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# 1 Global and Japanese conceptions of power and security policy in the post-Cold War era

## Conceptions of military security after the Cold War

### *The Gulf War and military power*

The end of the Cold War has wrought great changes in the global security environment and reopened the policy-making debate concerned with the most effective means of ensuring the security of the international system, states, and their individual citizens. The initial reaction in some quarters following the end of the Cold War was that the collapse of the USSR and global communism represented a decisive victory for the superior military power of the US and its alliance partners. The decision of President Ronald Reagan's administration in the early 1980s to seek strategic parity (or even superiority) over the USSR by embarking on a quantitative and qualitative build-up of US military forces through such programmes as SDI (Strategic Defence Initiative) appeared to be vindicated. The Reagan administration's defence policy was thought to have convinced Soviet leaders of the futility of expansionism and forced them to try to match increased levels of US defence expenditure, which in turn crippled the USSR's economy and forced it out of Cold War competition.<sup>1</sup> Following on from the assumption that the outcome of the Cold War had been decided by the crushing weight of US military power, the expectation was that the post-Cold War peace and security environment would also be determined to a large extent by this factor. Although President George Bush's administration, which oversaw the end of the Cold War, was certainly conscious of the need for retrenchment in defence spending and overseas military commitments in order to reap the benefits of the 'peace dividend', the events of the Gulf War of 1990–91 confirmed for the Bush administration the central role of military power in post-Cold War security, and encouraged the President to lay out in his 1991 State of the Union address a vision of a 'New World Order' in which national and global security would be guaranteed by collective military intervention under US leadership.<sup>2</sup>

The lessons of the Gulf War and Bush's vision of military power as the future of global security policy did not go unnoticed in other parts of the world.

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The perception amongst the defence communities of many middle-ranking and rising regional powers was that military power, and especially the technologically advanced military power possessed by the US, was the key to national security in the post-Cold War world, so giving rise to a number of arms races in the Middle East and East Asia.<sup>3</sup> Even the thinking of the United Nations (UN) was affected by the belief in the primacy of military forms of security in the immediate post-Cold War and Gulf War periods. Spurred on by the success of military action in the Gulf War nominally under UN control and President Bush's apparent enthusiasm for a reformed and reinvigorated UN, one of the first acts of the then newly appointed UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, as laid out in his June 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, was to seek the creation of a UN standing force to allow for rapid intervention in the early stages of international conflicts and civil wars and to undertake peace building and enforcement missions.<sup>4</sup> Boutros Ghali's permanent UN force failed to materialise, but the UN in early post-Gulf War operations in Somalia between 1992 and 1994 did allow itself to be pushed towards a more aggressive use of its military mandate. What began ostensibly as a peace keeping operation (PKO) mission became in practice one of peace enforcement, with the UN involved in an ultimately unsuccessful effort backed by the Bush and then the Clinton administrations to impose a settlement on the Somali factions through the use of ever-escalating degrees of military force.<sup>5</sup>

However, the reverses suffered by the multinational forces and the US in Somalia soon cooled the enthusiasm of the UN, the Clinton administration, and the policy-makers of other states towards the type of 'muscular multilateral' intervention outlined above. These doubts were reinforced by the experience of UN and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) operations in Bosnia. Even the success of later efforts by NATO to use force in Bosnia and the Dayton Peace Accord since late 1995, and the US's application of heavy military pressure on Iraq in early 1998 to ensure its compliance with UN weapons inspections, have not dispelled doubts within the Clinton administration and the US Congress about the risks of foreign military engagement and the problems of military power in resolving post-Cold War security problems, especially when channelled through the agency of UN PKO and peace enforcement operations.<sup>6</sup> The Clinton administration, therefore, has backed away from the interventionist, US-led collective security vision propounded by President Bush only a few years previously, and tended to resist international demands for it to intervene militarily in regional hotspots such as Liberia, Haiti, and Albania. This reversal or hesitancy in US policy thus gives grounds for civilian and military security strategists in the US and elsewhere to carry out a general reappraisal of security policy in the post-Cold War era and to question the value that can be attached to military power as the sole or primary means with which to ensure global stability.

*The post-Cold War security agenda and limitations of military power*

Recent events in Somalia and Bosnia have demonstrated that, after the Cold War, and despite the democratic and liberal peace in Europe, there remain security problems elsewhere in the world capable of threatening international, state, and individual security, and of spilling over into violent conflict.<sup>7</sup> But at the same time as Somalia and Bosnia have highlighted a number of key security dangers in the post-Cold War world and the necessity for states and international organisations to take concerted action to address them, it is also arguable that the UN, US, and NATO's experience of military intervention has revealed the limitations of military power in dealing both with these types of violent conflict and other post-Cold War security phenomena.

