

From "Australia's Foreign Wars: Origins, Costs, Future?!" <http://users.cyberone.com.au/ibuckley>
Illustrated version is available from [The British Empire](http://www.britishempire.co.uk/) <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/> (see Articles)

Appendix D

SURVIVAL THROUGH the 21st CENTURY - Essay based on talk to ANU WC
March 3, 2002)

That sounds like a bit of a challenging title, especially if you put a question mark after it - so I've left that out to provide some small reassurance!

As a parent and grandparent, I have a natural interest in the issue, which I don't doubt you share. Its also been decreed that the year 2000 is 'The Year for the Culture of Peace', so we may want to give some thought to that. I had, for example, thought of - "A Richer World, for Sure, but are we More Secure?", *with* question mark, which gives you a rough idea of what I want to talk about.

No easy task, you'll agree - and all in 15-20 minutes!! Well I've written an essay on the theme of where we as humans have been over the last 13,000 years in the hope that we can better understand where we are now, where presently headed, and how we might alter course somewhat. But don't worry, its not too prescriptive, there being no simple answers.

In considering where we humans have been, I want to say something about how we have evolved from our hunter-gatherer origins until the present which, in passing, we might say is marked by overpopulation, overproduction, overpollution and, (although there has been an enormous production of wealth, ('more than the world ever dreamed of') - by an increasingly uneven distribution of that wealth, a recipe for social instability and conflict if we keep going that way.

But going back in time, trying to get it all in some perspective, I want to say something about Jared Diamond's findings on our transition from hunter-gatherer to settled agriculture and what followed, for as you know, settled agriculture has been the foundation on which all subsequent social, cultural, technical and, ultimately, industrial, changes have been built.

From Hunter-Gatherer to Agriculture - and Beyond

The move from hunter-gatherer to settled agriculture began a mere 13,000 years ago, 'as yesterday' when you consider the 7 million or so years we humans and 'proto-humans' have been around as hunter-gatherers!! When it did occur, humans were already widespread throughout Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas, yet that slow transition occurred in only 5 small regions: - in the Fertile Crescent (e.g., 'Mesopotamia'), in China, and in 3 isolated spots in the Americas. But why only in *those* places - and *how* did it occur?

To cut a long story short, that slow transition was essentially fortuitous in the sense that it occurred initially *only* in those particular places which *happened* to have (be 'blessed' with) just the right sort of domesticatable plants (wheat, barley, rice etc.) and, later, animals suitable for labour-saving and food production - the ox, horse, sheep, goat and so on. Even though a gradual process, once accomplished, that transition gave the people of those regions (initially the Fertile Crescent) a huge 'head start' on all future developments.

Of course, by developing grain surpluses, these people were able to think about and do many things besides hunt and gather. Thus they could provide for a diversity of occupations, and 'specialists', such as 'being boss', being in touch with the Gods, being a craftsman, a labourer, a slave, etc. And, most important, that surplus made possible the growth in size of the group or tribe.

The transition to agriculture also led to a marked change in the nature of their society. These had been small, (not much more than family-size groups) essentially 'egalitarian', - characterised by a high degree of cooperation with either matriarchal or shared guidance - a kind of consensus 'democracy'. But once groups grew beyond a certain size, that arrangement was less and less practical, and progressively easier for a 'chief', to dominate. The larger groups thus became more and more finely specialised, hierarchical and male-dominated. And although cooperation between individuals occurred still, it was more and more enforced from the upper end of the hierarchy.

Now up until the transition to settled agriculture, human development was largely dependent on *genetic* evolution, especially on the very slow increase in brain size and the evolution of speech. But once a settled existence came about, more and more human development could result by '*cultural* evolution', humans then being able to learn a *wide* range of activities and behaviours by copying from others, that making possible a vastly accelerated rate of change. I emphasise 'change' rather than 'learning' (which might imply 'improvement') here because, as we know, there are many learned ideas/practices which are detrimental to true progress.

A related issue is that of 'tribute' because another consequence of the larger size and increased complexity of tribal needs, is the very real necessity for its members to provide 'tribute' for the common use, or 'good'. Such tribute might be grain to be stored for winter use, tools for cultivation, or whatever, - but the need is very clear. Equally clear, though, is the requirement for a wise chief to work out the necessary contributions and their subsequent responsible use. Obviously what was needed was not just good judgement but 'restraint' with regard to looking after 'no.1' !!

