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Victor Gray

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People Wars: Ruminations on Population and Security

VICTOR GRAY

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"Population--and immigration is a population problem--is one of the two most underreported stories of the 20th century." -- Walter Cronkite

During the 1950s and 1960s, "peoples' wars" were all the rage--on the ground and in the strategic literature. They were wars of national liberation, often tinged by ideology and nearly always sucked into the maelstrom of the Cold War, fought by those struggling to throw off the yoke of colonialism. By and large colonialism is gone, but such wars continue, fought today by people struggling with the residue of colonialism, be it that of Serbia in Bosnia or of Belgium in Rwanda, Burundi, or Zaire. Such wars are but part of the "people wars" that have at their heart the fate of entire populations. The Cold War is history and the operational concept of the nation-state may soon join it in that dustbin, but such wars have always been and always will be with us. And, given the explosive growth in population and technology, they are becoming ever clearer in what they are--existential struggles for survival, free of the niceties of the Westphalian system; ever more frequent and violent; and, therefore, ever more important to those concerned with issues of war and peace. What are we and they to understand as the connection between population and security?

Population is a central element in nearly any concept of national security. Hans Morgenthau, the American translator of *Realpolitik*, for example, posits the size of a country's population as one of the key factors in its relative geopolitical power.[1] He points out that a country can have too few people to rank among the world's powers; who, for example, would feel threatened by Estonia, Liechtenstein, or, for that matter, Canada? But Morgenthau was quick to add that too large a population can act as a drag on development and sap the potential for power status. India and Egypt come to mind in this regard.

In addition to being a resource of or a drain on power, population also comprises one of the three legs of what the "realpolitician" understands as *vital* national interests, the others being the economic well-being of the people and the territorial integrity of the state. There may be reason to consider whether the values of a state's system deserve consideration as a fourth vital interest; i.e., is the personal concept of "What does it profit a man to save his life but lose his soul?" equally valid at the national level? While the latter remains a debatable matter, there is precious little disagreement that the physical survival of a nation's people and protection of their economic well-being are vital interests worth going to war for.

At a lower level, where those *major* interests which if left untended could grow to threats to vital interests, there is a discernible trend toward the use of force in intrastate situations related to population rather than in traditional interstate conflicts. This seems to be the case in terms of the deployment of US forces. The most recent instance of the use of US forces in the more traditional mode, the Gulf War of 1990-91, occurred in the waning days of the Cold War and under circumstances which suggest that vital interests related to the importance of oil to our own economic well-being and that of our allies were at stake. In the more clearly post-Cold War era since then, we have put our forces in harm's way not to engage the forces of other hostile states but rather, as in Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, to protect innocent populations from starvation and genocide or, as in Haiti, to prevent an unwanted economic migration. The intent here is not to argue the rightness or wrongness of such deployments but simply to create the context for examining the strategic importance of populations.

A Multifaceted Problem

Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti illustrates well the important nexus drawn by Cronkite in his Berkeley interview last fall. When we speak of the ways in which population can be a threat or be threatened, we are not simply referring to some Malthusian Sword of Damocles; this issue encompasses as well the age-old tendency of people to get out from under that blade by moving to more promising climes. Given the means to do that, rational people are not wont to risk starving to death by staying put. They are much more likely, as did the Irish, Poles, or Jews a century ago, to board a ship (or a raft, as did the Haitians more recently) and head for America.

What has changed most in this regard in the latter half of the 20th century is the technology of communication and transportation. The "haves" of the world know much more clearly and quickly than earlier generations what the "haves" possess and where it is; they also have far better means to get there. Labor is now just as mobile as capital, and people are everywhere on the move in an increasingly global market economy. That movement of people poses potentially existential threats to the security of traditional nation-states. So, too, do the increasingly autonomous decisionmaking processes of transnational corporations, the "nationalities" of which are increasingly blurred. How does a state defend its borders and the economic well-being of its citizens--indeed, what is the meaning, the value of citizenship--under such circumstances?

