

## **An Abolitionist's View**

### Whose Security Does Defence Defend?\*

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Sharp differences of opinion have been expressed at this conference, but it has been evident that persons of good will have represented all sides and a great diversity of views. Opponents usually shared a common ground, and it is generally supposed that where both good will and common ground exist debate can be constructive.

To me the evident good will of all the participants indicates a sincere desire to contribute to European security and to advance the cause of peace. The common ground which most of the participants share is embodied in the tacit assumption that security, whatever else it entails, also includes a military component. Opinions diverge as to the nature of the military component that best enhances security, whether, for example, it should be defensive in the strict sense, i.e., without any offensive potential, or whether it should be defensive in the broader sense, in which the dictum that an offensive potential is indispensable for a defensive posture is accepted. Actually, everyone agrees nowadays that defence is the justifiable rationale for military capability. In fact, since World War II, all the ministries of war have been renamed ministries of defence.

If the assumption that military capability is essential for defence remains unchallenged, then all the arguments about the role that military capability should play in providing security make some sense. This is what I mean when I say that a constructive debate is possible on this common ground. In a debate of this sort expertise can play a vital role. For instance, in arguments about what constitutes a parity, given good will, agreements can be arrived at by appeals to detailed knowledge about potentialities of weapons, about logistics, etc. Appeals can be made to objective criteria. Calculations can be checked. These are the ingredients of a constructive debate.

I reject the assumption that military capability is a necessary component of security in today's world. On the contrary, I submit that the burgeoning growth of military capabilities has been the chief source of insecurity. Military capability remains associated with security in the minds of most people because of images that are carry-overs from a context in which they once had some relationship with reality to a context in which this relationship no longer exists.

A context in which security could be reasonably thought of as enhanced by military capability was the system of sovereign states that emerged at the close of the Thirty Years' War, provided security referred to the national interests of those states. These national interests were embodied almost entirely in the ambitions of princes. Whether these ambitions were grandiose strivings for glory and conquest, or modest, to secure what was held, a military establishment was clearly an indispensable instrument in the pursuit of these ambitions. Note that ordinary concerns of ordinary people, that is, protecting self and loved ones from the elements, from hunger, disease, and indignities, entered nowhere into

\*This paper was part of the Proceedings of the Conference on European Security Requirements and the MBFR Talks, held in Toronto in 1985, published in "Defending Europe: Options for Security", ed. Derek Paul (Taylor and Francis, 1985).

what constituted international politics of those days. The content of international politics was embodied in dynastic considerations, control of territory, alliance structures, none of which had the slightest relevance to the above-mentioned ordinary concerns of ordinary people.

To be sure, with the rise of patriotism and nationalism in the nineteenth century, the concept of national interest was democratized in a sense. Broad publics in European countries identified with the ambitions of their ruling elite's; thus the contention that issues related to these ambitions had absolutely no relevance to ordinary concerns of ordinary people could no longer be supported.

Although historical experience showed otherwise, it was still possible to believe that a war could be fought for something that made sense, at least to a sizeable sector of populations composing the nation-states.

This belief reached the zenith of credibility in World War II, when it appeared that the onslaught of states bent on enslaving large portions of humanity could be checked only by armed might. It was this experience that allowed the idea that armed might is essential to defence and to security to grow deep roots in mass consciousness. The idea persists in spite of the fact that it is no longer anchored in reality.

None of the time-honoured extra-military war aims are worth a war fought with modern weapons of total destruction: not conquest of territory, not trade monopolies, not the imposition of an ideology, not the enslavement of a population. The material costs of modern war must exceed by several orders of magnitude any material benefits. Since the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, there has been no instance of imposing an ideology (e.g., a religion) as a consequence of a successful war. At any rate, these arguments are superfluous because most persons engaged in war planning today know all this and, if pressed, would freely admit it. Only one rationale for war potential remains: defence. But defence against what? The standard answer is defence against an attack that would likely be upon a country without military capability. But an attack to what end if none of the time-honoured aims of offensive war can be rationalized today, even against a militarily helpless country? In the days when conquest of territory meant acquisition of the docile labour power that went with it, this aim was understandable. Does it make sense today? One hears of a take-over, say of Western Europe by the Soviet Union. Just what specifically would such a take-over entail? I do not want to hear a glib answer. I am asking for a reasonably credible scenario describing in detail concrete operations, backed by practical logistics, and so on. How would countries taken over be governed and what would the advantage of governing them, with all the problems that subjugation and pacification entail, as compared with developing extensive co-operation in mutual trade, cultural exchange, etc? Why does the United States not take Canada over or, for that matter, Mexico? It can be argued, of course, that the United States already dominates Canada economically. But what would a large military capability avail Canada in resisting this sort of domination?