Well, as history tells us that was a great variable, for while *some* rulers were 'wise', prudent, caring and self-denying, just so many others were the reverse: rash, extravagant, oppressive, self-obsessed, greedy, cruel - I could go on and on!! One broad feature of these latter societies, therefore, was that tribute raised was excessive, most accumulated wealth rising to the top.

In this brief discussion I have to jump ahead through history, simply emphasising that 'civilised' human *societies*, while diversifying in cultural, religious, and other ways, frequently had certain things in common. For reasons just given, they were usually societies in which wealth was distributed very unevenly, with extremes of wealth and poverty. And, notwithstanding that within many of these societies, eventually, very considerable wealth accumulated, most remained hierarchical, male-dominated, highly competitive, acquisitive, aggressive and, all too often, war-like. That is *not* to say that all or even most *individuals* in those societies were so inclined - for most were, for one reason or another, highly cooperative - simply that 'at the top' those societies were mostly of that inclination.

From 'Poly/Multi-Culture' to 'Modern Industry Culture'

We need to bear in mind, of course, that gradually, over the 13,000 years since agriculture began, along with the evolution of diverse cultures, many technologies were developed to facilitate not only agriculture, but the fashioning of very many sorts of tools and goods for everyday use and trade. Such was all an essential prerequisite for what was to follow, both in terms of technological development and the generation of surplus wealth, 'finance' for the beginnings of 'modern industry'. At all events, ultimately, - and remember, this is a mere 250 years (i.e., but 10 generations) ago, - began that enormously accelerated version of these prior developments, a version we call the 'Industrial Revolution' whereby fossil fuel-energised machines (rather than man-power) began to produce greater and greater quantities of goods, including *other* machines, with fewer and fewer people.

Well that process offered the opportunity of overcoming shortages of all kinds, of providing sufficient food and material goods for all, while still allowing a suitable proportion of surplus wealth to be invested for increased production. But, of course, it also provided the opportunity for owners of the new production systems to sequester a disproportionate amount of the resulting wealth, a great deal of which was reinvested, this increasing the rate of production. Of course, that gave the owners a temporary advantage in wealth creation.

Remember, though, for any market to *continue* to work efficiently, there has to be not just unsatisfied human needs, but enough *solvent* customers to purchase all that is produced. But since under the system preferred by owners, limited wealth was transferred, especially to the 'lower orders', even for the purchase of their most basic needs of food, shelter, health, education and so on, the manufacturing systems of *all* industrial countries ran into recurrent economic crises or 'depressions'. Well, throughout the 19th Century, the obvious remedy, a fairer distribution of wealth, was either unrecognised or ignored.

Consequently, within these weak domestic economies, one favoured way round the problem was (as now) to export abroad what you could not sell at home - which of course makes sense for commodities unique to one country, scarce in another. But, overall it could not be a long-term solution for all nations *unless* all domestic markets

were, (in terms of solvent customer numbers and buying power) healthy - which clearly did not apply, since all were bedevilled by that 'hangover' from the past, a grossly unequal distribution of wealth.

From Industrialism to Imperialism - 19th Century Style

So another approach adopted with enthusiasm by many leading industrial powers during the 19th Century was what they, themselves, proudly termed 'Imperialism', the forceful penetration of other countries for economic gain, a process they saw as realising their 'manifest destinies'. It has been well described by many historians including Tuchman, Howard, Gilbert, Cunliffe, Nutting, Edwardes, - and by the English economist John Hobson in his study of 1902. Perhaps surprisingly, Hobson's figures, (taken from official sources) showed that factoring in the high costs of military, police and administration activities, the nation as a whole gained *very* little indeed from its imperial activities in Africa, Egypt, India, SE Asia and elsewhere. Yet those 'Imperial' policies continued to be supported precisely because the particular sectional interests which found them so highly profitable did not have to bear the high costs, these being born by the British government - or taxpayer, if you prefer! And Hobson had no reason to doubt that this situation applied equally to the other imperial powers.

But even more serious than the inefficiency and inequality of rewards and sacrifices involved in such a system, Hobson saw clearly that the *competing* activities of the various Imperial Powers were causing head-on confrontations of those 'imperial' interests which were leading directly to a major European war. Unfortunately Hobson's insights (accepted neither at home or abroad) were ignored, notwithstanding that that terrible conflict, WWI, was a mere 12 years away.

