

# War In the Third World

## A Conceptual Overview

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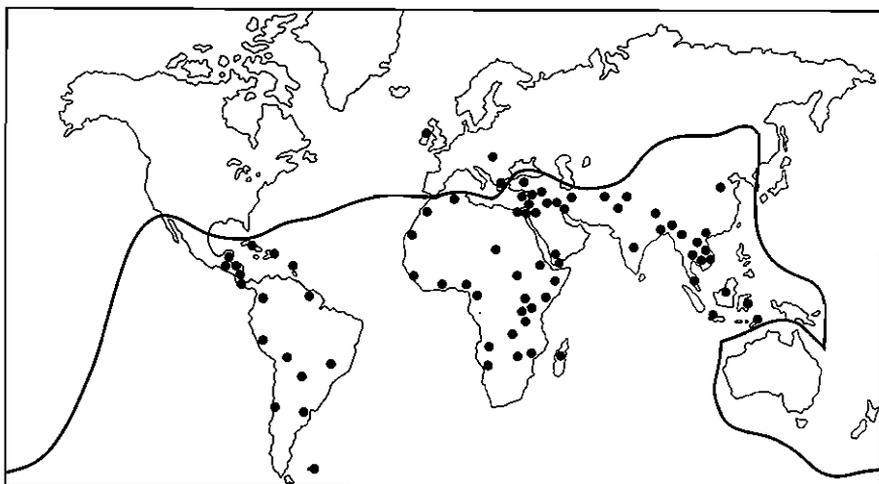
*Contemporary war is essentially a Third World phenomenon. In terms of spatial scale, inter-state and intra-state wars are the predominant types today. Analysis of the sources of conflict reveals four main types of war viz. anti-colonial, territorial disputes, ethnic/national conflicts and ideological conflicts. Although located in the Third World wars frequently involve one of the superpowers or a European colonial power. In the nuclear age the more plausible explanation for US and Soviet intervention into the internal affairs of other countries is material considerations of political economy rather than the strategic requirements of a global military chess game. Access to natural resources, protection of investments, defence of trade routes and maintenance of zones of influence are the primary motivations. Forms of intervention include direct military engagement, latent force and economic and military aid. Sales of arms by industrialised countries bring economic gain but also control over Third World economies.*

**T**he last forty years have been a period of unprecedented peace in Europe. European countries have only rarely been directly involved in major wars since the end of World War II, with the result that most Europeans would now regard peace as normal and war (with the possible exception of limited guerilla wars and sporadic “terrorist” activity) as exceptional. However,

viewed globally, war is still a depressingly common state of affairs. O'Sullivan<sup>1</sup> estimated that between 1983 and 1985 over 4 million people were killed in wars involving no fewer than 45 of the world's 164 states; whilst Ives<sup>2</sup> noted that there have been at least 120 conflicts since the end of World War II, resulting in the deaths of up to 25 million people - approximately the same number as were killed in the whole of World War II.

Perhaps the most striking feature about contemporary wars is their geographical distribution. A map of the location of the major conflicts between 1945 and the early 1980s reveals that the overwhelming majority are to the south of the north-south divide identified in the Brandt Report<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1). Contemporary war can therefore be regarded, with some justification, as essentially a Third World problem.

**Fig. 1. The Location Of Conflicts Since 1945**



The costs of war are often enormous. Apart from the human suffering which they cause in terms of deaths and injuries, the loss of family, friends and relations, and the displacement and sometimes fragmentation of families during enforced refugee movements, wars result in the destruction of resources (especially crops and livestock), property, and the environment. Wars also affect a much larger population than that living within the immediate war zone. At the very least, wars compound the existing economic problems of countries affected by war — revenue is reduced by the destruction of export commodities, whilst money used to purchase armaments or to replace essential

resources destroyed by wars (such as food) may increase indebtedness or absorb financial resources badly needed for development purposes. At worst, wars may trigger or compound a major crisis, such as the famines in Biafra, Bangladesh or, more recently, Ethiopia, each of which resulted in the deaths of over one million civilians.

