

## **MILITARY POWER: THE ELUSIVE ANSWER**

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Reduced to its essential ingredient, the doctrine of military power and capability rests on the primary notion of fear, and specifically, fear to one's life. Even "preemptive" military capability, including nuclear capability, is rooted in this primary notion of fear. Nuclear Powers do not tire from claiming that their capability is only preemptive, that it to say, only conceived as a defensive measure, or as a measure to address that primary notion of fear. Curiously, however, military capability, viewed in terms of the history of its own development, has constantly been found wanting. Renewal and regeneration of military capability seems to be an indispensable part of the military doctrine, conceived to address what turns out inevitably to be the insatiable need of fear. For every level of fear addressed through a military strategy or state of readiness, a further threat comes to be conceived for which further

military capability is sought. Nine/Eleven, both as an occurrence and as a response, stands as a paradigm of this dilemma of the military doctrine: that cracks in the security strategy are dramatically revealed, which are then addressed through a reappraisal and refinement of the very same military doctrine that proved its failure to provide security in the first place. For any revealed failure in the security strategy, it is assumed, there must be a better strategy that could be found: hence the pursuit of the elusive answer.

There is, besides the military doctrine's inherently paradoxical logic, and embedded deeply within its foundation, a cluster of assumptions concerning human nature which the doctrine simply takes for granted. Rather than seeking to find an answer to the dilemma of the military doctrine by pursuing its own line of logic (for example, by wondering what better security means can be found to address the basic "fear to one's life" concern), this may be a good moment to revisit that cluster of assumptions, and to

determine whether the “original sin” of the doctrine is to be found there. By determining where the fault lies, perhaps an altogether different solution to security could be found. In considering that cluster, there are two interrelated dimensions to address- that of identity, and that of human association- which bear on our inquiry.

One may look upon the first dimension –that of identity- as a dimension of “human ontology”: briefly, separate and distinct human entities in this “doctrinal” worldview are to all intents and purposes considered preset or predefined, as well as rigid or frozen. For example, “being Palestinian” or “being Israeli”, or “being Moslem” or “being Hindu”, are looked upon as hermetically-sealed, separate and distinct human entities possessing predefined and rigid identities on the world stage. Being an individual and possessing a singular identity is viewed in likewise fashion. Individual identities, in other words, are also viewed as being preset. But they are also viewed as being rigid or frozen. “Being who you are” is a lifetime affair, so to speak. You

are born into being a Hindu or being a Moslem, or into having your personal identity, after which you are determined to act in set ways which reflect that born identity. Being born Palestinian sets you in conflict with being born Israeli, simply insofar as being Palestinian is in conflict with being Israeli.

One may look upon the second dimension -that of human association- as a dimension of *construction* -or of seeking to formulate relations between identities. I would like at this juncture to invoke Thomas Hobbes: assuming one has the human ontology one has as a given dimension, but further assuming that our preset and rigid units of discourse in this ontology are the individual human beings (rather than larger groups), political theorists have traditionally sought answers to explain, and therefore find original justification for the existence (as we see them) of associations between those individuals. The answer Hobbes proposed was “fear to one’s life”. It is in search for “securing” that life that individuals are motivated to enter into associations with others. There are two



interrelated but separate elements here, one having to do with what *motivates* an association, and the other with what *justifies* it, or is therefore the source of its legitimacy. An Army general who was also a historian and who lived long before Hobbes, by the name of Thucydides, already in the context of the war between Athens and Sparta identified *fear*, besides self-interest and self-aggrandizement, as being the ultimate source of human political action. A human association in this view is thus predicated on security, both in terms of what brings it about as well as in terms of what justifies it.

I believe the conceptual source of the military doctrine (and the seed of its inherent dilemma) can be found in these two dimensions –the first relating to our understanding of human ontology, and the second to our understanding of how identities in this ontology relate to one another. I shall first try to explain in theoretical terms why this is so, and I will later try to relate this explanation to a practical case of conflict.

