

# The Strategic Environment and the Future of War

By Gregory R. Copley,<sup>i</sup>

*President, The International Strategic Studies Association.*



*The International Strategic Studies Association*

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The balance of power and geopolitical shape of the world are only occasionally *determined* — although they are sometimes *influenced* — by military conflict. They are more often shaped by *preparation* for military conflict — in other words, by deterrence and strategic maneuver — rather than conflict itself.

Conventional warfare — formal military conflict — however, is at a pivotal point of transformation as to its nature, reflecting the transformation of societies into urban-dominated groupings which are totally dependent on energy consumption for every facet of survival in the delivery of food, water, mobility, communications, and economic endeavor. The nature of warfare, then, will reflect the change of human social shaping. That is not to deny that conflict often serves to clear sclerosis in societies.

The post-World War II rise of Germany, Japan, Italy, and France — which all suffered military defeat at some time during World War II — was determined by non-conflict means. The post-Cold War regeneration of Russia, the surge of the People's Republic of China, and the post-Korean War rise of the Republic of Korea, all were products of non-conflict-determined factors. In order for these socie-

ties to be capable of their regeneration, then, it may have been necessary for them to have endured the catharsis of defeat. Indeed, the United States of America began its rise to global power on the ashes of its Civil War of 1860-65.

It does not follow axiomatically, however, that economic-strategic rise can *only* occur as a result of cathartic and national-level loss. The world's scientific and industrial baselines grew substantially as a direct result of World Wars I and II. The global dominance which the US came to achieve for a period after World War II was, as a particular example, directly the result of the challenges which caused a whole-of-nation response. There can be no doubt that the great and balanced strategic depth of the US — a balance of its resources, agriculture, industry, economic posture, and social cohesion and identity (as it then had) — going into World War II was what enabled the US to then achieve a half-century of further strategic dominance.

So it *does* follow — almost axiomatically — that a balanced fighting force is, in periods of sustained pressure, meaningless without a balanced economy (which is strategic depth in more than geographic terms) to provide the real shape and substance of strategic power. In other words, a successful fighting force can only be sustained by profound strategic depth. Modern urban-dominated society has transformed what that means, and while we have seen that urban (and therefore, almost by definition, neo- or pseudo-post-industrial) nations have great capabilities in capital formation, they also have great vulnerabilities, largely due to their dependence on resources which are not generated by their urbanization. And the delivery mechanisms for those resources and their use within urban society are totally energy-integrated. Therein lies the new vulnerability.

Let us not oversimplify, however, and think in 20th Century terms that this energy dependence merely reflects the digging, transportation, and burning of fossil fuels. It is far more complex, now, than that.

Despite this reality that it is the *comprehensive* shape, architecture, and cohesion/productivity (in all, depth) of an entire society — and certainly not forgetting its defense capabilities — which gives it true strategic strength, it is worth asking what the future shape of warfare holds for us. And we should do this before we embark, once again, on a new generation of military spending, so that funds are not squandered where they are not most useful.

We have seen on the horizon of military conflict the mortality, for example, of the viability in total war situations of naval carrier battle groups. This mortality has been developing because of the transforming nature and proliferation of submarine-launched nuclear torpedoes, supersonic (and soon hypersonic) long-range anti-ship missiles, the advent of precisely-targetable and maneuverable anti-fleet ballistic nuclear missiles, and so on. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has worked assiduously to develop these offensive capabilities, and yet it persists in working toward its own (by definition, seemingly vulnerable) carrier battle group development.

This is not incongruous. It highlights the reality that some power projection systems, which may be vulnerable in total war, are massively impressive in shaping situations in times of peace, or in limited war scenarios. The battleship endured successfully into the late 20th Century under such conditions, albeit with gradually declining cost-effectiveness.

We have seen the transformation of the fortunes of modern societies — some for ill, some for prospering fortune — during the first decade of the 21st Century. Arguably, those “modern” neo/pseudo-post-industrial societies which saw decline during this period lost their relative strategic strength because of failures of diplomacy, arrogance of leadership, and failure to heed the historical need for balance in society. This “balance” includes the need for social identity and common purpose — including linguistic commonality — which can only be achieved through conscious and persistent reinforcement. It also includes the need for a high degree of balanced self-sustainment in terms of the production and consumption of vital goods and services. How this “balanced self-sustainment” is achieved has been transformed by the urbanization of these societies.

In this regard, dependence for vital goods and services on a separate sovereign entity (ie: another nation), possibly a strategic competitor, becomes a point of vulnerability and distortion. Hence, globalization of goods and services must be seen for what it is: a holiday from the historical pattern of competitive societies. Sun-tzu, the author of *The Art of War*, highlighted the reality that the waging of war showed that all other forms of policy had failed. I reinforced this in *The Art of Victory*, and said that the “Age of Globalization” was transformative — like the earlier such age under Genghis Khan — in that it would lead to vulnerabilities in societies which had deliberately forsaken a whole-of-society approach to their own interests, security, and identity. Yet, as Chinese writer Huai-nan Tzu noted before his death in 122 BCE: “When sovereign and ministers show perversity of mind, it is impossible even for a Sun-tzu to encounter [ie: defeat] the foe.”

