

FUTURE TENSE: THE COMING WORLD ORDER

Gwynne Dyer

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“‘Terrorism’ is what we call the violence of the weak, and we condemn it; ‘War’ is what we call the violence of the strong, and we glorify it – Sydney Harris. With this quote the reader is introduced to developments worldwide over the past twenty years and their future implications.

International political inheritance, after a brief honeymoon of multi-polarity at the end of the bi-polarity of the Cold War, comes under scrutiny by Gwynne Dyer. The era of multi-polarity and a sense of normality were to last less than a decade before glib mantras such as a “war against terror”, “the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” and the repeated abuse of United Nations Resolutions on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) brought about an era of waging war by other means. War does not change, but the faces of wars and the masks worn by the warmongers change continuously, if not habitually.

The massive overkill by the USA and its “coalition of the willing” to the invasion of Kuwait by then Saddam Hussein was a harbinger of what was to follow. One-sided USA/NATO action in Kosovo earlier was to provide the first signal for how multi-polarity was to be side-lined by states that saw themselves as the consciousness of the whole globe and who were willing to put their weaponry where their mouths are – though not always their own soldiers, one has to add.

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During the 1990s, Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba and Venezuela focused on development and economic growth – albeit by different economic pathways (after 1990 Cuba suffered

under a renewed tightening of US trade sanctions in the hope that it would cause economic implosion in Cuba but, the country survived and eventually increased its growth rate). China advanced its four modernisations embarked upon in the 1980s to achieve its socio-economic development goals by 2025 – and achieved these goals by 2010. India focused on the balancing act of creating and sustaining an economic policy that balances import substitution with export orientation and remained the world’s largest democracy without embarking on forceful military intervention on the globe – the latter largely by seeing itself as one among a community of nations rather than getting stuck in a mentality of maintaining order in an “anarchic world”. Others simply minded their own business (or Business in some cases).

In another case, a long-set mentality to be the world’s political consciousness and militarised policeman eventually turned virulent towards a self-induced belief that the nation was a hyper-power and hence had the right to take on the role of a global vigilante be it under a Democratic or Republican government.

Dyer asks himself and the reader a few questions, Are we dealing with a conspiracy? (p. 39), “Is the terrorist threat really worth worrying about?” (p. 40), and “Is there a serious bi-partisan project for restoring American global hegemony, or is it merely a bunch of neo-conservatives dreaming of lost glories – or is it just the usual cock-up on an unusually large scale?” (p.40). He argues that the stakes are far higher than they seem (p. 40). Given the gravity of the USA’s economic situation by 2006, he points out that a collapse of the economy can deliver such hardships on the ordinary American that it is likely to lead to a further radicalisation of US domestic and foreign policy (p. 40). The USA’s trade deficit has ballooned to half a trillion dollars a year by 2006 (p. 32). The author further points out that the seeds of the First World War were laid by decisions made “ten to twenty years before 1914, and after that it was very hard for anyone to turn back” (p. 40). Relevant to his discussion here is his remark, “There is a strong case for saying that we have arrived at a similar decision point now; what happens in the next year(s) or so matters a lot and we need answers fast” (p. 40). That was 2006.

Dyer’s work is hard realism, demonstrating that we are currently experiencing the concrete outcomes of realist/neo-realist theory changed into prescription and then ideology and the implementation thereof by military means. Dyer demonstrates why the USA’s notion of liberalism and democracy became synonymous with the projection of military power over thousands of kilometres. He refuses to fall into the trap of conspiracy thinking, indeed pointing out that Emmanuel Todd’s notion of “theatrical-micro-militarism” of the USA (pp. 35, 36) is

not a conspiracy; it is a mentality. Any observer will probably add that designating smaller countries as bogeymen and then toppling their regimes will not have micro consequences. Dyer's reminder not to fall for primary or secondary conspiratorial thinking when analysing the rise of a politics of domination and ideological mobilisation while power is projected under pre-texts such as weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons, a "war on terror" or humanitarian intervention by the assuming all powerful agents is worth noting (pp. 35, 36).

The discussion of the ideas set out by the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) of 1997 is valuable (pp. 104ff). The mentality and set intentions of the PNAC's document *Rebuilding America's defences (sic): Strategy, forces and resources for a new century* (September 2000) was and still is an open declaration to maintain global US pre-eminence – turbocharged by the surge for oil and a (quasi-)religious substructure fuelled by a healthy dose of paranoia. One may add that a reading of US National Security Strategy documents for the 2000s will provide further proof for the uninitiated. In reading Dyer's work, one is reminded that these visions and acting them out in the present are the culmination of long-evolving hard-core mentalities. The international community saw that before Libya, and is likely to see it again, sooner or later – or perhaps sooner and later for quite a while to come. Interestingly, Dyer predicted in 2006 that the USA will be tempted to repeat Afghanistan and Iraq in Syria with, in his view, dire consequences for the USA and its allies (p. 29).

