

# Reflections as We Move Into the New Global Architecture

*Defense & Foreign Affairs* has turned 50. It has lived through a transformative period, but one which serves only as a prelude to a totally new era. Should we be celebrating? Or should we be equipping ourselves for a very different future? The answer is surprisingly positive.

FIFTY YEARS IS LESS THAN A TWINKLING OF HISTORY'S eye, but the past half-century has been momentous. It was, much of it, a bacchanal — *the bacchanal* — of recorded humanity.

This was the time of the creation and work of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* and its International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA) counterpart.

It included a period of ever-growing human hubris, wealth, wellbeing, and dominion over nature. It was an era increasingly drunk with material riches.

And if materialism reflects the immediate and tangible, then it also reflects what it is not: an abiding intimacy with history and identity, introspection, and with the future.

Now the world has awakened to find itself aged, exhausted, and with its fleeting civilizational and infrastructural constructions in decay; its memories dissipated, and its identities confused.

The past half-century was a time when most of global society learned little, disavowed all but the material, and then faced “the end of history”. Not the “end of history” in the way some historians averred — the brief belief that humanity had, for example, decided its fate upon the path of “democracy” — but in that we had run to the end of a human cycle, and had forgotten the past. To forget the past is to fear the future, because the future is totally unknown to those



who do not know the past.

Our global geopolitical architecture — our framework of sovereign states, geopolitical alignments, and civilizational influences — was, indeed, changing. This architecture, after all, was merely a human construction. “Democracy”, one of the great themes of the 20th Century, was changing in nature. So, too, was communism.

Indeed, as the 50 years of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* progressed, it had become clear that few actually pondered what either “democracy” or “communism” meant, and that each had become merely a brand for who we were.

At best, one brand required some measure of individual responsibility; the other promised that no individual could make a decision at a societal level. But few probed the origins, transformations, and meanings of either brand.

Neither doctrine was the permanent evolution of human behavior it was claimed it would be. Human nature did not change. And despite the improvements in human tools, ignorance and superstition were the pervasive forces of the 21st Century, but spread more rapidly than at any time in human history.

History and its lessons were being forgotten just at a time when human technology was capable of compiling a better record of its origins and activities

than ever before.

At *Defense & Foreign Affairs*, and at the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), we explored these transformations, not only with the print and electronic briefings we produced each day, but with a series of books<sup>1</sup>, and innumerable live and broadcast briefings.

But we witnessed in these five brief decades the culmination — the peaking — of the great innovative thinking which resulted in the creation of transformative, disruptive, revolutionary science and technological achievement. What we saw *after* that apogee, probably beginning in the last

<sup>1</sup> This writer alone, from the *Defense & Foreign Affairs*/ISSA house, published *The Art of Victory* (Simon & Schuster, 2006); *UnCivilization: Urban Geopolitics in a Time of Chaos* (2012); *Sovereignty in the 21st Century, and the Crisis for Identity, Cultures, Nation-States, and Civilizations* (2018); and *The New Total War of the 21st Century, and the Trigger of the Fear Pandemic* (2020). We produced a significant number of country-study books (Egypt, Azerbaijan, Pakistan); we produced, since 1976, the annual *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook* (which grew to 2,500 printed pages of a compendium of every country in the world and then became an online, daily-updated database and analysis center totalling many tens of thousands of pages of historical and current material); we produced specialist studies on the Balkans and on the Red Sea-Mediterranean nexus; and so on.

decade of the 20th Century, was the decline of truly disruptive thinking, as science and technology moved into a downhill slide; into a period of *evolutionary exploitation* of 20th Century achievements. The 50 years was a time of a great flowering of literature and strategic vision which peaked with the end of the Cold War, and suddenly declined into a pandemic of illiteracy and ignorance.

It was the best of times; followed by the worst of times.

It was the lifespan, thus far, of this journal, and of the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* family of “information services”. We attempted every day to chronicle the most significant aspects of those 50 years, those 18,262 days, to be exact, at the time of the 50th anniversary of our first edition on April 3, 2022. So, now, do I use this space to record a litany of our achievements in the strategic intelligence arena? Or use it to attempt to understand the place we now find ourselves as voyagers at the start of a totally new era?

Truly: the immediate past decades give us, if we wish, the capacity to adapt to an incredibly taxing new time in human history. Or they will blind us to the future in the hope that we can cling to all that we have come to know: our wealth, our luxury to shed the need for intellectual or ethical rigor, our ability to abandon the high grounds of literacy and language as well as our history, our obligations as a species to our own species, and much more.

That’s the old “what’s past is prologue” truth which Shakespeare espoused in *The Tempest*.

But the great learning experience of the past 50 years of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* serves as more than a platform for either self-congratulation, or for a jeremiad about the reality that we witnessed a period of great hope for much of the world as it suddenly pivoted into the decline of hope.

The half-century of *Defense & Foreign Affairs*’ history was based on earlier years of experience by my original partner and great inspiration, Dr Stefan Tomas Possony (1915-1995), and me (1946-).

A quarter of a century ago, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of *Defense & Foreign Affairs*. Admittedly, Steve Possony had already, less than two years earlier, left us after an illus-

trious life, but so many of our team were in the full flush of life. It was 1997, seven years or so into the “post-Cold War” era, still energized with the possibility that the end of the Cold War opened up the prospect of still greater prosperity and freedom of movement.

I noted, in our anniversary edition in 1997:

“We are now sufficiently past the watershed end of the Cold War to have realized that the world has not expired, nor has the process of history been radically altered.