War is not a very pleasant subject. However, it is too important a subject to be ignored. Given the implications, wars should not simply be dismissed as rare, exceptional or aberrant events: wars and associated phenomena (such as the existence of a strong military presence) exercise a very real impact upon the day to day lives of a very large section of the world's population. This paper is an attempt to identify some of the principal causes of wars and, in passing, to note some of their implications for the less developed countries.

## Spatial Scale and War

The spatial extent of the areas directly affected by war varies considerably from one war to another: some conflicts are extremely localised whilst others may be continental or, in the case of World War II, almost global in extent. Four spatial-scales may be identified:

*Intra-State:* Wars confined within the boundaries of a single state (i.e. civil wars);

*Local Inter-State:* Wars between two states in fairly close proximity. Most wars at this scale are between neighbouring states;

*Inter-Continental:* Wars between states not in close proximity. Most wars at this scale usually involve either a superpower, directly or indirectly, or a declining imperial power (e.g. Britain in the Falklands). However, occasionally smaller states may get involved in an inter-continental war by providing military assistance to distant allies (e.g. Cuban involvement in Namibia and Ethiopia). Although the participants in wars at this scale are inter-continental, the actual conflict zone is generally much more localised - indeed the territory and civilian population of the superpower or imperial power is rarely affected, which of course

makes the war politically much more acceptable in such countries. The United States, for example, has been involved in numerous wars since its inception just over two hundred years ago, but it has not had to fight a war on US territory since the British attacked Washington in 1812. (Hawaii was not a state at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.)

*Global:* Wars involving a large number of participants and directly affecting a very large area. The two World Wars provide the best examples in the present century, whilst the Napoleonic wars provide an example in the nineteenth century.

Since the end of the last global war in 1945, the initially high number of inter-continental wars has declined, leaving inter-state and intra-state wars as the predominant types today. To understand these shifts in spatial scale, it is useful to attempt a classification of the apparent sources of conflict.

## War : A Typology

Every war is different. Examined in detail, each is the product of a complex mix of circumstances which are unique to a particular region at a particular point in time. However, it is useful, as a prerequisite to a fuller understanding, to seek regularities and order within this apparent diversity.

The following classification identifies some of the main types of war, but it is by no means exhaustive. A number of conflicts do not readily fit into any of the categories listed; whilst many conflicts could justifiably be classified in two or more categories. Nevertheless, the classification provides a useful preliminary framework for examining the causes of war.

Four main types of war may be identified:

### Anti-Colonial Wars

At one stage most of the world was controlled by a comparatively small number of European empires, originally established with the aid of armed force. However, most former colonies have now secured formal independence, although in many cases only as a result of a war of independence. This process of decolonisation historically falls into two quite distinct phases or cycles.<sup>4</sup>

The first phase was in the last quarter of the eighteenth

century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when the main focus of decolonial activity was in the Americas. This period was initiated by the establishment of the United States of America, following the breakaway of 13 British colonies in the American War of Independence (1775-83), but within a few decades most of Central and Southern America had gained formal independence from the collapsing Spanish and Portuguese empires.

The final third of the nineteenth century was a period of renewed imperial activity, epitomised by the 'scramble for Africa' between the major west European powers, but this gave way in the twentieth century to a second major phase of decolonisation. The main focus of activity in this period was Africa and Asia. Many former British, French and Dutch colonies in southern and southeast Asia gained independence in the immediate post World War II period, whilst the late 1950s and 1960s saw the formal independence of most of Africa.<sup>5</sup> There were only four independent states in the whole of Africa in 1950 (Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa); today there are at least forty-seven — many the result of bitter wars (e.g. Algeria and, more recently, Angola and Mozambique). Given that the formal empires of the west European powers have now been almost entirely dismantled since the early 1970s, anti-colonial wars are today few in number — hence the decline in the number of inter-continental wars.

### **Territorial disputes**

Competition for overseas territories frequently resulted in wars between the major imperial powers in previous centuries (e.g. between Britain and France in the eighteenth century), but most territorial disputes today are between neighbouring states over the location of their common boundaries. There are a number of lingering territorial disputes in Europe (not least being that between Britain and Ireland over Northern Ireland), but the vast majority of territorial disputes and wars in recent decades have been in Africa and southern Asia (i.e. in a belt stretching from the Middle East through the Indian sub-continent into Southeast Asia).