I shall say nothing about the awful effects of that war - you will have gleaned enough from the BBC series and other sources (e.g., Knightly, Tuchman, Gilbert, Winter). Suffice to say that its effects were so terrible that very serious attempts were made to prevent any further occurrence. Thus, for example, arose the League of Nations and its solemn Covenants, as well as the Versailles Treaty, which committed *all* signatory nations to genuine mutual security arrangements, including the reduction of armaments, arms types and levels to be limited to those essential for national *defence*. And Lord Robert Cecil, architect of so many of these commonsense ideas, also proposed a 'Treaty of Mutual Assistance' that would commit all to come to the aid of any nation invaded by another. Unfortunately, as Lord Cecil's own country, Britain, refused to support that Treaty, it was never adopted. And, as for arms limitation, while it was enforced on Germany (up to the time of Hitler) the arms manufacturers worked very hard against any *mutual* arms limitation and it too was never adopted.

Its all too long a story to tell in detail though well described by Lord Cecil and Philip Noel-Baker in their books. However, the upshot was that the most powerful nations, the so-called 'victors' of WWI, failed to support the ideals and provisions of the League and Versailles (i.e., it was they who failed, not the League). They preferred to stick with power politics, ultimately doing deals with the rising Axis Powers, including arms

supply to Japan when it invaded Manchuria (1931) and helping to re-arm Hitler's Germany, even selling training planes for its re-born air force (Noel-Baker) and, through the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935, unilaterally 'authorising' the build up of Hitler's navy, including his submarines to British levels, as well described by Churchill in his history of WWII (Vol.I).

(and c.f. later chapters in Churchill; also Chomsky; Liddell Hart; McCarthy; Noel-Baker (1&2); Riverdale)

World War II and Birth of the UN: Another Chance to Mend our Ways

And so within a mere 20 years of WWI, another avoidable war, WWII, the war Churchill characterised as "the unnecessary war" (see preface to "The Gathering Storm", his first volume on WWII). Again, I don't want to describe that war's effects except to stress that they were so awful that, as a way of making an end to all such wars, millions of people everywhere sincerely wanted to see drastic changes to the past 'business as usual' approaches.

Accordingly, statesmen formulated a radically new set of principles designed to produce a much juster world order, changes considered absolutely essential if we were to be freed of the scourge of war. Hence the United Nations Charter, a solemn treaty obliging signatory states to honour a wide range of human justice provisions, including obligations to promote human rights, full employment, improved health standards and higher standards of living generally. As we see, the Charter places special emphasis on the critical importance of economic justice as an essential precondition for a productive, peaceful world.

Yet, over the intervening years, despite the extraordinary acceleration of technology, fossil fuel exploitation and consequent wealth creation, the resulting enormous material benefits have been less and less evenly distributed. Indeed, notwithstanding limited trickle-down effects for the majority, the long-term trend since WWII has been away from more equitable distribution of land and worldly goods to a widening of the gap between rich and poor (Susan George; also Martin and Schumann). Thus the world has experienced trends *aggravating* the very conditions known to lead to greater tensions and war.

Of course such neglect of the Charter provisions for basic human needs, may (by some) have been excused, or at least 'explained', by the demands of the Cold War - so long as it endured. However, the essential irrelevance of that is now apparent since although the Cold War ended more than 10 years ago, the trend towards ever-increasing human inequality has not only continued, but is accelerating. Thus throughout both underdeveloped and developed worlds we witness ever greater disparities of income and material security. For the majority at the lower end of the scale we see job insecurity, mounting low-paid work, rising long-term unemployment and growing poverty - all of which are causing social distress in the midst of unprecedented wealth.

Not only is the above situation unjust, with the potential to generate dangerous inter-group and international tensions, but in the long run, it is counter-productive of literally *everyone's* interests. That follows because, even in the medium term, it cannot be sustained: it must eventually collapse. Space precludes a full exposition of reasons for this statement, but some crucial limits to sustainability can be summarised as:

First, man-made environmental assaults have led to unacceptable levels of land clearing and salination, to depleted top-soils, fisheries and forests and to seriously depleted and/or contaminated waterways in most parts of the world. Secondly, there are increasingly cost/price-sensitive limits on what is economic in the exploitation of minerals, most crucially oil, limits which are rapidly being reached. Thirdly, the ever-increasing disparity between the solvent minority 'haves' and the progressively less-solvent majority 'have-nots' means that the price of many classes of goods and services will rise beyond the majority's reach, the market failing not for lack of human need, but for lack of effective demand. Fourthly, the ever hoped-for 'saver', export business, is limited for the reasons already given: the world-wide growing gap between rich and poor inevitably causes downward pressure on effective demand, that leading ultimately to serious market failure.

