

77 Gerrard St. W.; #708 Toronto, Ontario M5C-2J4  
johnecthompson@rogers.com

## Navigating Dark Waters

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John C. Thompson

### Forward to the Past

The dark web, terrorism, hacktivists, intruding drones, transnational organized crime – a dizzying array of problems are growing but these are only the froth of a growing wave of instability. The order we knew in past decades is no longer assured.

In a world menaced by significant population growth, environmental stresses, urbanization; and which yet remains connected and mobile like never before, ideas and causes are appearing and morphing with bewildering speed. In the coming years, old habits of thinking about security and stability are going to be a liability.

Two problems are going to seize many institutions like a mugger lunging out of an alley: First, thinking that the forms of conflict in a post-Westphalian World will prevail over non-state threats is going to be dangerous. The nation-state is becoming weaker than ever compared to non-state actors. The difference is that while conventional military and police organizations represent significant force, they represent increasingly little applicable force.

Secondly, in a world where national authority matters less and less, every institution of any kind is going to have to stop thinking the armed authorities of government (and even the rule of law) can protect them. Corporations, universities, political parties, and every other collective social entity must increasingly look to their own protection.

The kinetic threats offered by bombs, blades and bullets will still be just as plentiful, but non-kinetic threats to reputation, business continuity and everything else will be just as profound. In a world where so much virtual capability represents real wealth, virtual threats rapidly emerged to plunder or wreck it –or hide behind it -- thus causing real damage. The illusion that cybernetic damage does no real harm must be discarded.

Societies where government did not have a monopoly on force, and where institutions had to protect themselves have been seen before – back before the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648. In the centuries between the end of the Roman Empire and the rise of the modern state, violence was usually perpetrated by non-state actors. Merchant cartels, insurgents, bands of religious zealots, unemployed soldiers, pirates and bandits, clans, mercenary contractors, independent city states and troublesome

nobles all vied to make life... colourful.<sup>1</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Century looks to be just as varied and colourful and all of must look to our own personal defences.

### **An Intense World**

The world is getting crowded; median population estimates from the UN for 2050 see 9.6 billion people on the planet by that year.<sup>2</sup> Even as the mean population is aging, the sheer inertia of human population growth continues to add numbers especially in Africa and the Middle East.

By 2014, according to the UN, 54 percent of humanity were living in urban centres; the figure should reach 66 percent by 2050. Worse, the number of cities with populations of over 10 million people is growing rapidly. In 1970 there were three such cities, currently there are 28 and there should be 41 in another 15 years. In 1970 there were 141 cities with a population of one to ten million people, now there are 460.<sup>3</sup>

So far as security threats go, densely packed crowded cities have always presented a major problem from the stews of the Subura of Ancient Rome to the Lyari neighbourhood of today's Karachi. For conventional militaries, the old open battlefields in deserts, grasslands and farms will become rare, and fighting in urban areas is enormously expensive in terms of resources, supplies and collateral damage. For police and paramilitaries, densely crowded areas dominated by a hostile entity -- such as a street-gang, criminal cartel or political militia -- have always been a particularly challenging situation.

Humanity is becoming more connected.<sup>4</sup> Cell-phone and internet coverage is rapidly growing in even some of the poorest cities on Earth. By the end of 2015, there should be some 3.2 billion internet users around the world – with 2 billion of them in the developing world. World-wide, the number of cell-phone subscriptions has almost reached 7 billion. These technologies have given significant command and control capabilities to various armed local parties that made them almost as responsive and resilient as conventional military communications architectures. Modern connectivity also has made the likes of Somali militiamen, Jamaican Posses and Pakistani Jihadis self-organizing in confrontations with formal armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

The incentive to violence is already becoming more complex. We are already having difficulty feeding and providing fresh water for much of humanity, and the problem is going to grow every year. Throughout history fear of food shortages (rather than famine) has been a major source of political