Many border disputes (although by no means all) involve newly independent countries. In most instances the source of the dispute was inherited from the colonial era when colonial boundaries were superimposed by the imperial powers with little reference to the wishes of the people living in the affected

regions. Rivers, for example, which historically provided a unifying focus for local populations, often provided convenient demarcation lines for imperial powers anxious to delimit their respective territories in order to avoid conflict with one another. In other instances, especially in Africa, colonial boundaries were fixed by arbitrarily drawing geometrical lines on maps with even less cognizance being taken of geographical factors. The inherent irrationality of these boundaries of convenience, which were subsequently inherited by the newly independent states, has in many instances given rise to tension and open conflict.

The fighting in wars caused by boundary disputes is normally confined to the contested region, but in some instances it may develop into a general war (i.e. a war involving most of the armed forces of the belligerent states and directly affecting areas outside the contested region). In such instances, however, other causal forces, including internal political factors, are generally involved.

Border disputes, almost by definition, occur mostly at an inter-state level, although either or both of the belligerents may receive support from outside.

### **Ethnic/national conflicts**

The relations between adjoining states may be strained because of long-standing animosities between their two peoples (e.g. Iraq and Iran), but most conflicts based upon ethnic or national differences occur at an intra-state level and usually reflect the ambitions of an ethnic minority to break away from the majority to form a new independent nation state (e.g. Eritrea) or to unite with co-nationals in a neighbouring state (e.g. the Albanians in Kosovo in Yugoslavia). In the latter situation, the claims of the minority for separation ("enosis") may be supported by demands from the neighbouring state for unity ("irridentism"). The demands of the minority may be acceded to by the majority (in which case there will be no conflict), but generally the demands are resisted by a variety of strategies, varying from cultural assimilation, through limited concessions (e.g. regional autonomy), to armed force. Resistance to secession is especially likely if the minority occupy territory which is strategically important (e.g. the West Bank of the Jordan) or economically important (e.g. Biafra, which provides most of Nigeria's oil exports).

National conflict in many Third World countries, especially in Africa where it is especially rife, can be regarded as part of the European colonial heritage. Group identities in Africa were

historically, and still are, very strongly centred on the tribe - a much smaller unit than the recently created states.<sup>6</sup> Most African countries have therefore been faced with the problem of creating a national identity (i.e. an identity with the European defined state) to overcome the centrifugal tendencies of tribal identities. European concepts of 'state' and 'nation' have consequently been superimposed upon cultures to which they are not suited. Some African countries, especially those in which there is a balance of power between a number of major tribes, have been able to adjust reasonably successfully (e.g. Kenya), but in other countries tribal rivalries have given rise to political instability and even genocide (e.g. Uganda). State boundaries likewise bear little resemblance to the distribution of ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, where the profusion of minorities further complicates an already complex situation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ideological conflicts**

All wars are ideological in the sense that the combatants must believe that their cause is worth dying for (i.e. they must subscribe to some set of ideas about what is right and wrong). However, the term "ideological" is used here more restrictively to refer to wars which are primarily caused by a clash of ideas or beliefs. Most ideological wars can be attributed to either differences in religion or differences in politics.

Religious wars have a long ancestry, although in many instances religion was simply used as a pretext to legitimise or mobilise support for expansionist tendencies motivated by other more material factors. Viewed from a European perspective religious wars may appear to be a thing of the past (e.g. the Crusades), but a brief perusal of world affairs reveals that religious conflict is still a very important aspect of the modern world. Religious differences between neighbouring states frequently underlie traditional hostilities which occasionally escalate into inter-state wars (e.g. between India and Pakistan, and between Israel and its Arab neighbours), whilst revolutionary upheaval throughout the Moslem world over the past two decades has given rise to a large number of intra-state conflicts. Religious differences frequently complicate ethnic or national conflicts at inter-state or intra-state scales.