Tens of millions of even less fortunate migrants are also on the move as refugees from genocide or "ethnic cleansing" conducted specifically to frighten people into flight. And, it should be remembered, it is not only the refugees but also the receiving states--often themselves on the brink of ruin--that are at risk. Part of the risk for host countries and their citizens derives from the simple economic burden of caring for destitute newcomers. For states contiguous to the sources of refugee flows--e.g., Thailand, Zaire, Germany, France--that burden can assume staggering proportions and trigger the need for an international response. Part of the risk for host country societies is captured in the concept of "societal security," a concept advanced in 1993 by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan.[2] These authors concluded that states and societies can be tossed into national identity crises by large, seemingly uncontrollable influxes of culturally different foreigners, triggering in response xenophobic outbursts against the newcomers. Such outbursts, manifested in prosperous democracies like Germany, France, and the United States by draconian legal changes, the erection of physical barriers be they higher walls or offshore patrols, or outright violence, tend to run counter to the professed values of the host countries and, over time, could well erode those values. Recall, again, the argument about the "life" and "soul" of a country. It is an argument that should perhaps be taken seriously in a country like the United States whose self-identity or *raison d'être* is based not on ethnicity or a sense of place, but on the values and sense of mission embodied in what the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called "The American Creed." [3] We are, after all, truly a nation of diverse immigrants constantly on the move, even within our own borders.

Referring to the Holy Land that is both Israel and Palestine, another writer, Nikos Kazantzakis, a poet, not a sociologist, insisted that it is "not an idea, it is stones, vegetation, and soil." [4] Attachment to this "landscape of memory," described so eloquently more recently by Simon Schama, [5] can give rise to other forms of identity crises between two peoples locked in strife over the same piece of turf that, like Jerusalem's Temple Mount, Kosovo's Pristina, or Kievan Rus, represent the existential stuff of both peoples. Greater autonomy for Jerusalem's Palestinians, Kosovo's Albanians, or Ukraine's Russians is taken by the dominant nation-state--Israel, Serbia, or Ukraine--as a threat to their identity and, therefore, security. "Societal security," threatened in these cases not by the movement of peoples but rather by their refusal to move can, as we have seen over and over, give rise to bloody conflicts that again call for international response.

Thus, as the hard-nosed strategist surveys the world scene, he or she will find no paucity of population-related conflicts demanding attention. There are those involving two or more peoples fighting for the same "stones, vegetation, and soil" not just in the Holy Land but in Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and Nagorno-Karabakh; submerged nations such as Kurdistan, the Basque Country, or the Maya region; diasporas in, for example, the Baltic states, the Sudetenland, or Transylvania; genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, and, again, Rwanda. And in many regions the potential for conflict arising from simple overpopulation and starvation is large and growing. There is, of course, nothing simple about these problems; those who feel inclined to dismiss the seriousness of this potential should consider the question: "How does one say '*Lebensraum*' in Chinese?"

Strategists need to focus not just on "exit strategies" and "dates certain" for withdrawals--the latter tend only to make

certain that conflict will be renewed--but also those questions whose answers are crucial to defining exit strategies that are efficacious and honorable. What we did in Somalia was not dishonorable or necessarily inconsistent with American national interests, but the way in which it was done was naive and, therefore, ineffective. Among the questions that must be asked are: Why do some population-related conflicts escalate to violence while others do not? How can internal violence be contained within one country's borders? How can the violence be dampened, the killing stopped?

Multifaceted Solutions

Perhaps the first thing we have to learn to live with as we seek solutions is that not all such conflicts are amenable to "solutions"; others cannot be ended on a "date certain" with a smooth and easy exit. The situation in Bosnia demonstrates the truth of both propositions. It is pure fantasy to believe that the Dayton Accords are a solution. What that agreement and the subsequent elections did was to confirm the de facto partition of that would-be country. If SFOR, the follow-on NATO force, would withdraw, the fighting would quite possibly resume almost immediately, as Croatia and Serbia proper sought to expand and annex the Croatian- and Serb-dominated portions of Bosnia. That said, the Dayton Accords have accomplished two important objectives. First, the killing has been stopped, the genocide halted. Second, the danger of escalation to a larger conflict involving other European states seems to have been averted. Permanent partition enforced by a long-term international force along the cease-fire lines would be a small price to pay to ensure that the ensuing equilibrium--too uncertain to be called peace--remains undisturbed. Cyprus comes to mind as a similar situation where long-term partition ended a genocide and averted a war, in that instance between Greece and Turkey.

In addition to responding quickly with overwhelming force to such threats to peace as those in Cyprus or Bosnia, we will inevitably have to pay close attention to preventative action in intrastate conflicts that have not yet erupted into violence. This can range from reporting on internal conditions, to mediation, enforced arbitration, or judgments by international tribunals such as that now convened to look at war crimes in Bosnia. In Europe, the Helsinki Final Act provides the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its member states a basis for such action. And, it can be argued, so do the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention globally. The latter decades of the 20th century produced a noteworthy thickening of the web of the international human rights regime.