None of the hypothetical aims of an offensive war bear critical scrutiny under contemporary conditions. Such aims are invoked for one purpose only -- to provide a

rationale for military establishments, by making military and geopolitical expertise relevant. And so the only sense that could be made of a defensive war would be that the military capability of the adversary is a threat. Why and under what circumstances the adversary would use that capability remains vague. In the thinking that dominates international politics, it has always been axiomatic that the adversary intends to use that capability. It remains axiomatic.

In only one context does the rationale of military preparedness as a way of coping with threat makes sense, namely, in the sphere of pure military thinking. By pure military thinking I mean the complex of concepts, assumptions, technical expertise, and strategic calculations that is generated by the theory and practice of war itself, quite unrelated to anything outside the realm. In military thought an adversary, real or hypothetical, is given. It is not necessary to establish that he is indeed an adversary, much less why he is an adversary, any more than it is necessary to raise such questions in the theory and practice of chess or that of medicine why the patients must be cured rather than poisoned. In complex civilized societies, people work in milieus in which certain imperatives are divorced from all other aspects of life. There is plenty to occupy their attention, to utilize their energy, and to nurture their self-esteem within these imperatives. Things are not different in the world of defence. This world includes not only people in uniform, who are becoming relatively less important, but also the entire infrastructure of science and technology, or institutes, enterprises, educational institutions, and so on, where activities all converge on the final product -- the modern war machine.

Much has been said about the profit motive as a prime mover in this world. It is probably an important factor in societies where profit is an essential ingredient of most social activities. But I don't think that the profit motive is crucial. In modern societies, whether capitalist or socialist, professional competence is a most powerful source of motivation and satisfaction both for the ambitious and for the selflessly dedicated practitioners. For this reason, it is practically impossible to convince an expert in any field that his expertise is an important strand in the fabric of social life only because of persistent delusions. To believe this is difficult because in human affairs many delusions are integral parts of social reality. Thus, it is not unrealistic to say that the United States and the Soviet Union are adversaries, and act accordingly. When two paranoiacs confront each other, both are realists.

Now one of the most important reasons why these perceptions persist is because they provide the *raison d'être* for sophisticated expertise. This expertise is real enough. It stems from accumulated experience with battles and campaigns, logistics and geopolitics, knowledge of conditions under which one or the other side is likely to have an advantage and ways of counteracting it, and ways of enhancing one's own advantage without making it appear that one is doing it, and ways of seeing through such deceptions, and so one and on, driving the expertise to ever higher levels of sophistication.

These considerations comprise the whole content of arms control negotiations and of disarmament negotiations. People of good will on both sides may hope that some day the deception will be eliminated and that each will be genuinely concerned about the security of the other and will work together to assure it. But let us remember that in this far-off

Utopia security will still be defined within the paradigm of military thought. It will be based on the maxim that neither the intentions nor the preferences but the capabilities of the adversary should be the starting point in designing a system of security. Parity will still be regarded as a synonym for fairness and elaborate provisions will be made to preserve it. This is the best of all worlds that the military mind can imagine. By the military mind I do not mean the mind of a militarist who has a positive attitude toward war. I mean the mind of someone who may well be a person of good will but who accepts the presence of an adversary and the necessity of keeping him in check. It is this perception that is no longer anchored in reality. It is a carry-over from eras when the desires, fears, and ambitions of princes governed relations among states, and this was regarded as normal.

It seems to me that only in this way can the absurdity of present day ideas about security be explained. Surely our conference discussed various options and modes of progress for retreating from the present outdated modes of security in one or more ways and for finding ways out of the present bind or trap. Experts still count divisions and compare calibres of guns, assuming that an advantage of one side over the other will inevitably induce the stronger side to attack. This conclusion is compelling in the military mode of thought. From there it diffuses into political thought. In our day, when the burgeoning growth of technology pervades all human activity and is more dramatically visible in the vistas opening up to the military profession, the hegemony of military thought in international affairs becomes firm.

And so it comes about that the key words in all discussions of such matters as defence, deterrence, stability, and security itself are used in their military meanings and evoke images that make good sense in the military sphere. If, however, we stop to reflect for just a moment, long enough to shift our attention to the vast regions of life outside the military sphere, we cannot fail to see that these words are completely deprived of the meanings ascribed to them in traditional language.

Defence? Whom do military establishments defend? There were, to be sure, eras when armies defended their countries, in the sense defending the populations of their countries, from marauders and rapacious invaders. This may have been true in antiquity, when pillage was an attractive war aim. It was true in World War II, when Germany went on a murderous rampage. But throughout most of the modern era this has seldom been so. Armies, when on the defensive, have primarily defended themselves, not populations. And populations have frequently been victimized by their own armies as well as by the enemy's.