Wars motivated by political ideology have a much shorter ancestry, but the clash between socialism (in its various forms) and capitalism has emerged as probably the single most important source of conflict and war throughout the world since

the end of the last main phase of decolonisation. Most wars of this type are formally civil wars (i.e. wars between two or more factions within a country fighting for control of the state), but many of course result in the intervention, either directly or indirectly, of neighbouring states or one of the superpowers, in which case they may escalate into inter-state or regional wars.

As with wars in general, the most striking feature of this type of war is its geographical distribution. As Chaliand and Rageau<sup>8</sup> note: "For all intents and purposes, all such conflicts since 1945 have taken place in the Third World". However, the distribution of such wars within the Third World has been uneven. Politically motivated civil wars have been a particularly common occurrence in recent decades in Central and Southern America and South-east Asia, although possibly the only reason why they have occurred less frequently in other parts of the Third World is that, until recently other sources of conflict have assumed a greater urgency.

## The Geopolitical Dimension

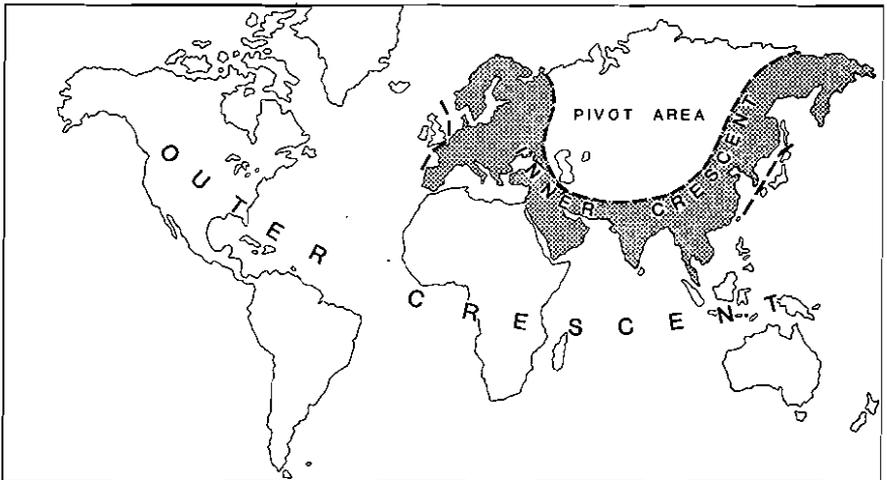
Although war in the modern world may be regarded, at least in terms of its costs and consequences, as essentially a Third World problem, it would be wrong to assume that war is a primitive or atavistic form of behaviour which will wither away of its own accord following "modernisation". Although almost every major war zone since the end of World War II has been in the Third World, many of these wars have been characterised by the involvement of a European colonial power or of at least one of the superpowers, even if only indirectly. It is clearly not sufficient, therefore, to seek the causes of war solely within the Third World itself - to do so would simply give rise to yet another case of "blaming the victim". The world is an inter-connected system. To understand the causes of wars in the Third World it is essential to consider the linkages between the Third World and developed countries in general, and the Third World and the superpowers in particular. The present section consequently considers the global outlooks of the superpowers and their impact upon the Third World.

The intervention of the superpowers in the internal affairs of other countries is often justified, in terms of military strategy, as being essential to their own security. Actions which are essentially

aggressive in other words, are depicted as pre-emptive defensive measures to forestall the possibility of attack by the other superpower or its allies. Adopting this perspective, the world political map may be viewed as a giant chess board in which the superpowers must continuously jostle to defend their strategic positions. The long-term game strategies of both superpowers are supposedly guided by geopolitical theories, many of which would appear to have evolved out of the ideas of the British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, whose "heartland theory" was recently described by one writer as "the first premise in western military thought".<sup>9</sup> The accuracy of this evaluation will be questioned shortly, but first it is useful to consider Mackinder's ideas in some detail.

Writing at the beginning of the century, Mackinder<sup>10</sup> argued that the world can be divided into three major zones (Fig. 2). The first, occupying a large part of Asia and referred to as the *pivot area* or *heartland*, was inaccessible to shipping because all the rivers in the region either flow south into inland salt lakes (which are not connected with the world's oceans) or else flow north into the Arctic which is frozen for most of the year.