The first limitation is concerned with the nature of violent conflicts after the Cold War, and the declining effectiveness of military power to contain and resolve them due to problems of mismatched military strategies and escalating costs. During the Cold War period, the US, USSR, and their respective allies devoted much of their policy-making energy and defence budgets to preparing for the eventuality of inter-state nuclear and conventional war. Following the end of the Cold War, and despite the retention of considerable nuclear arsenals by the major powers and the desire of regional powers such as India and Pakistan to acquire these talismans of international status, the prospect of nuclear war has receded. The outbreak of the 1990–91 Gulf War showed that the possibility of inter-state conventional warfare in areas such as the Middle East between democratic and non-democratic powers (even if the protagonists' power capabilities are unequal) cannot be entirely ruled out.<sup>8</sup> However, this is not to say that Gulf War-style conventional conflicts fought out between highly specific adversaries and over clear-cut questions of territorial sovereignty are likely to be the predominant type of military conflict in the post-Cold War period. Instead the evidence from Chechnya, Bosnia, and Somalia suggests that post-Cold War conflicts, even if driven in part by well-articulated nationalist groups seeking to create an independent state of their own, are often more likely to involve non-state, quasi-state, or even tribal actors, and thus to assume the characteristics of guerrilla and low-intensity conflicts. The increasing importance of low-intensity conflict as part of the post-Cold War security agenda is also shown by concerns about the enhanced threat from sub-state terrorist groups seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction, as in the case of Japan's Aum Shinrikyō; and the rising power of organised crime groups, many of which rival small states in their destructive capabilities.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Martin Van Creveld argues, by far the most significant, or 'real', form of warfare since 1945 in terms not only of casualty numbers but also in bringing about lasting political change has been low-intensity conflict and wars of 'national liberation' in Indochina, Africa, and Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> These conflicts generally have been fought out between, on the one side, the conventional armies of major 'colonial' powers or superpowers with access to highly destructive and sophisticated weaponry,

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and, on the other, the comparatively low-tech guerrilla and 'insurgency' armies of the developing world. In nearly all cases, and as demonstrated most vividly by the examples of the Vietnam War and Afghanistan, it has been the latter set of combatants which have emerged as the victors and confounded the view of those in the developed world who believed that a resolution to the conflict could be imposed, or peace 'made', through the application of ever-greater levels of military force. Hence, when viewed from this perspective, it appears that the Gulf War is in fact atypical of the nature of contemporary warfare, and that the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and Chechnya described above are part of a longer-term trend towards the spread of low-intensity conflict.

This trend, then, explains the declining utility of military strategies and power for dealing with many contemporary forms of violent conflict. The history of low-intensity conflicts indicates that they do not readily lend themselves to containment, resolution, or peacemaking by military force. Therefore, it is understandable that UN, US, and NATO efforts to deploy in the low-intensity conflict environments of Somalia and Bosnia the same types of sophisticated weaponry which crushed Iraqi resistance during the Gulf War, and which were developed for conventional warfare, should have proved to be relatively unsuccessful. The functional mismatch between the existing military power and strategies of the major developed nations and the types of regional low-intensity conflicts with which they have to deal was well illustrated by the UN/US debacle in Somalia. The use of helicopter gunships and massive firepower by the UN and US proved impotent when employed against Somali factions which held no fixed positions or territory, and were able to withdraw in the face of overwhelming odds, only to regroup later. The near indistinguishability of one faction from another and from the civilian population, meant that concentrations of firepower produced the type of indiscriminate 'collateral' damage that turned the population against the UN/US force and further complicated its tasks. Operations in Bosnia confirmed many of the lessons of Somalia and the difficulties associated with using military power to contain low-intensity conflicts. The 'stand-off' weapons and 'smart bombs' seen to have been used with such effect in the Gulf War, and developed by the US after the Vietnam War to avoid the need to commit US troops to another costly ground war, when used in Bosnia gave NATO a clear psychological edge and did damage key Bosnian-Serb military installations. But as NATO operations continued it became clear that massive rather than surgical airstrikes would have to be used to bring the Bosnian-Serbs to heel. Moreover, in the end it was only by NATO's acceptance of the need to deploy large numbers of troops and the risks of involvement in a low-intensity ground war – the very strategy which the US had hoped its high-tech weapons could help it avoid all along – that the Bosnian conflict could be contained and the Dayton Peace Accord implemented. To some extent the limitations of military power in dealing with these conflicts can be accounted for by political, diplomatic, and humanitarian restraints upon the freedom of commanders to exercise to the full the capabilities of the forces at their disposal. But even the relatively unfettered use of military

power and the devotion to a conflict of overwhelming amounts of troops, *materiel*, and firepower are no guarantee of a successful outcome. This was demonstrated by Russia's ignominious defeat at the hands of Chechen rebels between 1995 and 1997, which occurred despite its deployment of over 40,000 troops, 1,000 tanks and armoured vehicles, and the expenditure in the conflict of billions of dollars.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the problems of Somalia, Bosnia, and Chechnya all point to the same essential truth that in the post-Cold War period, as during the Cold War period and the history of US intervention in Vietnam, the conventional force strategies and weapons of the major powers remain limited in effectiveness when faced with low-intensity conflicts.