We are driven, in our modern societies (but not in traditional societies) into believing that security issues are the province of uniformed — and uniform — armed

services (from police to the military), and that economic issues are the province of non-uniformed sectors of the society. As a result, when “security” threats become visible (a sign, in fact, of failed intelligence or failed governance and deterrence), the response is to place all faith and authority in the hands of the military. As the US maxim goes: “When you are a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

The hammer is now becoming more complex and expensive. And everywhere nails proliferate, while coffers run dry.

Yet still the strategic tide and balance of power turns against the neo/pseudo-post-industrial societies (but not against the more-balanced industrial societies). At the same time, in most Western states, in which populist approaches to democracy prevail, there is a persistent stubbornness — Huai-nan Tzu’s “perversity” — which disengages the security and strategic relative positioning of the state and society from the challenges. There are attempts to engage in diplomacy without supportive power. There are, equally, attempts to sustain military power without supportive political-economic-diplomatic power.

The future of conflict must be viewed, then, as something far broader than military warfare, and yet something which neither can be won by diplomacy nor economic power alone. This is not a new concept, but it has been deliberately forgotten, as politicians continue their quest for power without responsibility. Deterrence — the creation of a viable, war-capable and feared military force — is critical to sustaining influence. But the *resort to actual use* of that force in combat — even assuming it has been well-crafted and given the systems, training, prestige and visibility it requires — represents the *failure* of political and diplomatic management, and of

society as a whole. The deterrent power of a great military force from a strong society should have done the job.

The PRC may build its carrier battle fleets to demonstrate that it is indeed a great world power. Indeed, it cannot fail to do so. It knows, however, that it must *prevail* through other means. If it must engage in “war”, then it should be indirect and, ideally, deceptive. Cyber war, used so well by the PRC and its allies tactically of late in support of domestic and international operations, could easily close down the economies and viability of the US and other advanced societies. Cyber capabilities hold the key to the survival — literally on a day-to-day basis — of modern, urban populations.

Cyber defenses are well beyond the domain of the uniformed military (although the military must be part of this). Thus the investment of governments in cyber defenses, and offensive capabilities, cannot be neglected. Like intelligence capabilities, they must operate discreetly, but require a fluidity of thought and operation which defy formal, uniformed service logic in many instances.

But to achieve comprehensive strategic progress — achieving the security and economic and social strengths of our societies — we must look to grand strategies which re-think how we achieve military deterrence and power projection, while giving real teeth to societies through assuring their cohesion, and a balance of their production and consumption which guarantees a high degree of self-control over one’s own fortunes and fate.

For Western societies to overwhelmingly pump the vastness of their fortunes into two low-production sectors — military spending and “entitlement” benefits — is the path to defeat within the emerging global balance of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Gregory Copley is President of the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), based in Washington, DC. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* publications, and the Director of Intelligence at the Global Information System (GIS), the on-line, encrypted-access, global intelligence service which provides strategic current intelligence to governments. He has authored 31 books on strategic, military, aerospace, and other topics. He serves as an adviser on strategic issues to a number of governments and leaders. His latest book (February 2011), *Energy Security 2.0: How Energy is Central to the Changing Global Balance in the New Age of Geography* (co-authored with Andrew Pickford, Yossef Bodansky, and David Archibald), details many of the parameters of the changing global strategic balance. His book, *The Art of Victory*, was published by Simon & Schuster's Threshold Editions in New York in 2006. In December 2010, *On Preferring Life: Human Considerations in a Larger World*, was published in Australia. The 17th edition of his 2,500pp encyclopedia, the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook*, was published in January 2009, and is now being updated daily in an online version, the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook Online*. His *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Azerbaijan* was published in July 2006, with an expanded second edition in May 2007. He co-authored (with Purvis Hussain) the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Pakistan*, which was published in November 2008. He authored the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook on Egypt* in 1995, and a study on Ethiopian symbols and military strategy in 1998; and so on. ISSA has for almost four decades worked on grand strategy issues. Copley is also Chairman of ISSA's Australian think-tank, ISSA Indo-Pacific, in Perth. He was Principal Author of several landmark studies including *Australia 2050: An Examination of Australia's Condition, Outlook, and Options for the First Half of the 21st Century*, which was launched in the Australian Parliament in December 2007. In April 2009, at the Office of the Australian Prime Minister & Cabinet, in Canberra, he launched *Such a Full Sea: Australia's Options in a Changing Indian Ocean Region*. He also authored the study, released in June 2008, entitled *Australia's National Security: Considerations for Planning Defence and Security Capabilities Well Into the 21st Century*. He was principal author of the study, *Australia's Energy Options*, presented at Federal Parliament in August 2005. One of his earliest books was *Australians in the Air*, which is still the only comprehensive history of Australian aviation. He has received a significant number of orders and decorations from governments, including, in 2007, being made a Member of the Order of Australia for his contributions to the international community in the field of strategic analysis. Copley also has had an extensive career as an industrialist, owning several shipyards and engineering companies in the United Kingdom, a naval architectural firm, and a chemical company in France. He served as Vice-Chairman of the Scottish national airline, Highland Express. He can be reached at email: [GRCopley@StrategicStudies.org](mailto:GRCopley@StrategicStudies.org) or [GRCopley@aol.com](mailto:GRCopley@aol.com).