Dyer contends that currently, "The US economy is a confidence trick based on everybody else's perception that the United States is centrally important for the world's security and that its economy is equally central in the global economy" (p. 34). He realistically points out, "Both those propositions were true in 1945; neither is actually true any longer" (p. 34). However, myths can have powerful manipulative value. Compare Madeleine Albright's statement in 1998, "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation" (p. 36). Dyer suggests that the conflicts in which the USA involves itself (i.e. Iraq) "allow the United States to be 'present' throughout the world. The United States work to maintain the illusionary fiction of the world as a dangerous place in need of America's protection" ... and "America's economic vulnerability can only be disguised by emphasizing its global strategic role, and in the absence of the Soviet Union and the threat of a Third World War, terrorism would just have to fill the bill" (p. 35). This mythology continues until today. Bush stated in 2002, "America will not rest, we will not tire until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, has been stopped and has been defeated ... our Nation is just beginning (a) great

objective, which is to eliminate those terrorist organizations of a global reach.” Three years later he added, “We are now waging a global war on terror – from the mountains of Afghanistan to the border regions of Pakistan, to the Horn of Africa, the islands of the Philippines, to the plains of Iraq. We will stay on the offense, fighting the terrorists abroad so that we do not have to face them at home.” But myths – even convincingly presented as (neo-) realism – can wreak havoc with millions of human lives. What Robert Fisk referred to as “a festival of violence” in Iraq, he coupled chillingly with the intended message of the then action taken by the USA. “We are the superpower ... This is how we do business.”

That little had changed between 1998 and 2013 is perhaps best demonstrated by Stephen Hadley in his article in the *Washington Post* in August 2012. In support of Hillary Clinton threatening Iran with US power and her insistence on stronger steps towards Syria, he makes it clear that the US should “stop pursuing the issue in the UN Security Council” and “change the US government’s public posture to show that the US is leaning forward aggressively to hasten Assad’s departure.” At this point, *Future Tense* calls the reader to reflection.

Dyer’s work is fresh and bold, a rare honesty set on paper. Dyer goes basic, real life if you like. His work illustrates how an old mentality bolstered by a self-induced importance, the imperative to lay hands on scarce resources of other countries (especially if they are “weak” or “failed” or “suspended states” or simply fall in the category of “non-pliant” (to a USA/NATO *Weltanschauung* or World Order) can lead to an international abyss. Dyer points to how the securocratic mentality in the USA is bolstered by paranoia, a lack of cultural understanding, a lack of an inter-subjective communication, persistent (neo-) conservatism including a warped understanding of liberalism boosted by religious-infused bias, eventually culminating in today’s developments. Dyer’s work shows how it came about that the world we arrived at in 2013 presents a moment where strategic lunacy is presented as normality with a humanist touch by powerful self-inflated states that define who should be called “terrorist”, “rogue” or “unwilling” or demonstrating a “lack of discipline”. He also implies that such a moment will present a *kairos* for the international community at large.

The weakness of the book is the underestimation of the role of the Christian religion as an ideology and mobilising tool for militarism and the close link that evolved between the Western understanding of Christianity and the rise of industrial capitalism and mass consumerism as a brutal but calculated rational exploitation of the “Other”. He does not discuss the precarious link between

religious beliefs reified through consumerism and profit seeking and how this tends to invoke state guided militarism. The work (at least the revised version) says little about the depths of racism, Christianity and Euro-centrism and its effects. In analysing the role of the USA, Dyer also underestimates the levels of aggression exported by the USA with – when available, willing and opportunistic – allies since Vietnam. In this sense, the reader is left with a bit of a-historical writing, a story told in a bubble. However, the positives in this work outweigh the negatives.

Dyer's work can fruitfully be read together with works such as the *Three trillion dollar war: The true cost of the Iraq conflict* by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes (London, 2008), Robert Fisk's *The great war for civilisation: The conquest of the Middle East* (London, 2007), various works of Noam Chomsky and numerous essays on international political economy. The reader may find that Dyer's arguments also provide worthwhile background to the ideas offered by Cornelius Castoriadis in his *Philosophy, politics, autonomy: Essays in political philosophy* (Oxford, 1991).

Future Tense is essential reading, even if discomfiting, for professors, teachers and students of international relations (IR), strategic studies, international political economy (IPE), military/security studies and civil-military relations. Other fields of study that may find it useful are globalisation studies, military studies, anthropology, sociology and (contemporary) history. The book can be used fruitfully in combination with other texts. As an introduction to current international realities, uniformed military practitioners will benefit from it too.

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