If that web is to be strengthened and preventative action to become commonplace, then more attention than has heretofore been the case will have to be devoted to strengthening international norms and to developing a consensus for group cultural rights and a modicum of economic equity among competing groups within states. Such initiatives would have to stand firm against the racist cultural relativism represented by the Chinese, Cuban, and Iranian arguments that would deny the universality of individual rights. This process is proceeding haphazardly, aided by two major transnational trends. First, instantaneous, global communications--the "CNN effect"--can quickly elevate local injustices from the most remote corners of dictatorships to issues of global concern. Second, global corporations and non-government organizations (NGOs) are ever more effectively forging communications links and agendas among peoples independently of governments and often in the face of the best efforts of governments to break such links and thwart the attendant agendas. Anyone who doubts the importance of such developments would do well to consider, first, the role of Radio Free Europe, the AFL-CIO, and the Catholic Church highlighting events in communist Poland and strengthening the opposition there and, second, the role of the fax and the internet in present-day China.

Greater attention has to be devoted also to forging links between the developing normative consensus and specific, effective enforcement capabilities. The possibilities for doing so are probably greatest in Europe, where the web of interlocking regional organizations is strongest. Particularly interesting in this regard are the growing links between the OSCE and NATO, with the former providing the rationale for action and the latter the wherewithal. In Bosnia, it was NATO--not the European Union nor the United Nations--that proved it could get the job done. Only NATO has the command and control and lift capabilities to do such a job. And, it should be added, it will have those lift capabilities only so long as the United States remains an active and committed member and maintains a presence in Europe. But NATO possesses something else that the OSCE does not yet have. What has held NATO together and what will carry it beyond the Cold War is not so much the threat it faced nor the hardware it has, but the fact that it is an organization that represents the consensus of like-minded democracies. Our representatives in Brussels are comfortable and candid with each other; they don't have to start anew in the face of every crisis, for there is already agreement on basic

principles.

In expanding NATO to ever more closely parallel the pan-European membership of the OSCE, clearly a desirable development from the perspective of the problems encompassed by this essay, two changes have to be made--one by NATO, the other by would-be new members. First, NATO has to change its *raison d'être* and *modus operandi*. NATO no longer exists to counter Russia or any other state. It exists to deal with the types of people-related conflicts that could, if ignored, escalate to larger, interstate wars. This needs to be made clear not just to the Russians but to the voters of current NATO member states. To the extent that the OSCE and the Helsinki Final Act provide the rationale--call it a fig leaf, if you are cynical--for such actions, it would make sense to obtain an OSCE, pan-European blessing for each such action. In practical terms, this--in addition to a "special" NATO-Russian consultative mechanism pending full Russian membership--would go a long way toward assuaging legitimate Russian fears about NATO expansion. Equally practically--this time to assuage fears by NATO members--OSCE "blessing" for such actions should be limited to approving, not ordering, them. Neither could come to pass, however, unless the OSCE abandoned its practice of action by unanimity in favor of dealing with such issues by majority vote.

And what changes would future NATO members have to make? First--and this is the overriding criterion for membership--they would have to become full-fledged democracies able to buy into the norms of the organization. Second, they would have to guarantee equal treatment for minorities within their borders, whether they are Russians in Estonia, Hungarians in Romania, or Germans in the Czech Republic. For only then can their democracy be considered full, their stability secure. These are the current criteria being applied by NATO and represent no new features in either US or NATO policy.

If such a melding of norms and enforcement capabilities--which will be difficult enough in Europe--could be paralleled in other regions, it might be possible to contemplate a bottom-up building block approach to a global collective security system for peoples. What are the prospects outside Europe?

There is great promise for such development in Latin America, where there is a long history of regionalism, albeit tainted in the eyes of many by *Yanqui* domination. The Organization of American States (OAS) is the logical enforcement vehicle, perhaps merged over time--here they take a page from the linkage developing in Europe between membership in NATO and the European Union--with a widening NAFTA membership. The Santiago Declaration of 1991 is a forceful expression of the growing consensus for democracy and human rights in the hemisphere and parallels the Helsinki Final Act in providing the OAS with a consistent pro-people rationale for action. The fact that it was agreed to in Santiago is, moreover, an eloquent affirmation of the near-universalization of democracy in Latin America. As one of the hidden success stories of the last decade, the growth of democracy in Latin America must rank right up there with Cronkite's other underreported stories.

Developments in Africa are at a far earlier stage. Only in the last few years has the Organization of African Unity (OAU) begun to develop its capabilities, its organization, and its resolve to take responsibility for policing Africa's many people wars. Artificial borders, and the equally artificial writ that those borders must remain immutable, are the biggest cause of those wars and the biggest stumbling block to their resolution. The lack of economic development, and concomitantly the lack of resources for sizable peacekeeping operations, also continue to hinder the OAU's progress in becoming another continental building block in a global collective security system. But progress is being made--witness the Economic Community of West African States and the OAU's role in operations involving Rwanda and Zaire.

