Thoughts on a New World Order

by Albert Legault

Before discussing the substance of the world order we should like to see, we must first say a few words about how today's international system has come into being.

Generalities are not much use and hardly help us to plan for the future. Nevertheless, there are certain major trends in the international system, as noted by the American specialist Michael T. Klare in his book Peace and World Security Studies, from which we might borrow here.

- Violent conflicts of all kinds will continue to occur in the years and decades to come;
- No major powers or centres of power will be able to establish their hegemony over the whole world, let alone over large parts of it; on the contrary, we shall see a world that is highly fragmented with a few islands of relative stability (North America, Western Europe), which will be surrounded by vast areas subject to chronic instability and violence;
- Although the risk of global conflict or of war affecting a whole continent ... cannot be ruled out, the greater likelihood is that we shall witness a global proliferation of local disputes, insurgencies or ethnic and religious conflicts;
- Although it is possible that nuclear or chemical weapons, if not both, will be used in local conflicts and in these domestic wars, most wars in the future will be waged with conventional weapons;
- No single institution or entity alone will be responsible for making peace on a global scale and no single strategy for making peace will apply to all cases of conflict. The task of peacemaking will instead be shared by a wide range of bodies the United Nations, certain states, regional organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), concerned individuals and, similarly, use will have to be made of a broad range of techniques for making peace to deal with the range of likely conflicts.

This means then that the world of tomorrow will be highly fragmented as far as international security is concerned, despite the globalization of trade and the means of production that make our world appear increasingly homogeneous. Peacemaking will be all the more difficult since the UN and other organizations have not yet found the means to guarantee effective international peacekeeping and security, and the security that was until recently indivisible may well become increasingly divisible, as is clearly shown by the recent examples of the conflicts in Rwanda, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. The conflicts of tomorrow will not necessarily be those which we can foresee or for which we have prepared ourselves.

This image of a world in which disorder is increasingly common, where the whole planet may well blow up or where it threatens to disintegrate piece by piece, is hardly encouraging for the freedom of peoples and the democracies. The image of the world as a leopard skin, where areas of peace exist side by side with huge areas of insecurity is hardly more encouraging for the future of the democracies. Be that as it may, three main concepts seem gradually to be emerging. The first is that security cannot be reduced...
merely to its military dimension. New threats are constantly appearing and other types of institution are necessary to deal with them. Second, the North-South problem has been an ever-present reality since 1945 and has gained fresh vigour since the end of the Cold War (which dates back to the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification). While the work of the Brandt and Palme Commissions showed that military spending contributes to the economic insecurity of states and that there will be no peace until we achieve social justice and a new international order, there is still many a slip between cup and lip. States have barely begun to put into practice the principles of environmental protection and better sharing of resources around the planet.

Third, as far as international organizations are concerned, the first efforts at changing the international security system began with the publication of the UN Secretary General's Agenda for Peace, but here too there is much still to be done. The remainder of this article will concentrate on this last point.

PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

Much of Agenda for Peace dealt with improving international institutions and their mechanisms for intervening to resolve conflicts. In addition, much stress was placed on the possibility of intervening before conflicts occur, in other words, the possibility of giving the UN a real capacity for preventive intervention. This capacity would be possible if the UN were equipped with a truly international army.

However, this concept suffers from three fundamental weaknesses. It does not in any way make the upstream decision easier, and this is tantamount to saying that the UN Security Council will always be responsible for deciding whether to intervene. It is easily forgotten that an international organization always reflects the wishes of the member states and that those most concerned act only when their interests are threatened. Secondly, recent examples tend to suggest that the greatest misfortunes occur when all vestiges of government within a country collapse entirely. Somalia and Rwanda provide good examples but Afghanistan and the Sudan could be added to the list. The new face of international relations has introduced a new element to preventive diplomacy: the peacekeeping dimension. In this area, it is the NGOs above all that can achieve something in cooperation with the UN, rather than the UN acting alone because it does not have a mandate or the capacity for civilian intervention. Better coordination between the UN and NGOs could in future facilitate matters in this area but this would not do much to increase the ability of international organizations to intervene. Finally, no state has yet expressed its willingness to place its troops under UN control.

A SEMI-PERMANENT UN ARMY?

For all these reasons, there is increasing talk of establishing an army of standby forces in which certain states would agree to place at the disposal of the UN national contingents, which could intervene at the request of the authorities concerned. While progress has been made in this area since the UN Committee of 33 was created in the late sixties (it became the Committee of 34 when China decided to join), the fact remains that all the problems involved in setting up this international army still revolve around the issues of control and command, standardization of equipment, common procedures accepted by all the members on all types of missions as well as problems of logistics, education and training. Canada has done and continues to do a great deal in this regard.