Starting first with a closer look at our human landscape it is immediately obvious that it is highly questionable that identities are set out in the way the military doctrine implicitly assumes. Let me here invoke another great thinker, a Nobel-laureate from the Indian sub-continent, Amartya Sen, who has recently been addressing the issue of identities. Sen questions the fundamental notion of a uni-dimensional identity. Typically, he argues, an individual is by definition composed of multiple identity-layers, each one of which reflects a different role or association that individual happens to have in real life contexts. Sen uses the notion of this multiplicity to argue further in favor of enablement or freedom conditions which would allow the individual to *choose* the strengthening and development of one or more specific layers rather than others. An Indian who is also a U.K. citizen should be free to choose whether to emphasize one or the other of these two aspects of her identity, as well as the extent of this emphasis. Sen applies this analysis to human culture or civilization, essentially

with a view to challenging the thesis of hermetically-sealed and rigidly predetermined identities. In other words, rather than viewing identities as being rigid and uni-dimensionally predefined, they should be viewed as being multidimensional, that is, already sharing commonalities, and malleable, or subject in their nature to the conscious choices of the human will. More generally, a cogent argument could be and has been made in favor of a human ontology whereby identities are neither rigid nor predefined, but are instead in constant processes of formation and change. As I shall argue below, changes in one identity can also cause changes in another, whether positively or negatively.

The second dimension in the conceptual source of the military doctrine relates to fear as a primary concern and hence as a motivation for associations. While Thucydides, as we said, ascribed fear as a primary motivation to already-existing political communities or groups, by the time political theorists of the Enlightenment began to consider the logical origins of the social

contract the emphasis had turned to single individuals, since the assumption was that the explanation needed was that of why such separate individuals are motivated to enter into associations in the first place. Various ideas were proposed, but one that is relevant to our discussion is that of fear, formulated by Hobbes. If fear to one's life from the aggression of others is what primarily motivates an association, then individual security for that life immediately becomes the *raison d'être* of that association. Conceived primarily as a defensive mechanism, the notion of individual security naturally translated itself into a military capability, or into the capability of using force. However, while the notion of fear to one's life could be recognized as an important concern, it is not at all obvious why or whether it is indeed *the* primary concern. For a start, it is arguable, as the Moslem sociologist Ibn Khaldun did in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, that the primary fear against aggression by others is that to the lives of one's blood, rather than to one's own life. But such instinct already presupposes compassion, that is, associations which are founded in altruistic rather than egotistic concerns. Of



course, one could also propose primary concerns other than fear or altruistic compassion as sources of association, including, for example, a unified theory combining affect and calculative skill in the pursuit of a better life. Or one could propose other ideas proposed by various theorists, including, for example, Locke's property-legitimization concern. That is to say there is nothing in the fear-thesis that is more compelling than other possible accounts, and nothing therefore to assure us that this thesis truly captures human nature at its pristine stage.

To return to the roots of the military doctrine one could now show that while these roots outline a human landscape where preset and rock-solid identities are destined to converge or clash in an almost independent law-governed movement, it is quite possibly the case that the only laws that are relevant in that landscape are those which Kant might have described as self-promulgated, affecting both one's identity as well as how one relates to others.

Applying the military doctrine to Israel's predicament, and given a rigid definition of "what being an Israeli" means, the dilemma of the insatiability of fear implies an indefinite search for better security capabilities. For every security measure, there is a counter measure that breeds further insecurity. The acquisition by Pakistan or Iran of a nuclear capability neutralizes the security achieved by Israel's own nuclear capability. Non-governmental terrorism neutralizes governmental military superiority. Chemical weapons neutralize the security of cement walls. Demography itself can come to be viewed as a threat. In short, an ultimate answer to the military imperative is simply never to be found, simply because there is none. However, in addition, and perhaps not so curiously now that we are aware of how identities can in fact change, what "being a Palestinian" means comes to affect "what being an Israeli" means. Often the effect is negative, in the sense of further reinforcing a sense of seclusion and retrenchment, and therefore more fear. Now that the results of the Palestinian elections are out, "being a Palestinian" for example has come to mean "being