In Asia there is no shortage of economic resources, but those resources and a record of economic cooperation are not matched by agreements on norms or regional security arrangements. The biggest stumbling block remains China, which continues as the odd-man-out ideologically not just in Asia but in the world. Beijing also wields preponderant military power in the region and seems intent on using that power in a hegemonic fashion. Thus, democratic transition in China would appear to be the linchpin upon which rest Asia's hopes for a regional security system based on normative consensus. Again, there is reason for long-term optimism. Economic progress has spurred democratization in Korea and Taiwan; why not Indonesia, Vietnam, and, yes, China? In the meantime, more distant Asian Pacific powers like the United States and Russia will have to maintain a presence in the area to keep the prospects for regionalism alive against the hopefully transitory Chinese dreams of hegemony. And until those prospects have been

realized, the United Nations will have to continue to serve as peacemaker in such fratricidal people wars as that in Cambodia.

Finally there is the Middle East, which some have characterized as a cockpit of competing injustices, a hotbed of ideological fanaticism. It is hard to see how any basis for normative consensus can be found in this area, where disagreements are routinely viewed as either-or struggles to the death. We cannot expect consensus any time soon, nor should we even expect the possibility of recreating a pragmatic ad hoc alliance of the sort forged against Saddam. The September 1996 fiasco involving Saddam and the Kurds should be illustrative of the limitations of anybody, whether the United States, the United Nations, or some ad hoc alliance, in trying to "provide comfort" to any people at risk in this area.

Prospects

Despite the limitations so clear in the Middle East and in Asia, this building-block approach remains the best hope of forging the consensus and capabilities necessary for containing and, eventually, resolving the sorts of people wars that are all too common today. Why not start in Europe where the prospects are so good and in Latin America and Africa where the promise is growing? Stopping the killing in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Guatemala should be incentive enough. But growing normative consensus, compulsory jurisdiction against war criminals, and effective enforcement capabilities radiating outward from an area comprising four continents is the only way to reduce and then hope to eliminate conflict between peoples. Pie-in-the-sky? No. What is really pie-in-the-sky is to expect that such agreement could be imposed from above and take hold firmly and instantaneously in all corners of the globe. Instead, it must be painstakingly and often painfully constructed one piece at a time. And such a process is beyond the ken of any single nation state no matter how powerful. It requires the joint efforts of many like-minded states.

It should also be clear that solutions to the pressures created by population growth and movement, pressures that threaten the security of so many states, are beyond the means of any single state. Migration today can be controlled only by international agreement. This requires agreement on regulating in a humane fashion the movement of people across borders and the rights of people--citizens and non-citizens, legal and illegal--within national borders. Finally, there has to be a more meaningful effort to attack the causes of migration: overcrowding and poverty in the "have-not" states of the world. If people have faith in even a modest improvement of the quality of life where they are, their natural inclination is to remain where they are. The idea of home, whether based on myth, personal experience, or images of "stones, vegetation, and soil," is a compelling one that all people seem to feel instinctively. But creating that faith will require on the part of the "haves" a sharing of their technical wherewithal, a sensitivity to cultural nuances, and a commitment to economic equity that has so far been largely absent from their policies with regard to population, environment, and development. As long as there are "have nots," there will be dissatisfaction with whatever the status quo.

Simply put, there can be no lasting peace without justice. To the degree that politics remains stuck in the grooves of power over another and interests defined in economic terms, this millennial concept will continue to elude us. In the meantime, it behooves us as individual nation-states and individual people to get on with the hard, often dirty work of banding together to create the sorts of regional coalitions that can control, mitigate, and reduce the frequency of the people wars that remain beyond our collective capacity to prevent.

NOTES

1. Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics Among Nations*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 142-45.
2. Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, et al., eds., *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
3. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 20th anniversary edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 3-25.
4. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco* (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 123. In addition to being a Nobel Laureate poet,

Kazantzakis had personal experience, as a Greek government official, with the post-World War I forced migration of more than 20 million ethnic Greeks from Turkey.

5. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Viking, 1994).

Victor Gray is Program Director of the World Affairs Council of Northern California, in San Francisco. He is a retired Senior Foreign Service Officer, having served in Berlin, Warsaw, and Munich, and as Consul in Krakow, Poland. He held the Department of State Chair at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces from 1991 to 1994 and was the State Department's Director of Northern European Affairs from 1988 to 1990; he previously was Officer-in-Charge of German Democratic Republic Affairs and, during the 1980-81 Solidarity crisis, Polish Affairs.

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