the Balkan, accelerated the process. Deploying large number of conscripts to conflict zones after the end of the Cold War was simply not an option. Professional and restructured forces, suitable for far-reaching operations seemed to be the practical alternative.

Important in this is the reduced social base of the army. While a conscript army necessarily is tied to large sections of society, the reduced professional army has a smaller social footprint in society. Furthermore, the success of recruitment drives is partially related to the economic situation in the home country. In a recession the poor and unemployed are recruited; even those with criminal dossiers. This has an additional effect: the sections of the population involved have little or no access to public opinion through the media and therefore no political power, especially if they do not vote. However; the all-encompassing dream of a better life through a non-military career competes with recruitment.

In any case, the professional soldiers are volunteers and the consequences of their work, including the risks, are widely accepted by the public which therefore imposes fewer constraints on operations. Political flexibility for a government in waging war therefore increases. However, there are still questions of patriotism tied to the legitimacy of a war. If this is seen as just, then there is greater empathy with the professional soldiers and dependants. If it is not, such empathy naturally becomes more brittle. That is also why the shaping of public opinion by the media is so important.

Media control

The question of public opinion was greatly influenced by the involvement of large sections of society in distant wars. But there have always been other factors at play, of which public

opinion on a war, informed through the media, has been the most important. In Vietnam the war was brought home to the American public through the TV screens and the reporters on the spot. Indeed, some strands of conservative opinion hold that the war was 'lost' by the media, since it created the basis for public dissent and the breaking of the country's will to wage war. Whatever the truth of this doubtful proposition, most western armies have in the intervening period developed various methods of controlling the flow of information from the battlefield to the home front. Indeed, the home front itself has come to be seen as a battlefield, where the 'hearts and minds' need to be won over.

The best known doctrine is that developed under the heading of 'information warfare'.^{xiii} This part of military doctrine not only covers the control of information and intelligence from the battlefield but also the shaping of public opinion at home. This does not just involve the traditional question of public morale (support the soldiers in the field as a form of patriotism) but also the shaping of the public debate in order to maintain support for the war. Although the creation of a *casus belli* by encouraging fear and loathing of 'the enemy' is a time-honoured method of gaining public support, the propaganda war was taken to new heights by the administration of president Bush through its manipulation and exaggeration of information in order to gain sufficient public support and that of Congress to initiate the war against Iraq in 2003.

Naturally, this was only possible through large-scale media complicity, which in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 unfortunately gave priority to greatly amplifying the US government's message on the grounds of a professed need to follow a patriotic line, including self-censorship.

Faltering recruitment

A combination of failure on the battlefield plus the realisation that there is no victory in sight, can seriously affect the recruiting base for the professional army. Furthermore the success with which various overseas commitments can be met depends on the number of wars which are waged simultaneously. This is a direct consequence of foreign policy choices. If war is continually chosen as an instrument of choice in a crisis-ridden world, manpower limits will rapidly act as a brake on foreign adventures. Furthermore, if there are also changes in society which offer alternative careers, especially during a war, then recruitment itself will falter. This has indeed been the case in a number of professional armies.^{xiv}

As noted above solutions to this problem have been sought in the form of increased fire power application. That in itself means working at cross purposes with any meaningful counter-insurgency doctrine, which ultimately depends on personnel on the ground. Hence the emphasis laid on setting up and training a local army, naturally within the bounds set by the intervening nation(s). This may, however, take a long time and can well falter, because guerrillas may infiltrate the army, attack its cadres and generally weaken its fighting strength.

There is one other way in which the fall in personnel can be compensated and that is through the use of contractors. That need not be directly into the combat functions: if the huge logistic tail of a western army can be contracted out, it becomes possible to shift some personnel to the combat functions. Furthermore, static guard duties or convoy escort can also be privatised.

Consequences of privatisation

The large scale hiring of contractors can have far-reaching consequences. The ties of the army to the public will become even more tenuous. That is a reflection of the position of the contractors, who are simply doing a job which can no longer be regarded as an expression of the political will of the people who sent him to war. The costs of contractors may be

comparable to that of a professional army^{xv}: but they carry with them an insidious influence, directly related to their proximity to the actual operations. In a guerrilla war the distinction between combat and non-combat functions may become tenuous. As a result contractors fulfilling guards' duty can play a pivotal role in the chances of success or failure. The case of Blackwater in Bagdad has already been mentioned, but there have been many other instances of such problems.

These problems are compounded by the lack of controllability of the contractors by the army employing them, let alone the government of the country in which they are active.

This too increases the distance from the home front. When these ties are severed, there is not only no control but also no interest or involvement by the people at home. The war being waged overseas in their name becomes largely an abstraction, entirely defined by the official announcements and media.

Thus the introduction of contractors to meet the short-fall of personnel not only fails to solve the problem of waging contra guerrilla war, but also damages the relationship of the army with its political masters. Indeed, in the most extreme situation, an army run on the basis of profit can become the instrument of rich and powerful sections of society.

Blowback

There are other ways besides the obvious ones of recruitment and expense in which wars waged elsewhere can have a very direct effect on the society waging them. If the enemies engaged have the capacity to do so, they may well choose to strike back. Carrying the war to the territory of the country waging war against them would be entirely logical from their point of view. As they are normally not capable of deploying the array of modern weaponry used against them, they instead make use of the strategy and tactics they are already familiar with: guerrilla war. That means covert operations directed not only against military but also civilian targets. The use of such terrorist tactics against the civilian population is first and foremost a propaganda operation, directed at the hearts and minds of the civilian population. Or in other words, an attempt to undermine the national political will. A part of the operations in the distant operational theatre may also be described as such, but on the home front of an industrialised state with a high standard of living, it has a multiplier effect. The war is brought home and this can have far-reaching consequences for the political support of the government. Such a terrorist campaign can also result in an overreaction by the state apparatus, in the form of repressive measures which curtail civil liberties and indeed the stigmatisation of large sections of the population, deemed to sympathise with the enemy. The most extreme form of such a development is the removal of the normal legal constraints on the operations of the police and security forces. If this also results in judicial measures against that minority and this happens to coincide with racist prejudices, the result may well be alienation amongst those communities and sympathy for the guerrillas, even ultimate involvement in their war. That is, the escalation logic which takes place in the far-off war, may be imported into the country waging the war, with dire consequences.