In April 1994, as it had done in Kingston in 1967, it played host to fifty or so countries who came to this country to discuss these problems. In the meantime, on May 5 of this year, the Clinton Administration published a document on UN shortcomings in the field of peacekeeping. This document seems to give a death-blow to the notion of peacekeeping as such since the United States would intervene only if international peace and security were threatened and if its interests were at stake. Despite this general pessimism, the fact remains that we may still hope, as long as other countries such as the middle powers in the international system take up the task and agree on a minimum set of criteria for action.

This last point is especially important because, while peacekeeping is still a popular commodity in Canada, all observers agree that it will lose this popularity if a lot of Canadian lives are lost in operations of this
kind, which are tending to become more numerous and more dangerous.

Canada should cooperate with its main allies and devote its efforts to developing internationally recognized standards in order to create a genuine system of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. As long as this does not happen, Canada could well be talking to a brick wall or be viewed as an idealistic fireman who is still unaware of the magnitude of the disaster to be avoided or contained. Even if we assume that the states will one day reach agreement to set up an international army made up of national contingents, such an army could not be effective in peace enforcement operations, which would still have to be overseen by the UN Security Council alone. Such a force could intervene only in cases of low-level conflict or in those situations where a country is in such a state of disorder that to all intents and purposes it has no real government. In addition, the establishment of such a force would not resolve the question of when and where the force could intervene and, for all these reasons, it might be preferable to abandon the expression preventive diplomacy and speak of a capacity for positive action by the UN or the international community.

It is widely accepted that improvement of the UN's capacity in this regard would offer three advantages. The most obvious is that it would help to give meaning to the concept of collective responsibility. The Cold War gave too much importance to the UN Security Council. Second, such a force might have been able to prevent the massacres in Rwanda but that does not mean that this would have happened if such a force had existed. Nobody can predict or rewrite history. However, it is reasonable to assume that, if this force had existed, it (the international community and certainly not the UN Security Council) might have intervened on time. Thirdly, this would be the only way to ensure an interface between the Secretariat and the Security Council since, because the former lacks the resources, it has become a mere enforcer, doing what the main states in the international community tell it to do.

POSITIVE ACTION AND DEMOCRACY

Recent examples of international peacekeeping and security sometimes serve as a warning to observers. Cambodia is held up as a UN success story and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia as a failure while the interpretation to be given to Somalia and Rwanda remains, to say the least, very dubious. There is confusion as to what should be done in Haiti, not to mention the war between the two Yemens or the situation in the Sudan.

Two factors seem important here. The first, which is amply illustrated by the situation in Somalia and Rwanda, is that peace and domestic order cannot be separated from the disastrous economic situation that prevails or has prevailed in those countries. Development and democracy do not always necessarily go together because Chile and many other examples in Asia show that harsh regimes are often the ones that are best at promoting the economic development of certain states. This having been said, the fact remains that democracy cannot be constructed on the ruins of bankruptcy and that it is of the utmost importance for the international community to examine this problem. The second problem is directly linked to the first: how do we build democracy? Here the examples of Russia and some of the former Soviet republics show that the change-over from totalitarianism to democracy does not take place overnight, just as economic growth is not something that can be arranged in 24 hours. We feel, therefore, that the linking of development assistance for the dual needs of learning and building democracy is a matter of urgency. In this area we need major coordination between Canadian NGOs and the main government agencies responsible for aid and international economic development, on the one hand, and between NGOs and the UN or any other regional economic organization, on the other.

As far as coordination with the UN is concerned, several areas of cooperation already exist such as the monitoring and control of elections in certain countries, the creation of civilian police forces or the deployment of medical staff and specialists in transporting and shipping rescue teams or food to locations where conflicts or natural disasters occur. All these sectors should be further strengthened and better equipped as specialized national teams are created. Other examples could be examined such as the training required in the operation of democratic institutions or the strengthening of procedures relating to the rule
of law, the creation of better guarantees to ensure respect for human rights and all the necessary know-
how required for the free circulation of ideas and information. These few suggestions obviously provide
only an overview of the problems involved in building democracy but these few practical principles will
perhaps be more effective in the long term if all those sectors that help to consolidate democracy work
hand in hand rather than separately, which was the case in the past. Such a vision of the future clearly
presupposes a major breaking down of bureaucratic barriers, especially a decompartmentalizing of the
notion of peace and security, which would then be extended to include all areas of civil peace.

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**By the same author:**

*The End of a Military Century?* by Albert Legault.
IDRC 1992, 120 pp., ISBN 0-88936-618-7,
(order@idrc.ca)

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ISSN 0315-9981. This magazine is listed in the Canadian Magazine Index.

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