Fig. 2. Mackinder's Three Geo-Strategic Zones



The second area, referred to as the *inner crescent*, could be accessed either from the heartland by land or from the outer crescent by sea. It contained a very high percentage of the world's population. The inner crescent can be divided into four

fairly self-contained subregions, roughly corresponding to the world's four main religions: Christian Europe, Moslem Middle East, Hindu India, and Buddhist East Asia.

The third area, the *outer crescent*, could only be accessed from the heartland or the inner crescent by sea and included the Americas, Japan and Australia. More importantly (from Mackinder's point of view), it included Britain which was separated from the inner crescent by the English Channel. It also included Africa. Although Africa is connected by land to Asia, and hence to Europe, it was included in the outer crescent because land communications between Eurasia and most of Africa were effectively cut-off by the Sahara Desert. Africa, south of the Sahara, could therefore be regarded almost as an island which could only be accessed by sea.

Mackinder argued that these basic geographical facts have exerted a major influence upon the course of world history. The history of the world, he argued, could be viewed as a continuing struggle between land power and sea power. Three eras could be identified:

#### **The Pre-Columbian era (i.e. pre-1500)**

Land power, centred in the pivot area, dominated in the pre-Columbian period because of its central position and greater mobility. The northern part of the pivot area was a forested and frozen waste, but the grasslands in the southern part (i.e. the Steppes) provided fairly easy movement to armies on horseback. Horsemen from central Asia were consequently able to attack out rapidly in any direction. The position of central Asia vis-à-vis the main centres of world population provided the horsemen of central Europe with many different options for attack (hence the term "pivot area"). This, coupled with their ease of movement, gave them a decisive military advantage over the much more highly developed civilisations in the inner crescent. European, Persian, Indian and Chinese civilisations were disrupted between the 5th and 16th centuries by wave after wave of nomadic horsemen from central Asia.

#### **The Columbian era (1500-1900)**

The balance of power began to shift from about 1500 onwards in favour of Europe. The turning point was the discovery of a Cape route to the Indies. Europe had been hemmed in by the Asians and the Arabs, but the Cape route (discovered after great difficulty) gave Europeans access to the whole of the inner

crescent. Armies could be moved faster by sea than by land, and hence the whole balance of power, based upon flexibility, began to swing to the sea powers. The resources from the Americas, and other overseas colonies inaccessible to land powers, also gave Europe a decisive advantage. Britain, the foremost sea-power in Europe, due to its insular position, eventually became the world's leading power - a situation Mackinder was anxious to maintain.

### The Post-columbian era (1900-)

By 1900 the world was beginning to change, due to the construction of trans-continental railways. The railways gave land powers greater mobility. Also, the vast untapped resources of central Asia could now be exploited with the aid of railways. The fact that the pivot area remained inaccessible to British sea power created a serious potential danger to "world peace" (i.e. British hegemony) if it was to be occupied by a major land power.

Mackinder was not particularly worried about the Russians who occupied the heartland. Although the Russians had expanded across Asia in much the same way as Britain had expanded over the oceans, Russia at the beginning of the 20th century was still semi-feudal and could easily be contained. Mackinder argued that the real threat to British hegemony was that the pivot area might become controlled by an inner crescent power. The resources of the pivot area, coupled with the population of the inner crescent power and access to the sea, would give the inner crescent power a decisive advantage. Mackinder argued that the main threat to Britain was either Germany or Japan (if it got control over China).

Mackinder's ideas were revised by an American geographer, Nicholas Spykman during World War II. Spykman retained Mackinder's three-fold division of the world, but argued that the key to world domination lay in what he referred to as the *rimland* — an area which more or less coincided with Mackinder's inner crescent.<sup>11</sup> The biggest danger to "world freedom" was that this region would be united under a single power.