As we know, there are many concerns about unjust, unsustainable economies. One is the concern mentioned earlier, that competition for the necessarily limited aggregate export trade could, as in the past, cause tensions leading to war. Another concern is that, again, the increasingly limited buying power of those in real need could lead to another 'Great Depression' in which human wants would become altogether desperate. For obvious reasons, these two major concerns are closely related.

Security, Sectional Interest and the Arms Trade

This general instability raises the very-much-related issue of the arms trade. As we know, a particularly powerful sectional interest is involved in the production of armaments and their sale both to home governments and internationally. The practice and the arguments to support it go back to the 19th Century when it did a great deal to precipitate wars and vastly amplify their tragic effects (Allfrey, Noel-Baker, Mason). Arms manufacturers were prepared for and, in the event, fully supported WWI - at least from a safe distance behind the lines! And as already mentioned, they successfully opposed the widespread popular move after WWI for the mutual limitation of arms production to levels essential for 'home defence', eventually succeeding in promoting an international trade which helped to arm both Japan and Germany.

After WWII, notwithstanding the UN Charter's Articles 26 and 47 requiring the 'regulation' of arms (and the establishment of the 'Conference on Disarmament') it soon became a 'business as usual' situation with, year by year, more and more conventional (as well as nuclear) arms being produced, the principal reason given being the 'Cold War' between the erstwhile Allies of WWII. At its height, \$1,000 billion was squandered in this way *every* year, the products being 'sold' to home governments or those abroad, and thus ever accumulating. I stress the "stated reason" simply because when the Cold War

finally ended, that fact made small impact on these yearly additions to the world's arms burden - or on preventing the arms export push. Clearly we are dealing here with sectional interests which are so influential with governments that they can effect sales both to their own governments and to the international market, whether government or non-government recipients, and whether or not either is truly "in the *National* (c.f. sectional) interest", whether or not it undermines everyone's security.

It is, as John Ralston Saul puts it, a form of 'socialism for the rich', a process greatly expanded and 'regularised' in many countries, especially after the economic difficulties of the early 1970s which followed the oil price hike by OPEC countries. Vast wealth owed to the oil-producing countries could be 'paid back' in part by supplying all manner of sophisticated armaments. Thus we saw huge arms sales to Iran, Iraq, and (still) to Saudi Arabia, which, through its oil wealth (and for no other reason) must be one of the world's most 'over-armed' countries. At the same time, less wealthy countries have never been neglected - including Sri Lanka and Indonesia - which has received arms from Britain and many other countries over the past decades and still today, a brief arms embargo having now been lifted.

The situation is regrettable not just because it is self-serving on the part of manufacturers but because these arms, (whether destined for Africa, the Middle East or Indonesia, for example) not only fail to increase the security of those regions but, contrarywise, hugely undermine it, - as well as increasing the traumas, as we have seen recently in Africa and E.Timor. At the same time, they represent a vast diversion of resources from projects desperately required to serve people's real needs - the accomplishment of which would *reduce* tensions and conflict.

And of course its not hard to see that if you have large arms build-ups year by year *in conjunction with* growing economic inequalities and injustices around the world, then you have a very sound recipe for social and international instability and the generation of conflict. And the 'funny thing' (or not so funny thing) is that all this is not only unnecessary (to reintroduce Churchill's expression in another context) but it is altogether counterproductive, against the best interests of literally everyone, including even those who make and sell the arms because if, in pursuing these clearly *un* economic practices, the economic system collapses in war or depression (or both), then literally *all* will be the losers.

There is a medico-biological analogy which may help to put such things in perspective. The idea is that we consider the several billion individuals of our world as comparable to an individual's billions of living cells. We then have to imagine the result of a gradual but progressive deregulation of intercellular relationships with respect to the cells' freedom to consume nutrients, to excrete toxins, to proliferate, and to occupy territory outside their normal confines. If *all* cells did that simultaneously, the individual would promptly lose recognisable shape, literally disintegrate, and die. Of course, that never happens in such a way. However, it does happen that when certain cells follow such a deregulated course, they proliferate, form a cellular mass and literally invade the territories of surrounding normal tissues, even 'metastasising' to distant parts of the

body. And all the while such deregulated cells are taking more and more nutrients to themselves so that while the tumour cell mass increases apace, the body mass declines. It is a case of the body's cells being 'at war with themselves'. The end result, however, is that, unchecked, the individual wastes away and (along with his/her 'thriving' tumour cells) ultimately dies, - an all too obvious 'lose-lose' outcome.