Hamas”, which already is beginning to affect what “being an Israeli” means. Likewise, it is arguable that perhaps the very new face of Palestinians, judged negatively, is itself the product of how Israel behaved or behaves, that is, of “what being Israeli” means. But just as there is verifiable negative influence on the other in identity-formation, surely a verifiable positive influence can also be hypothesized. To contemplate the powerful impact of this hypothesis (a hypothesis of positive change), imagine how it would be if, cognizant of the notion of identity malleability, either Palestinians or Israelis were to consciously work on themselves in the first place with a view to causing positive identity change in the other. Such an approach, based on a different point of departure, might well provide the answer to security which the military doctrine seems inherently incapable of providing.

Let me end my observations by elaborating a little on what this process is, and how it might work. Instead of its being a “repellant” force, causing self-entrenchment in the other, “being Israeli” could

come to mean, through a radical internal process of self-reevaluation, being genuinely concerned for Palestinian rights and needs. Whether by word or by deed reflecting basic respect and recognition of responsibility, Palestinians could be “enticed” or “seduced” into reassessing how they see what “being Israeli” is. A compassionate arm extended towards Palestinians, instead of the deployment of aggressive arms, could easily generate positive change in the Palestinian posture. Transforming oneself from being an enemy of the other into being a concerned friend, the other may similarly become transformed from being an enemy into becoming a friend. This thesis is predicated on the principle that, in this world, one doesn’t only *find* enemies or friends as rigidly predefined identities, but can equally and more importantly *make* them, as well of course as lose them. But this is not a process that works only in one direction. It works in both directions. Palestinians, too, could similarly initiate an attraction dynamic, with a view to causing positive change in the other. But whichever direction it is, one could imagine the tool being used as some form



of an Archimedean moral lever, by which one side, resting itself on the solid platform of human commonality, can so act as to raise the latent disposition to human compassion in the other side, which hitherto has been suppressed by layers of mistrust, fear, and the false sense of security through force. In the circumstances, one might call this a Ghandi-an lever.

Lest it be thought that I am proposing a totally idealistic theory, I should quickly add that egotistic self-interest is an integral part of the theory. In our present case, Israel's interest can best be served through an agreement with Palestinians- indeed through an agreement that provides us with acceptable terms for an independent State. Palestinian best interests, likewise, are arguably served by the establishment of such a State. Therefore, rather than employ "repellant" methods which verifiably make that agreement harder to achieve, it is more rational to employ an attraction dynamic which is more likely to bring its realization about. However, from the point of view of the theory, even if a two-state

solution is not in the best interest of either side, or is not in the mutual best interest of both sides, the important point is that a common interest, whatever it may be, is theoretically identifiable, but has to be identified by both sides together. It is not, like a military answer, elusive or inscrutable, or unilaterally determinable.

In conclusion, I believe it is tragic to give in to a human ontology of hermetically-sealed, discrete, and inherently rigid identities, and to proceed to construct international relations and military strategies on this basis. There is no inherent reason for why “being Iranian” and “being Western”, or “being Christian” and “being Moslem”, or “being Hindu” and “being Moslem”, should be at odds with one another –any more than for why “being Israeli” and “being Palestinian” could not be complementary rather than mutually exclusive identities. I do not claim of course that acts of terrorism can automatically cease once the new approach is adopted, or that conventional security methods would all of a

sudden become obsolete. But I do believe that much of the groundswell accompanying and encouraging terrorism can be defused, hence making targets more isolated and identifiable. And when they do become identifiable as abnormally extremist voices in a societal context, it is very likely the case that it is also within that context they could be contained.

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