

## *Endings of Eras*

“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.”

“Closing Time”, Semisonics, 1998

Two significant periods seem to be coming to an end for students of security in Canada – one local, relatively brief and certain, while the other is somewhat longer, world-historical in nature, and somewhat less certain.

Recently, the government of Canada has made known its intention to institute major funding changes in its Security and Defence Forum program. These both cut support funding very substantially and shift the model of the program from providing base funding for various centres around the country. Clearly, some SDF Centres will weather this change better than others.

The SDF program was a 1960s initiative. One of its intentions was to build up expertise in defence and security affairs outside of the Department of National Defence, within Canada’s universities. It has succeeded admirably in this, benefitting not only the academic community in Canada, but also DND and other departments of government, and beyond simply narrowly-conceived strategic-military issues. Whether the Security Studies sub-discipline of IR within Canadian universities is now able to stand on its own feet will be one measure of the success of the old-model SDF, and one factor in the success of any new funding model in achieving its objectives. Canada does not, as yet, have the myriad of think-tanks (and advocacy groups masquerading as

think-tanks) that one finds in the US. Will individual researchers adjust to this new environment? Will universities be able to support and maintain, at least to some degree, existing programs under current and foreseeable budgetary conditions? Will other funders step in – without unacceptable compromising of academic freedom and integrity? All this remains to be seen.

Details of the new model are as yet unclear: they are still, it would seem, under consideration, though the radical scaling back of financial resources for the SDF program is clear. One presumes that the now-reduced resources will be allocated strategically to a smaller range of activities, where continued funding can still provide a useful return, rather than being dissipated across a wider range of activities with a lesser impact. One hopes that the government and DND retain an interest in supporting high-quality, independent research.

On the larger stage, one academic parlour game is to debate the periodization of history. Was there really a “long 16<sup>th</sup> century,” a coherent unit of time not merely marking an arbitrary chronology? Did the 19<sup>th</sup> century last from the battle of Waterloo to August 1914? And what shall we make of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? One could say it opened with World War One, but when did it end? A case could, at least at one time, be made for 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. But does that suggestion now stand? September 11, 2001 was at one point another marker. Looking at current events, however, yet others arise as possibilities: 2008, with the collapses of Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, and the AIG bailout; or perhaps August 2011, when the US debt ceiling and deficit seem to have run into their walls, and the apparent US political divisions on handling these matters seem to have given the American political system a new status as an exemplar of dysfunctionality. Different concerns point to different markers.

In the old realist and neo-realist traditions, much favoured in classic security studies, economic factors (much less domestic political factors) did not often enter significantly into consideration. Honourable exceptions to such a generalization might be found in A. F. K. Organski’s “power transition” theory, Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, or Klaus Knorr and Frank Trager’s *Economic Issues and National Security*, to name a few. Outside of the sub-discipline, Mancur Olson’s *The rise and decline of nations* might also be noted. The broader discipline of IR has certainly begun

thinking seriously about the state as a unit of action beyond merely the “high politics” of politico-military relations, though the self-crippling division between system-level and foreign policy studies continues. But has strategic studies taken seriously the adage that the balance of payments is the classic chink in the armour of Great Powers? Has it taken note of the importance of governmental systems and of state-society relations, as well as of broader patterns of economic transactions among nations? What challenges – in policy and in theory – do these recent events pose for security studies?

And what, as well, do they say about the future of the US, and the periodization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? A downgrading of US debt and a facing, at long last, of the consequences of economic and financial trends well-established both domestically and in US foreign economic relations over many decades, are potential game-changers. The US may still be the biggest dog on the block, but it will be significantly hampered by its economic circumstances both at home and abroad in its ability to respond to, much less take the initiative in, the emerging international political and economic environment. It may thus turn out that “the new American century” lasted scarcely 20 years. As new powers emerge both regionally and globally, as the European Union seems hamstrung by its own economic difficulties, as Russia is experiencing at least some signs of a second wind, as the Arab Spring may (in failure or success) alter the state of play in the Middle East, we may find ourselves experiencing a more vigorous and more divided world order, a multipolarity that may only partly be mitigated by any pretense of Great Power concert. We might do well to ponder what this could mean for a world significantly dominated, even at the height of the Cold War, by broadly liberal institutions and ideology.

The Peloponnesian War ended with Sparta triumphing over Athens, but Sparta’s dominance was short-lived: first came Thebes, then Macedon, and then ultimately Rome. The true end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may be marked not by the Western triumph in the Cold War, but by the end of America’s “unipolar moment,” in part through self-inflicted injury, and the full-blown reappearance of the rest of the world on the stage.

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