Given the *reductio ad absurdum* of all time-honoured war aims, defence in its military sense has only one meaning. A defence establishment is concerned with defending itself -- with its own potential *vis-a-vis* other defence establishments. Nowhere except in the absurd projects of civil defence against nuclear attack is there any mention of or concern with defending populations. One must conclude that the function of the word defence is a public relations ploy. It has become difficult to sell war. This is why all ministries of war have become ministries of defence.

Security? Whose security are we talking about? It increased destructive potential enhances security, one must conclude that people are more secure today than they were thirty years ago. Are they?

Stability? The word breathes reassurance. The stability of a system depends on negative feedback, which counteract disturbances by generating forces opposing the disturbances. But attempts to restore balance in an arms race amount to positive feedbacks. These generate forces that magnify disturbances. Nonetheless, each escalation of the arms race is represented as a step toward ensuring stability.

Status quo? The cabinet wars of eighteenth-century Europe sometimes ended without any major changes in boundaries or in relations among states (*status quo ante bellum*). The use of this term today is a clear example of a carry-over from a context in which it made sense to one in which it cannot make sense. In our day, what can re-establishing the status quo after a war in Europe possibly mean? Yet a question was asked at this conference whether, if war broke out in Europe, the aim of one of the blocs would be victory or a return to the status quo. Even in the absence of war no reasonable meaning can be ascribed to status quo. Rapid change has become a pervasive fact of life. Yet it was argued by one participant that the foreign policy of a major power was directed toward the preservation of political conditions allegedly established in 1945.

Deterrence? Deterrence is based on the supposition that the adversary is rational (that he will refrain from attack for fear of retaliation), but the defender is not (he will retaliate when retaliation has become a futile outburst of rage).

The world of geopolitics has always been insulated from the world of ordinary human lives. Today this insulation has become completely opaque. In his book, Weapons and Hope, Freeman Dyson distinguishes between warriors and victims. The warriors are those who live in the world of weapons, strategies, and geopolitics. The victims are everyone else. He goes on to say that his aim is to provide a basis for a dialogue between the two worlds. I have always thought that a dialogue is a good thing and should be encouraged whenever and wherever possible. I am at a loss, however, to see how such a dialogue can begin. I fail to see any common ground between the warriors and the victims. Warriors are concerned with the security of weapons systems; they worry about advantages that an adversary can reap from this or that political development, this or that technological innovation. The victim is worried about what is going to happen to himself and his children. The warrior expects the victim to see vital links between his own life and the power of the state in which he lives, between the very life of that state and the destructive might it can wield. But, if the victim is at all enlightened, he must see that these links exist only in verbiage, that they are only products of bizarre imagination.

Yet it is difficult to abandon hope for common ground on which to establish a dialogue, for without that hope what hope remains? Perhaps a chain of dialogues can be stretched between the victims and the warriors who, it seems to me, cannot share a common ground directly because fulfillment for one spells the demise of the other. The victims must see the warriors engaged in a monstrous game of strategy in which the victims are pawns for acceptable or unacceptable casualties. As for the warriors, the

victims' concerns are of no more interest to them than were the concerns of a French or Russian peasant to Louis XIV or to Frederick II.

There is, however, one difference between then and now. While there was no way in which the peasant could communicate with the king, much less influence his policies, ordinary people today do have some say about matters of vital concern to them. To be effective their voices must be listened to. In order to be listened to they must speak a language understood by those they speak to. This means that in our day people must find intermediaries who can speak the language of deterrence, security, etc., so as at least to stand a chance of being heard. The aim of these intermediaries should be to stay the hand of the warrior as it reaches for the lever that will unleash the final holocaust, to try to apply the brakes to the arms race, to gain time, to prepare ground for future defections from the war community, which are already in evidence and which may accelerate as the holocaust becomes ever more imminent.

It is in this sense that conferences such as ours can play a positive role. As an abolitionist, I maintain that no tinkering can make the global war machine safe or stable. Moreover, even the goals of making it safe are self-defeating if these efforts tend to make the continued existence of the global doomsday machine more acceptable or if they bolster the legitimacy of the war system. I continue to maintain that the concepts of deterrence, security, balance, etc., as used in strategic discussions and even when directed toward slowing the arms race, have no more relation to objective reality than did the metaphysical concepts of medieval scholasticism or the racist concepts of the Nazis. I must also recognize, however, that these present-day versions of ideational involution represent a reality, namely, the state of mind of people who think in these terms. These include people of good will who must be taken seriously, whose efforts on behalf of peace are sincere, and who may be indispensable in establishing the chain of dialogue between the victims and those warriors who may still come to their senses.