Viewed from an American perspective, the biggest danger during World War II was that the rimland would be dominated by the Germans in alliance with the Japanese, but in the post-war era the danger was that it could come under the control of the heartland (i.e. the USSR). It was this fear which supposedly led to the US adopting a policy of containment (originally articulated in 1947 by George Kennan in the US State Department). Accepting Mackinder's premise that the USSR enjoyed the

advantage of a key strategic location, the basic objective of containment was to try to prevent the USSR from extending its influence into the rimland. The United States consequently set about forming a series of military alliances in the 1940s and 1950s to surround the Soviets and to keep them "hemmed in": NATO in Europe, SEATO in Southeast Asia, and CENTO in South and Southwest Asia. Enforcement of containment resulted in United States involvement in major wars in Korea (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1965-1973).

The Soviet global outlook would appear to be basically a mirror image of the USA's. Whilst US policy is seen as one of trying to contain Soviet expansion, the USSR sees itself on the defensive and surrounded on all sides by hostile forces (including, of course, the People's Republic of China). The USSR has therefore used its military power to secure the installation of friendly governments, especially in neighbouring regions (which includes most of the rimland). It has occasionally provided assistance to "liberation" movements further afield (e.g. Cuba, Nicaragua), but it has concentrated most of its efforts in the rimland where it has — at least until recently — taken a very resolute stand against possible defections by "friendly" immediate neighbours (e.g. Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; Poland, 1980; and Afghanistan, 1979-1988).

US foreign policy would still appear to be governed by containment. However, a key question which must be asked is: how essential is containment to the security of the United States? Likewise, is the maintenance of a satellite bloc in eastern Europe essential to the security of the Soviet Union? The geopolitical significance of the heartland to Mackinder was that it was a natural fortress which was more or less immune against attack by British sea power, but technological developments since World War II would seem to have rendered concepts of heartlands and rimlands irrelevant. With the advent of long-distance bombers, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles, capable of delivering nuclear weapons with enough destructive power to destroy a whole city, the historic struggle between land power and sea power has been almost totally eclipsed by the emergence of 'air power', resulting in a totally new geopolitical context.

Although both superpowers are massively over-armed with nuclear missiles (the United States in the early 1980s had enough nuclear firepower to destroy every major city in the USSR at least 35 times over), neither could be sure of totally destroying the other's missiles in a pre-emptive first strike.<sup>12</sup> Each, in other words, has the capacity to launch a devastating retaliatory second

strike. Providing the balance of power is not broken, this guarantees the security of both sides (barring accidents), as each knows that neither side can afford to launch a nuclear strike without bringing about its own destruction. Under these circumstances, intervention in the internal affairs of neighbouring states (let alone those on the other side of the globe) cannot be regarded as essential to the military defence of either superpower.

## An Alternative Explanation

If superpower intervention in the internal affairs of other countries is not motivated simply by considerations of strategic military defence (as depicted by classical geopolitical theories), this raises questions as to the real motivations. Starting from the premise that the policies of a state always reflect the interests of its dominant classes, it is suggested that US and Soviet activity is probably motivated more by material considerations of political economy than by the strategic requirements of a global military chess game. The foreign policy of the superpowers, in other words, is motivated by consideration of factors such as:

*Resources:* Although both superpowers have abundant resources, their economies benefit from imports from other countries. Apart from gaining access to resources which they do not actually have within their own boundaries, the superpowers are also able to take advantage of their powerful positions within the world economy to import other resources more cheaply than they can produce them at home. Both superpowers therefore have an interest in maintaining friendly relations with resource-rich countries (especially oil producing countries) and, by the same token, in trying to minimise the influence of the other superpower.

*Investments:* The defence of industrial and financial investments in underdeveloped countries (possibly to take advantage of cheap labour) is also an important consideration, although this is obviously of more concern to the United States (which has more overseas investment) than to the Soviet Union.

