

How has Globalisation Reformulated the Strategic Agenda?

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GEORGE WETZ, MAY 5 2009

“We live in a post-secure world.” (Blair 2006) How has Globalisation Reformulated the Strategic Agenda?

Far from fanfare, Blair’s phrase chimes the mentality of today’s strategic agenda. The belief that we can teleologically strive towards dissolving all societies’ ills has been diverted to a quest to live in a world of tolerable risks. Furthermore, Ulrich Beck’s thesis that we live in a risk society has now been transposed into a world of globalisation. Where we used to deter dangers and threats, we now perpetually manage strategic risks. The foundation of this behaviour is in our mentality of risk, but globalisation has reformed our strategic agendas further. Not only has globalisation allowed the rise of global terrorist networks, it has heightened our sensitivity to risk and the frequency at which we discover it. The catastrophe of September 11th 2001 (9/11) galvanised our fear of risk. Globalisation allows us to do what we can imagine, and the event granted us a manifestation of that achievable by the ‘dark side’[1] of globalisation. Our imagination has been stretched; the risks we try guard ourselves against are more devastating. The strategic agenda is no longer mere military practice. It involves a dispositif of governance of risk from bureaucratic surveillance of our populations to waging pre-emptive wars. The strategic agenda is no longer resigned to foreign ministries, but consumes manifold levels of government. We live in a globalised world where we cannot, nor allow ourselves to, be secure. But we still try to make it feel at least tolerable anyway.

“Post-secure” pertains to the conviction that we can no longer dream of perfect security. The Western world, exemplified by the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), has moved from an industrialised society that seeks to manufacture ‘goods’, to a risk society that manages ‘bads’.[2] This, in turn, has come to dominate the strategic agenda since the Clinton administration. The West now sees strategy as risk management – an approach that has side effects. Risks do not reveal themselves in the present; they exist only in the future. This means that administrations are trying to securitise possibilities that may never come to fruition, but also that there becomes an infinite, unmanageable number of risks to manage. During the Cold war, the danger and its consequences were largely known, so strategies of deterrence were prevalent. Statesmen could rely on academics and policy boffins to formulate a clear strategy with a sound basis. Now, the academic may just as well be a weatherman:[3] there are so many perceived risks that strategy becomes based upon speculation and imagination. The effect is that strategy operates in the informed future. It may be said that we are “post-secure”, “post-modern” and “post-industrialised”, but strategy has become pre-emptive, preventive and precautionary.[4]

Blair also said, “We live in a world where isolationism has ceased to exist”.[5] The West must now manage risks in a globalised world. Globalisation is seen in essence as “the social, economic and political results of cumulative lower transaction costs”[6], and these forces have moulded with a risk mentality to further transform the security agenda. New risks have arisen, and our sensitivity to them has been augmented. Globalisation has benefited societies, but it has also facilitated the growth in strength and size of global terrorist networks. 9/11 bore to us the capabilities of the Al Qaeda movement, and was only possible because communications allowed a free transfer of information and the modes of travel that permitted the liberal movement of people and products. This bears to us the dual infinity of globalised terror.[7] The limits of catastrophe and damage lie on the boundaries of imagination. The limits of uncertainty as to when or where or how the catastrophe manifests itself are unknown. The potential threats posed by

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terrorists have therefore multiplied because globalisation grants them the means to. Yet globalisation has forced us to multiply our sensing of risks also. Populations are more sensitive to the risks of terrorism after seeing first hand the horrors of Manhattan's 9/11 and London's 7/7. Our ability to detect risk has also been augmented by globalisation through surveillance and gathering intelligence and information. The paradox is that in a globalised world there are more and greater risks from terror, but far from mitigating the risks, the increased knowledge and technology that globalisation has equipped us with can do relatively little to eradicate them.

Yet this has not stopped the US and UK from trying. 9/11 marked the change in strategic agenda, for although risk management policies were used in 1990's bombings of Al Qaeda facilities in Sudan and Afghanistan, and the 1999 air campaigns on Serbia, the risk had never turned into tragedy. The catastrophe turned the tide of open strategic policy and language to prevention, a break from the past policies of deterrence. Globalisation's first war was the "war" on "terror", [8] a strategic campaign addressing the risks of the future that operates on the precautionary principle. [9] Thus, the military strategy of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been pre-emptive; to reduce the risks to the West that emanate from those states to a tolerable level. Ironical, then, that the first campaign in the "war" on "terror" was named *Enduring Freedom*, when our belief was that we could never permanently remove the risk of terrorism. Though temporary comfort has been granted to statesmen as they have erased some of the infinity of uncertainty; they know where and when the battle is taking place. [10] This is war as risk management. [11] But the strategy of the "war" on "terror" has not been restricted to military action; it has encompassed a multiplicity of policies across government departments. It has also not been purely preventative; it was instigated as a reaction to the manifestation of risk in 9/11.