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<sup>1</sup> This is a prediction, and a reminder, from Martin van Creveld in his *The Transformation of War*, New York The Free Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Population figures are drawn from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, *Concise Report on the World Population Situation 2014*; United Nations, New York, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Pg. 17., Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*; United Nations New York, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Figures from International Telecommunications Union; *“ICT Facts and Figures”*; Geneva, May 2015

<sup>5</sup> see David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, Oxford, 2013

turbulence: Keeping the Roman mob fed was the major concern of the Emperors, and the global spike in food prices did more to kick off the so-called Arab Spring than any other single factor.<sup>6</sup>

When people are afraid, fear can be compounded by the opportunistic. The methods for creating, inciting and sustaining radical ideologies are widely understood. Political organization, revolutionary theory and totalitarian propaganda techniques have outlived Lenin and Hitler, and become a grab-bag of tactics which anybody with a cause can utilize without adopting the political philosophies that 20<sup>th</sup> Century totalitarians proposed.

Al Qaeda and its successors, particularly the Islamic State, have successfully blended traditional religious/cultural practices and modern communications with these ideologically-derived techniques to create a powerful engine for recruiting and conditioning partisans to engage in violence. Where they have led, others will follow. Currently ISIS/Daesh can recruit and condition new supporters with a speed that the Marxists and Anarchists of the 1970s could never have matched.

Terrorism is inherently political, but politics themselves have become far more confused. The proliferation of modern communications technologies has meant that any conspiracy buff or person given to cognitive dissonance has a means to reach an audience, and a ready audience of people willing to self-select their media choices to validate their own beliefs. The Internet's promise of a new age of freedom from propaganda has given way to something else as humanity seems to be making a shift from the information age to the disinformation age.<sup>7</sup>

This trend has interacted with the post-modernist 'intellectual' climate that arose in the 1960s to further muddle contemporary discourse; both help to create new tensions along numerous fault-lines within our societies. All opinions are supposedly valid -- unless they contradict the assumed values of the Neo-Totalitarianism referred to as 'Political Correctness'.

This new Neo-Totalitarianism is the result of the emergence of Post-Modernist thinking in the 1960s and 1970s which allowed for other forms of destructive thought. There was a systemic re-evaluation of the entire Western value system and an attack on its history. The problem is that intellectual evolutions have real consequences – as two World Wars and the evolution of Nazism, Marxism-Leninism and other creeds clearly demonstrate.<sup>8</sup> Westerners have seen an attempt to pull up the roots of our own society and replace it with any notion of the moment and the harm this has caused is incalculable.

In short with the onset of the Internet, it might be said that never before have people known so little about so much, or been prepared to be swayed so easily. The day of the demagogue is on us.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Food prices and the Arab Spring: Let them eat baklava'; *The Economist*, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and Steve Baragona; '2011 Food Prices Helped Trigger Arab Spring', Voice of America, December 13, 2011, 7:00 PM.

<sup>7</sup> See David J. Rothkopf; 'The Disinformation Age', *Foreign Policy*, No. 114 (Spring 1999), pp 82-86. Among other articles on the web on the subject are Mark Lee Hunter, 'News credibility in an age of disinformation' at [gijn.org](http://gijn.org), posted September 8 2014 and Clifford D. May, '[The Disinformation Age](http://www.nationalreview.com)', posted at [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com) December 12, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> The history of intellectual life can make for the driest reading, Norman Cantor's *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times* (Harper Collins, New York 1997) is especially useful here.

At the same time, Post-Modernism allowed for the creation of political/managerial elites which self-alienated themselves from older values... but which are entrenched throughout the Western World and have become dangerously self-destructive.<sup>9</sup> A growing rejection – fuelled by anxiety over illegal immigration, poor economic performances, Islamism, and the arrogant behaviours of many of today’s financial and political elites – is gathering in Europe and the United States with Nativist movements like the Tea Party, the English Defence League, generation identitaire and others.

In defence of most of these Nativist movements, they seek a return to more normative political practices and ethical leadership within older constitutional frameworks. They have so far stayed well clear of violence, but are not likely to long tolerate violence or repression being visited on them.