This limitation upon the effectiveness of military power in dealing with violent conflicts is compounded by the knowledge that after the Cold War the human, political, and economic costs of intervention in both conventional and low-intensity conflicts have greatly escalated. The operations in Somalia and Bosnia have illustrated the continued high cost of intervention in terms of military and civilian casualties. As seen above, the belief at the end of the Cold War that wars in the future could be fought and contained largely by relying upon air power and high-technology weapons with a minimal commitment of ground troops and limited casualties – as with others in the past that have stressed the potential of air power to win wars – has been disproved by the failure of this strategy in Somalia and Bosnia.<sup>12</sup> The inescapable reality of PKO in these two conflicts was that high numbers of military and civilian casualties are inevitable if a military solution is being sought.

These human costs also highlight the growing domestic and international political costs of military intervention. Domestic political opinion in the US and other developed nations – having suddenly become accustomed to the deceptively low casualty rates of the Gulf War – is not prepared to endanger the lives of its military forces in anything other than a conflict which is perceived to threaten vital national interests.<sup>13</sup> International political opinion also remains an important factor which affects the success of military intervention. For although the demise of the Soviet Union and the loosening of gridlock in the UN Security Council (UNSC) have given the US and other developed nations potentially greater freedom to exercise military power on a unilateral or multilateral basis, international opinion has shown itself to be highly wary of the risks of intervention, whether they are human, commercial, political, or involve questions of sovereignty. Hence, even the US, which once acted with a confident international mandate in using military power against Iraq during the Gulf War, in recent years and as illustrated by the showdown over UN weapons inspections in 1998, has had to pay an increasingly higher domestic and international political price, and risk international diplomatic isolation in its sporadic attempts to use military power to pressure the Iraqi regime.

The hugely escalating economic costs of military intervention were first made clear by the Vietnam War, estimated to have cost at least US\$150–175 billion (and over three times that amount in today's dollar prices) over a nine-year period.<sup>14</sup> But it is the colossal costs of the Gulf War which seem finally to



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have borne out Norman Angell's predictions that in the twentieth century the economic price of inter-state warfare has risen to the point of becoming almost prohibitive.<sup>15</sup> Even excluding indirect costs upon the economies of the developed world and the Middle East, the seven-month Gulf War campaign amounted to approximately US\$80–100 billion in direct financial military costs to the coalition allies.<sup>16</sup> That the war had to be paid for through the contributions of the US's allies in Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe (Japan alone contributing US\$13 billion) demonstrated that the economic costs of military intervention now restrict even the freedom of a superpower to exercise military force.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as the case study of the Korean Peninsula in the 1990s in Chapters 3 to 5 will show, in many instances policy-makers are aware that high degrees of military interdependence have made the human, political, and economic costs of warfare too great to countenance, and that they are left essentially 'muscle bound' in any attempt to use military power to deal with contemporary forms of conflict.

The declining effectiveness of military power to contain or resolve many contemporary forms of violent conflict can, therefore, be explained by the high costs of intervention, and, as the US's National Defence Panel noted in 1997, the essential asymmetry between the strategies and weapons of developed states and the type of threats faced.<sup>18</sup> The argument here is not that military power is redundant in dealing with the problems of the post-Cold War security agenda; for the developed states may yet produce new non-lethal weapons suited to the nature of low-intensity conflict, and it is clear that more than ever in an uncertain post-Cold War world there is a need for states to commit their military forces to regional policing and PKO actions. But rather the indications are that there is a need to acknowledge the shortcomings of the use of military power after the Cold War and that there are likely to be few clear-cut Gulf War-style victories, and even fewer opportunities to use military power as a tool for peacemaking.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the prevalence of low-intensity conflict will mean that states will be compelled to commit their ground forces to protracted PKOs, and that, as in the case of Bosnia, unable to seek a quick resolution or create peace, the best they can do is to attempt to 'smother' the conflict until a political solution can be achieved. Thus the realisation of policy-makers after the Cold War is – and in many ways as they have known since the Vietnam War, if not before – that military power offers few quick resolutions to contemporary forms of violent conflict and is declining in its ability even to contain and keep a lid on them.

The second obvious limitation of military power concerns its inability to address the root causes of post-Cold War security problems – whether they take the form of violent conflict or belong to what can be termed a 'wider' security agenda.<sup>20</sup> As can be seen from the above descriptions of the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and Chechnya, even though these and many other conflicts are highly militarised, and, as a consequence, may require the measured application of military force in order to pacify them initially, their underlying causes are to be found in problems such as ethnic, nationalist, and religious

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