*Trade routes:* Apart from countries which act as sources of important resources, the superpowers also have a vested interest in the internal affairs of countries which border on key trade routes and which therefore control access to those resources. Sea

routes and waterways (e.g. Gulf of Hormuz, Gibraltar, Panama, etc.) are especially important. The strategic importance of South Africa, especially if Suez is closed, should not be overlooked in this respect.<sup>13</sup>

*Zones of influence:* Although both superpowers operate at a global scale, they each exercise particular control over large areas which are regarded as exclusive zones of influence. Soviet domination of eastern Europe is probably influenced by genuine defensive considerations (Russia has repeatedly been invaded from the west throughout history), but the potential implications of a political upheaval in eastern Europe (or, for that matter, in its Islamic neighbours, such as Afghanistan) upon the internal politics of the Soviet Union must be treated very seriously by Moscow. In contrast, liberation struggles in Central and Southern America do not create a serious threat to the national security or the internal stability of the United States, but they do threaten US investments and its near monopoly of the resources of the region. The “defections” of Cuba and Nicaragua do not threaten the security of the United States, but they do provide dangerous precedents which, if emulated elsewhere, could undermine the United States’ economic domination of the whole region.

## Means of Control

Superpower intervention in the internal affairs of other countries can take numerous forms. Let us consider the main options.

*Direct military intervention:* The most obvious form of superpower intervention is direct military intervention. However, although both of the superpowers have been involved in major wars since the end of World War II (e.g. Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan), direct military intervention is a comparatively rare occurrence and is essentially an admission that other more subtle forms of control have failed. Indeed, the direct use of force is not only an admission of failure, it frequently does not even prove effective: neither superpower, for example, was able to achieve victory in any of the wars mentioned above in the face of determined opposition by theoretically weaker forces.

*Latent force (‘force without war’):* In many instances the superpower can achieve its objectives simply by “flexing its muscles” in order to intimidate a wavering government. Troop manoeuvres and military exercises, for example, are often used to

demonstrate a superpower's military capabilities in order to apply political pressure. This strategy is used more frequently than generally realised: Blechman and Kaplan<sup>14</sup>, for example, noted 215 examples of US armed forces being used to bring about political objectives without using appreciable violence in the period 1945 to 1976; whilst Kaplan<sup>15</sup> identified 190 examples of Soviet armed forces being used for similar purposes in the period 1944 to 1979.

*Aid:* Probably the most effective, and low-key, method of control is to provide aid to a friendly regime within the target country. Given the enormous disparities in wealth between developed and underdeveloped countries, the administration of badly-needed aid provides donor countries with a powerful political weapon. President Kennedy, for example, was quite explicit on the purpose of US aid: "Foreign aid is a method by which the United States maintains a position of influence and control around the world and sustains a good many countries which would definitely collapse or pass into the communist bloc."<sup>16</sup> US aid is directed towards countries with "a free enterprise system in which United States firms can prosper", especially those with a right-wing regime; conversely, aid is usually dramatically reduced, or cut altogether, if the country falls under the control of left-wing or even mildly reformist regimes.

Aid, of course, takes many different forms. Economic aid may be used to stabilise the economy of a country with a friendly regime, but if the regime is threatened by internal opposition aid may take a more overtly military form. Military aid may also be provided to the opponents of non-compliant regimes in other countries, taking advantage of boundary, ethnic or ideological conflicts, to help destabilise "undesirable" governments. Aid, whether military or otherwise, thereby enables the superpowers to wage a continuous undeclared war for control over Third World countries. The full extent of superpower involvement in the apparently local wars of the Third World is disguised by the fact that the superpowers wage war "by proxy".

## Summary and discussion

Most wars since the end of World War II have been fought on an intra-state or local inter-state scale, but the influence of one or other of the superpowers, either direct or indirect, is rarely far

away. Four main types of war may be identified: anti-colonial; territorial disputes; ethnic/national conflicts; and ideological conflicts. In many instances the underlying causes of specific wars have their origins in a colonial past. The anti-colonial wars of the early post World War II period were obviously a reaction against colonialism, but the underlying causes of many border disputes and ethnic/national conflicts were also inherited from the colonial period. Ideological clashes, whether religious or political, are less obviously the product of a colonial past, but are frequently complicated by such historical factors. The concentration of wars in the Third World today can therefore be regarded, with some accuracy, as a bi-product of old-style European imperialism.