To be truly dangerous, a demagogue needs guns, money and political support.

Weaponry has become cheap and abundant, particularly the ubiquitous AK-47 and the related set of infantry arms manufactured since the USSR introduced them early in the 1950s. The AK-47 is so simple to use even a chimpanzee can fire one (to say nothing of the African “soldiers” who gave one to a chimp in a memorable [you-tube clip](#)). The rifle is murderous at close range, cheap and at least 75 million have been produced so far although the weapon is now being copied by numerous private actors. Matched against efforts to curb the international trade in small arms is a growing industry for the illegal manufacture of firearms – where even a small machine shop can easily turn out significant numbers of copies of police and military designs with little effort.

While American’s political elites might be – tellingly -- focused on domestic gun control (and the US is truly a heavily armed society), the entire world is awash in more guns than ever before. The supply of high explosives might be closely monitored, but any trained bomb-maker knows what can be done with a few household chemicals in the correct proportions.

Modern terrorist groups also have seamlessly fused with organized crime for some decades. The biggest clandestine money-makers are narcotics trafficking and people smuggling, and it is hard to think of any major contemporary insurgent movement that is not involved in either.<sup>10</sup> The relationship goes both ways... the Sicilian Mafia has turned to terrorism at times to inhibit the Italian justice system and a Sri Lankan underworld extortionist, Villupillai Prabhakaran, created one of the world’s most innovative terrorist groups – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.<sup>11</sup>

For many years terrorist groups and insurgents used narcotics trafficking directed towards their targeted society to draw easy money from that society and simultaneously contribute to the erosion of its social fabric. People smuggling accomplishes the same end with the net benefit that the insurgent can also place

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<sup>9</sup> The first clear warning came from Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1996), now the warnings are coming thick and fast from leading academics like Angelo Codevilla (see ‘America’s Ruling Class – and the Perils of Revolution’, *the American Spectator*, July-August 2010), Thomas Dye, Jeffrey Folks, Robert Reich and Thomas Sowell.

<sup>10</sup> One especially comprehensive survey on terrorist involvement in narcotics is “A Global Overview of Narcotics-Funded Terrorist and Other Extremist Groups”, A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Department of Defense May 2002.

<sup>11</sup> See C.H.S. Jayewardene and H. Jayewardene; *The Battle for Eelam* (Ottawa, Crimcare, 1987) and Kirithie Abeyesekera; *The Underworld of Sex, Crime and Drugs*; (Columbo, Lakehouse, 1991).

his supporters inside the targeted society as a charge on their rolls for social benefits, but also as agents for his cause.<sup>12</sup> Terrorists drawing support from émigré communities is an old story, but the Tamil Tigers' deliberate creation of a diaspora so that they could feed on it was a new story in the 1990s. This is also a strategy for the Muslim Brotherhood and now for ISIS/Daesh.

The internet has provided more ways of generating and moving money than we ever imagined before, and the clandestine means of doing so are plentiful – particularly thanks to the emergence of the Dark Web of sites and connections normally hidden to the public. Some transactions are not all that shadowy... one of the recently [leaked files](#) from the NSA (another telling point about security these days) discusses some use of on-line gaming environments by several terrorist groups for training. They have also been known to use avatars in games like Second Life to communicate and the virtual economy of on-line games can actually be used to move real money around with little notice from officialdom.

Of course, if guns are easy to acquire, offensive cybernetic abilities are even easier. Basic vandalism on web-sites and denial of service attacks are being joined by increasingly sophisticated attacks – often seemingly designed by nation states. However, techniques can be deliberately farmed out for use by non-state actors, giving the nation state whose resources developed them almost complete deniability.<sup>13</sup> The other problem is that – for the moment – cybernetic warfare is not commonly seen as much more than vandalism writ large and not directly lethal. Yet it still destroys invested time, money and effort, and may in future directly destroy lives. We need to see the malevolence in cybernetic warfare for what it is.