Thus the intervention elsewhere has a blow-back effect on society and may even structurally change it, in a manner comparable to the way the Roman republic was transformed when it engaged on its expansionist policies.

IV. Conclusion

A distant guerrilla war cannot be waged without sufficient combat personnel. If neither a conscript nor professional army can provide that, while the use of contractors raises a separate set of problems in the war zone, then a shift to using firepower as an alternative for the lack of infantry becomes inevitable. Although technological advances have made precision weapons possible, this cannot neutralise the implicit problems in deploying such weaponry (artillery, bombing and strafing from the air) in a contra guerrilla situation. Through its very nature civilians and combatants are often in close proximity and indeed may well be identical if the insurgents have gained a large popular base. In that case the foreign army will be waging war against the population, resulting in civilian casualties and destruction of property.

Furthermore racist sentiments may well start playing a role. That is the consequence of the implied difference of the value of a soldier's life as compared to that of the civilians he is supposed to be helping. As the casualties mount the distance between guerrillas and civilians disappears. That results in increased support for the guerrillas and therefore initiates an ever-increasing spiral of destruction and death. The shortfall in infantry cannot safely be compensated for by the use of contractors. They operate on the basis of different interests and outside the regular chain of command. Neither fire-power, nor contractors, therefore, can win this kind of war. In the long if not the short run, defeat of the foreign army is inevitable. The impact of waging a war abroad on an industrialised society may be reduced somewhat through professionalization and privatisation of the military through the use of contractors, but the costs may still turn out to be prohibitive. For example, the Iraqi war has, according to Professor Stiglitz's calculation cost the US taxpayers trillions of dollars.^{xvi} Although the US government has funded that war and others by simply allowing the national debt to increase to astronomical levels, at some point society will have to pay. In the final analysis such a development will ultimately limit the capability of society to wage war and the option of the ruling government to choose it as a policy option. Before it reaches this point, however, the consequences of the war, the 'blowback', may have changed society irrevocably.

ⁱNotes

ⁱ See for example: Milward, Alan S. *War, Economy and Society, 1939-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. and *The Wages of Destruction* Adam Tooze Penguin London 2007

ⁱⁱ *The Changing Face of War: lessons of combat, from the Marne to Iraq*, Martin van Creveld Press, 2006, ISBN 978-0-89141-901-3

ⁱⁱⁱ *Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones* NYT October 5, 2007 By DAVID ROHDE
NYT <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/05/world/asia/05afghan.html?pagewanted=print>

^{iv} *FACTBOX-Obama, McCain: Quotes on Afghanistan, Pakistan* Tue Oct 14, 2008
<http://in.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idINSP4037720081014>

^v *Foreign Affairs Budget – the world begins at home* 18-Sep-2007 | Press release | Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<http://www.minbuza.nl/en/news/pressreleases,2007/09/Foreign-Affairs-Budget---the-World-Begins-at-Home.html>

^{vi} See chapter 6. *Military involvement in aid delivery*, in *Memorandum submitted by Christian Aid; hearing UK parliament* t Sept 2007 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmintdev/memo/ucafgghanistan/ucm402.htm>

^{vii} Afghan Archives - Civilian Casualties <http://www.comw.org/warreport/afghanarchiveciv.html>

^{viii} *U.S. Study Is Said to Warn of Crisis in Afghanistan* By MARK MAZZETTI and ERIC SCHMITT
The New York Times October 9, 2008

^{ix} *Concern over US army recruitment* Story from BBC NEWS:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/5278654.stm>
Published: 2006/08/23 and *Military Personnel: DOD Needs Action Plan to Address Enlisted Personnel Recruitment and Retention Challenges* GAO-06-134, November 17, 2005 <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06134.pdf>

^x For relevant case studies see: *Private Security Companies and Local Populations: An Exploratory Study of Afghanistan and Angola* Ulrike Joras and Adrian Schuster (eds.) 2008 swisspeace Bern ISBN 978-3-908230-72-4

^{xi} *Impact on Human Rights of Private Military and Security Companies' Activities* By José L. Gómez del Prado UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries 2007 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10523>

^{xii} *On Anniversary of Civilian Shootings by Blackwater in Iraq, Amnesty International Calls on U.S. Government to Hold Military Contractors Accountable* Sept. 16, 2008 <http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/anniversary-civilian-shootings-blackwater-iraq/story.aspx?guid=%7B09A78181-F23A-43EC-9026-9798172915FF%7D&dist=hpr> AND
Blackwater in Baghdad: "It was a horror movie" By Jennifer Daskal, senior counterterrorism counsel Human Rights watch Dec. 14, 2007 <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/12/14/usint17554.htm>

^{xiii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_warfare#Papers:_Research_and_Theory

^{xiv} See for example in the case of the US: *Military Recruiting 2007: Army Misses Benchmarks by Greater Margin*
<http://www.nationalpriorities.org/militaryrecruiting2007>

^{xv} *Contractors' Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq* CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE Aug 2008 <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/96xx/doc9688/08-12-IraqContractors.pdf>

^{xvi} *The Three Trillion Dollar War*; by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, W. W. Norton. 2008 ISBN 978-0-39-306701-9