Blaming the past, however, does not get us very far — nor is it a complete explanation. The high incidence of wars in the Third World today, I would suggest, also owes much to the competition between the superpowers for spheres of influence required not so much for purposes of global defence (as they would claim) but for economic profit. Both superpowers have exploited wars and conflicts within the Third World, inherited from the colonial period, to maintain or expand their spheres of influence. By leaving former colonies in a state of political chaos, the old-style imperialist powers facilitated the continued exploitation of the Third World by new-style imperialism.

Wars require weapons. Given the spatial distribution of war, it is hardly surprising that about 70 per cent of the world's total arms supplies are purchased by Third World countries, of which about two thirds are produced in the United States and Soviet Union. Other developed countries (especially France) produce most of the remainder. Armaments are very big business: worldwide military spending in the early 1980s was estimated by Sivard<sup>17</sup> at \$660 billion per year (i.e. more than 20 times the total spent on official development aid). The world arms trade therefore generates a massive flow of capital from Third World economies to the superpowers. However, it is generally argued that the real benefit to the superpowers is not the direct profits made on the sale of arms, but rather the indirect profits made as a result of the control which the provision of armaments gives the superpowers over Third World economies. To quote from the Brandt report: "the major powers sell weapons mainly to suit their own foreign policy ... rather than to benefit their economies"<sup>18</sup>.

The profits from the sale of arms may be relatively insignificant relative to the overall economies of the superpowers, but the

impact of arms spending upon the economies of underdeveloped countries is often very substantial. Arms spending in Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-9, for example, cost the equivalent of the total income of 5 million people.<sup>19</sup> Arms spending on such a scale obviously has massive implications for Third World countries, not only by diverting resources which could be put to much more productive purposes, but also by increasing indebtedness and hence dependency.

Given the debilitating effect of arms spending upon Third World economies, it is perhaps pertinent to consider why Third World governments spend so much on armaments - worldwide military spending is now about 13 times greater at constant prices than it was in the 1930s during the build-up to World War II.<sup>20</sup> Technological factors cannot be ignored: the two superpowers spend vast amounts of money on military research, with the result that the destructive power of even "conventional" weapons has evolved out of all recognition in recent years.<sup>21</sup> Third World governments faced with armed opposition equipped with the latest technology must therefore spend heavily to defend themselves. However, the high level of military spending in the Third World also reflects the fact that many Third World governments are faced with considerable internal opposition. In some instances this opposition may be centred on boundary disputes or ethnic differences, but the opposition is generally motivated by material grievances. The governments in many Third World countries are drawn from small privileged elites willing to co-operate, for reasons of self-interest, in the exploitation of their own country's resources. This is also true of many more developed countries, but opposition in the developed countries can be more easily contained through ideological means of control (e.g. by appeals to the "national interest"). In Third World countries ideological control is difficult because the differences between the "haves" and "have nots" are greater, whilst notions of nationhood and common identity are less well developed. Third World governments consequently have to resort more frequently to coercive means of control,<sup>22</sup> although in some instances the elite may be able to mobilise popular support for the government by waging war with a neighbouring state.

It has been suggested that the high level of military spending gives rise to a 'poverty-repression-militarisation' cycle in many Third World countries.<sup>23</sup> By spending massive amounts of money on armaments, Third World governments waste essential resources and increase poverty. Increased poverty, in turn, results in increased opposition to the government, which is then obliged

to step up repression, and seek further military aid, in order to maintain power. The existence of repressive military regimes, often with appalling records with regard to civil liberties, and backed by one or other of the superpowers, is a depressingly common phenomenon: Sivard,<sup>24</sup> for example, estimated that no fewer than 56 countries in the Third World are under military control.

The causes of war are complex; but their consequences are too great to be ignored. Apart from the human suffering caused in the immediate war zones, wars have widespread debilitating consequences for the economies of very many developing countries, whilst the militarisation of Third World societies creates very serious problems with regard to civil liberties. War is too important a subject to be left to military experts: but, if we are ever to prevent wars from occurring, it is essential that their causes be more fully understood. It is hoped that this paper may, in some small measure, encourage further constructive thinking upon the subject.

### Footnotes

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