The techniques of activism have also become widely known... so much so that the remnants of the old Radical Left are still lurching around the political landscape, defined not so much by their ideology as by their activity. Protest can be undertaken for its own sake, largely to self-validate, while the purpose or the expressed goals behind a protest movement are often ill-formed or even largely unarticulated. The protestors who flock to international gatherings like a G-8/G-20 conference don't need a purpose, they just need a venue.<sup>14</sup>

This places all manner of successful institutions at increased risk. A resource company need not be polluting to find itself subjected to simultaneous cyber-attack, violent protest and explosive vandalism; it is merely enough that the company might someday pollute. Appearance has become reality, accusation is truth, and denial is confirmation. The question might not be 'Why are they doing this?', so much as it might be 'Who is putting them up to this and how can I stop it?'

To compound matters, the world's swelling population and the ruthless efficiencies demanded of modern production are leading to increased unemployment and under-employment. The old saying that the Devil finds work for idle hands is a historical truism: There are enough examples from around the world in recent decades of what can happen when the young are educated and find that opportunities are few and far

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<sup>12</sup> Elsie Gonzalez, 'The Nexus between Human Trafficking and Terrorism/Organized Crime: Combating Human Trafficking By Creating a Cooperative Law Enforcement System', Seaton Hall, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013; the author also did extensive work for 15 years on the Tamil Tiger apparatus in Canada.

<sup>13</sup> 'Cyberwar: The Threat from the Internet', *The Economist*, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010

<sup>14</sup> The author has been amid many protests and riots over the years, his field notes from the 2010 G-20 Conference in Toronto can be found at "Amidst the G-20 Protests", *Sitrep, the Journal of the Royal Canadian Military Institute*, July-August 2010, Volume 70, Number 4.

between. Eric Hoffer pointed out that those who are most likely to be attracted to a radical ideology are the 'new poor', who have diminished expectations and someone to blame for it.<sup>15</sup> Prosperity, upwards social mobility and a middle-class lifestyle are incredible instruments of social stability, and we endanger these at our peril.

Concurrently, unemployment and diminished expectations are placing increased stress on government welfare systems that were designed as temporary aids to the disadvantaged; but it is hard to think of any Western nation that doesn't have some element of its population that is now on permanent assistance. Meeting these obligations is a drain on all other government functions, which makes the exercise of a government's authority become weaker rather than stronger. Likewise, the tax load necessary to finance assistance is a further detriment to prosperity and the middle class in a vicious circle.

### Strategic Concerns

Besides the problems of resources, population increase and political instability, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is going to be defined by even more rapid technological development than was the case for the last two hundred years. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century might be most defined by the steam revolution, and the 20<sup>th</sup> by the electronics revolution – at present the world is in the throes of three related technological revolutions: Life sciences (bio-engineering and genetics); robotics, and nanotechnology.

Every major new technology has two sides to it – one of threat and one of opportunity. Steam power revolutionized travel and trade... and made possible larger and faster concentrations of armies than ever before – the warning of Shilo, Königgrätz and Sedan in 1860-1870 was that battles like Verdun, the Somme and Ypres were possible in the future. Computers originated as calculation machines for artillery and missile ballistics and now have universal application.

It is impossible to predict how our current revolutions might impact us, but we may have enormous new benefits in medicine and food production, while making more fiendish biological weapons than any that came before. Robotic weapons systems are already being designed, but so far everyone is heeding the warning of the 'Terminator' movies and the threshold for unregulated armed artificial intelligences has not – yet -- been crossed. Nanotechnology offers fresh miracles in every aspect of our technology, but a cloud of self-replicating dissemblers turning a city full of humans into goo is also possible.

We should remember... more urgently than ever... that the new technology and all of its potentials is not necessarily at the command of the nation state. The appearance of enhanced, genetically targeted smallpox or hummingbird-sized hunter-killer robots might be at the behest of secretive private actors.