The crux of the new strategic agenda is that our insecurities in a globalised risk society require us to take preventative measures against future possibilities using a variety of governance policies. Neither the risk society literature, nor securitisation theory can adequately describe the new strategic agenda. Risk society literature provides with insight into our mentality and reasoning, but fails to donate more than a commentary when explaining the new security agenda. For example, it cannot explain why strategy has proliferated so far from foreign ministries. Securitisation theory, as thought by the Copenhagen School, does not accurately account for the multiplicity of practises in the new agenda whose justification lies far outside the intensity range required for the securitisation process to occur, nor can it account for the infinite time-frame in which terrorism related threats materialise.

The days of strategy as purely the planning of military operations are left behind. Instead, a dispositif of "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" [12] has emerged as the basis for the new strategic agenda. Risks set in the dual infinity of globalisation require a holistic approach to combat them. Hence, our strategy in the "war" on "terror" includes monitoring home citizens to locate terrorists as well as satellite surveillance and targeting of weapons factories in Iraq. This approach is logically derived from the welfare state – where risks are no longer acceptable, the state is expected to take the action to free us from our fears. [13] More specifically, the new agenda seeks to change minds and mountains, kicking the legs from beneath terrorism's stool. Western governments are increasingly shaping the "plastic" environment [14] in which we live to make it inhospitable for terrorists, whilst preserving the benefits of globalisation for themselves. Thus, increasing security checks for shipping containers and airline passengers are part of the dispositif strategy. Similarly, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have sought to supplant Western values in populations through (subtle) "nation tending" [15] in opposition to fundamental Islamist movements. The actors who play out this strategy are as diverse as the dispositif in which they operate. Bureaucrats manage the daily risks of inflowing intelligence; sovereigns assess and act upon the dangers that they decide to be "intolerable". [16] The new strategic agenda, then, involves all these elements, and is deemed necessary due to the risks felt to be at hand.

Ulrich Beck said that he was both a Realist and Constructivist. [17] The new strategic agenda is also. The risk of terrorism has become a threat since 9/11. The West no longer need grapple with its imagination to gain a glimpse of what terrorists could do in a globalised world: it has been experienced. Yet we still search for risks, and find them in greater quantity and ferocity than ever before. That is because of the risk mentality, set in a globalised world where possibilities are at the mercy of imagination. This has demanded and formulated a new strategic agenda, which, rather than deterring dangers, manages risks. The strategy has proliferated far beyond the realms of military

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operations, and begun to consume more and more areas under the state's control. We see a dispositif strategy, which ignores the traditional boundaries that define what a strategic agenda can be. Its mission is to make the risk of terrorism tolerable. It lives in the future, but uses the present to manufacture an environment, both physically and through values, that is as inhospitable as possible for these dissident groups. Although it is doubtful whether the West will ever be satisfied with the level of risk that the "war" on "terror" poses, meaning that the new strategic agenda could well be a very long and arduous one indeed.

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[1] Giddens, A. *Runaway World* pp.7

[2] Beck quoted in Aradau, C., van Munster, R. *Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un) Knowing the Future* p.92

[3] Rasmussen, Mikkel. *The Risk Society at War* pp.98-9

[4] Heng, Yee-Kuang. *War as Risk Management* pp.247

[5] Blair to Economy Club of Chicago

[6] Rasmussen, Mikkel. *The Risk Society at War* p.99

[7] Aradau, C., van Munster, R. *Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un) Knowing the Future* pp.98

[8] Kurt Campbell, *Globalisation's first war?* Washington Quarterly Winter 2002 pp.7-14

[9] Aradau, C., van Munster, R. *Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un) Knowing the Future* pp.102

[10] Coker in Rasmussen, Mikkel. *'It Sounds Like a Riddle': Security Studies, the War on Terror and Risk* pp.391

[11] Heng, Yee-Kuang. *War as Risk Management*

[12] Foucault in Aradau, C., van Munster, R. *Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un) Knowing the Future* pp.97

How has Globalisation Reformulated the Strategic Agenda?

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[13] Rasmussen, Mikkel. *The Risk Society at War* pp.97

[14] Ibid. pp.98

[15] Heng, Yee-Kuang. *War as Risk Management* pp.249

[16] Ibid. pp.231

[17] Beck in Aradau, C., van Munster, R. *Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un) Knowing the Future* pp.103

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