Applying the analogy to the present global economy, we see that 'deregulation' (including inappropriate regulation from afar) has taken us well down a comparable unjust, unsustainable road. To go even further down that road, implementing yet further steps towards total 'deregulation' before having a radical rethink about consequences is, ethics aside, simply to act in a thoroughly counter-productive manner, literally to 'be at war with one's self' by producing ever greater inequality, consequent instability and risking the sorts of internal conflicts and external wars which could make life impossible - or at any rate not worth living!

As humans we've come a long way in 7 million years and we've changed remarkably in the past 13,000 since agriculture began, during the 'civilisation' process, most of it through *cultural* evolution. While not wanting to go back to those earlier days, I think we can recognise that not all those culturally-acquired changes represent improvements, nor are they appropriate in helping us to cope with the very rapid changes that have marked our very recent industrial age, the last 250 years. We've been just 'terribly clever' at making things, (not always the right kinds of things, mind you!) but not even very good at constructing market arrangements to sell them all - hence the gross inequalities and economic crises. But the good news there is that *culturally*--evolved changes are readily correctible by further cultural changes, it requiring only the political will.

The science and technology behind all those developments of the last 250 years *could* be used benevolently, cooperatively, to solve *all* our major needs and problems - or, they could be used, as of now, competitively at home and abroad with devastating effect on people and the environment. The cheerful message in all this is that as individuals we have the power to think about such issues, to doubt the wisdom of current dogmas and trends and, collectively, to cooperate towards more positive approaches to the challenges we face.

References

Allfrey, Anthony. *Man of Arms: The Life and Legend of Sir Basil Zaharoff*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1989.

Cecil, Lord Robert. *All the Way* Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1949

Chomsky, Noam, *The Revolutionary Pacifism of A.J. Muste*, **In** American Power and the New Mandarins, Pelican, 1969 <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/196709--.htm>

Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War Vol.1. The Gathering Storm*, Penguin, London, 1985. (for rebuilding the German Navy, see pp. 123-128)

Cunliffe, Marcus. *The Age of Expansion 1848-1917*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1974.

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs and Steel: A History of Everyone for the Last 13,000 Years*, Vintage, London, 1998

Edwardes, Michael. *The West in Asia 1850-1914*, Batsford, London, 1967.

George, Susan. *The Debt Boomerang: How third World Debt Harms Us All*, Plut Press, London, 1992.

Gilbert, Martin. *A History of the 20th Century*, Vol.1, 1900 - 1933, Harper Collins, London, 1997.

Hobson, John A. *Imperialism: A Study*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1902, 1905 & 1938.
<http://www.econlib.org/library/YPDBooks/Hobson/hbsnImp.html>

Howard, Michael. *The Lessons of History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

Liddell Hart, Basil *History of the Second World War*, Cassell, London, 1970

Knightly, Phillip *The First Casualty*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1975.

McCarthy, John. *A Last Call of Empire: Australian Aircrew, Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1988.(includes role of Lord Riverdale)

Martin, Hans-Peter & **Schumann**, Harald. *The Global Trap: Globalisation and the Assault on Democracy and Prosperity.*, Pluto Press (Zed Books Ltd) London, NY, 1997.

Mason, Peter. *Blood and Iron*, Penguin, Victoria, 1984.

Noel-Baker, Philip. *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, Dover, 1972.

Noel-Baker, Philip. *The First World Disarmament Conference 1932-1933 and Why it Failed*, Pergamon, Oxford, 1979

Nutting, Anthony, *Scramble for Africa: The Great Trek to the Boer War*, Constable, London, 1970.

Riverdale, Lord Arthur, Director, Arthur Balfour and Co., Capital Steel Works, Sheffield. Address to Incorporated Sales Managers Association, (Sheffield Daily Telegraph, October 24, 1933, and quoted in Noel-Baker (1), p.125).

Saul, John Ralston, *Voltaire's Bastards : The Dictatorship of Reason in the West*, Penguin, Toronto, 1993

Tuchman, Barbara, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War 1890-1914*, Bantam, 1970.

Tuchman, Barbara, *August 1914*, Papermac, London, 1980.

Winter, Denis. *25 April, 1915: The Inevitable Tragedy*, University of Queensland Press, 1994.