As these revolutions mature, the possibility of another 'Dreadnought' paradigm becomes possible – as new technologies are suddenly combined in startling new manner the balance of power could suddenly shift. We know full well from the last 500 years that changes in that balance are punctuated and accented by wars; but this is also old-thinking about conventional balances of forces. One hundred years hence historians might remark on the 9/11 attack and similar events as the debut of a new paradigm of power... and the inability of

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<sup>15</sup> Eric Hoffer, *the True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, 1951, Harper, New York; Part 2. Pp 26-27

the Nation State to be able to accurately bring its substantive strength to bear against the ephemeral and fleeting strength of an nebulous ideology matched to terrorists, hackers, activists and gangsters.

War in the coming decades might not only be hard to recognize, it might be unrecognizable. Could it be a competing series of genetically enhanced plagues? Tiny groups of Special Forces hired to utilize robotic weapons to hunt a few individuals in a feud over control of a major corporation? Might it be the systemic murder of key scientists? Might it be more of the pointless, amorphous sprawling sporadic violence we already see at the heart of some major cities as gangs, terrorists and political militias squabble without end? If a nuclear weapon detonates in the heart of a major city, will we even know who put it there, and why?

Could we see – for example – strawberry growers in Mexico hire mercenaries to put a bio-toxin in Chilean product to increase their own market share? Could an oil company engage environmentalists to begin protests against a rival's assets? (Canadians should bear in mind this may have already happened to us.) Could a university's key scientific breakthrough immediately put its research team in mortal jeopardy?

Just because the nuclear prohibition has lasted for 70 years, there is no reason to believe it will last another 70, especially given the deal that was just worked up with the Mullahs of Iran. The other great inhibitor on conflict in the last seven decades was the technological, industrial, financial and military might of the United States – now much decayed. What the next 70 years will bring is anyone's guess. One of the world's leading strategists, Colin S. Grey, warned that predicting wars is a very inexact discipline, except that it is always safe to predict that there will be wars.<sup>16</sup>

Again, what kinds of wars will these be – tit for tat singular nuclear exchanges? Will ballistic missile defence become the new must-have defence technology? Will we see genocide conducted in the usual age-old way of driving the loser out into the wilderness to die of exposure and deprivation (which in a world short on food and water may be more salient than ever)? Will Hollywood's nightmare vision of a wasteland populated by autonomous deadly robots be realized?

At the other end of the spectrum, we are already catching glimmers of hackers stealing information on key personnel, systemic harassment and intimidation by activists and sabotage as non-state entities go after particular companies or institutions. Yet these attacks might go after key economic assets that are vital to an entire nation state, yet the act is prompted by a non-state rival, private citizens or a terrorist group. We may have constant warfare that strives not to appear like warfare and yet that is its nature and intent.

There are other concerns, Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis was widely disputed when it came out as a magazine article in 1995 and a book in 1996, but there has been no better road-map to many of the emerging supra-cultural conflicts and rivalries around the world.<sup>17</sup> More or less at the same time, Benjamin R. Barber's *Jihad vs McWorld* gave a rival idea that peoples' imperiled senses of identity in an increasingly globalized world was also producing conflict.<sup>18</sup> One can wonder about the irony of the extensive porn collection Osama Bin Laden had on his computer when he was killed; was he more fascinated or repulsed by it? Whose thesis -- Huntington's or Barber's -- does this validate?

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<sup>16</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005

<sup>17</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin R. Barber; *Jihad vs McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World*; Ballantine, 1995

As the world gets more crowded and the impression that resources are growing short intensifies, then these other themes may take on a sharper edge and a more pointed urgency. Notwithstanding Gray's warning, we can predict that warfare can occur but our 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century ways of thinking about it are going to be a handicap. Warfare is no longer the exclusive business of the state, and our weak and weary national governments are going to need all the help they can muster... but don't expect them to rally to your defence against all the warriors who might be coming after you.

There is the old Chinese and Scottish curse "May you live in interesting times" ... and times are going to become very interesting.