“... The preoccupation among signatory states to the North Atlantic Treaty, and among many other European states, has lately been with the “expansion of NATO”. This remains one of the great exercises in ‘re-arranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic*’. Not that NATO should necessarily be abandoned: it has become an efficient tool of international cooperation. Rather, greater effort should be focused on giving it purpose, bearing in mind that it has become a mechanism of protection and stability for the industrialized G7 states as much as anything.

“The opportunity now exists to take that basis and develop it to meet new needs. One such requirement includes embracing the common interests between existing (and proposed) NATO states and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). And others, such as, for example, Japan, India, Pakistan, and the ASEAN states, Australasia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, South Africa, and so on. Even once-hostile *blocs*, including the PRC. The argument at this stage is open-ended. But the premise should be to create a body which is *inclusive*, rather than exclusive. Already, NATO has taken over some UN peacekeeping functions. Perhaps an expanded “NATO” (with a new name), allied to the UN, can become the framework of a global operational security arm for peacekeeping?”

But there was to be no creative thinking after US Pres. Ronald Rea-



*Defense & Foreign Affairs* Group founders Gregory Copley (left) and Dr Stefan T. Possony (center), and Pamela von Gruber, publisher, in Washington, DC, in 1982, the year all three formed the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA) to provide more face-to-face links with D&FA’s users around the world.

gan (1981-89) and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-90) left the scene, and no other Western leader emerged of their stature. They had been unrelenting warriors in the defeat of the USSR, in order to end the Cold War, and yet they had been the most open to taking advantage of the end of the Cold War to bring the peoples of the former Soviet (and Russian) empire into the West.

The point was that the end of the Cold War offered enormous possibilities, but, for many, opportunities represented uncertainties and a departure from the security of the known but dangerous competition of the Cold War. The 2022 reversion of the world into a form of “Cold War II” is a reflection of that, even though the new polarization of the world lacks the stability of the 1945-1990 model.

All of this goes to the issue of why we did not choose to mark the 50th anniversary of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* as a celebration, as we did our 25th anniversary.

We spent a half-century and our working lives consistently outlining global trends, threats, and opportunities. We forecast in the early 1970s when the USSR would collapse; we were consistently proven right in many areas of the world when we outlined where trends were going, and

why. We saw the grand strategic patterns emerging, and advised you.

To do this, we created a global intelligence collection apparatus which monitored the situation in every country and territory. We now monitor 290 nation-states and territories, feeding data into our Global Information System (GIS), to provide government subscribers with access to data and to trend analysis. What had begun, with its publication on April 3, 1972, as a weekly *Defense Newsletter*, had grown within a year into this monthly journal, *Defense & Foreign Affairs* (later to add the main title of *Strategic Policy*), *Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily*, and then several weekly newsletters focusing on strategic developments in Africa, Latin America (also published in Spanish), *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook* (annual), and the *Strategy* series of major strategic conferences around the world. *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook* moved after 2006 from a print publication to a daily-updated online service, and that grew — with the addition of daily analytical reports and more sensitive material — to the Global Information System (GIS).

The result of this process has been that changes around the world are seen contextually. Patterns can be observed which are missed when the focus is too closely around issues within a country or region. And it is the patterns which give us an indication of potential outcomes.

But does a comprehensive understanding of the world's trends actually bring about better national policy-making? Possibly not.

We see how readily the world reverts slavishly to earlier patterns of behavior, rejecting opportunities and insights. The living world never really progresses its history in a linear fashion, but most individuals think in linear terms: that tomorrow will merely be an extrapolation of today. It is a form of self-deception which makes it possible for an individual to cope with an unstable reality.

What is the purpose of intelligence and analysis if it is to be ignored?

Forget, for a moment, the trap of linear thinking: Is human nature so predictable that we can know that it will even *cyclically* return with chronometer precision to the patterns which will lead it first to strength and

then to collapse?

If human nature and life is as pre-ordained as the fatalistic Mesopotamian tale of an "Appointment in Samarra", in which destiny cannot be denied, then why bother to understand it, or wrestle with the outcome? We have discussed that phenomenon repeatedly through the 50 years.

The reality, however, is that an understanding of context, including historical context, can indeed prepare an individual to cope with seemingly unanticipated changes in the strategic realm. So our hope lies not in always being able to stop the *tsunami* of changing global trends, but in being able to understand and anticipate such trends in order that we may be better prepared to handle them.

That has been the task of *Defense & Foreign Affairs* and ISSA. Our mission, in a sense, has been to show that the only "black swan events" out there are the failures of our own minds to understand the contextual issues which lead to great and *seemingly* sudden change. The *Defense & Foreign Affairs* logo has always included a black swan — the *cygnus atratus* of the Swan River, of Western Australia — to show that the black swan is indeed fully able to be anticipated and understood.

What developed as a comprehensive philosophy, or a grand strategic approach to threat perception and trend analysis began when I met Dr Stefan Possony at a talk he gave to the Bohemian Club in San Francisco in early 1972. Well, it began much earlier for Possony. He had already achieved much since his original publication in Austria in the 1930s of *Tomorrow's War*, which was the first study to really understand the phenomenon of total war and how it would occur in World War II. Possony should be the subject of his own book; he was the greatest strategic philosopher of the 20th Century, according to one of his friends and rivals, Dr Robert Strausz-Hupé. He was far more than that, however.

Possony's 1949 book, *Strategic Air Power*, shaped nuclear policy and foresaw intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which had not, at that point, been devised. He was also the master of psychological strategy, unique in the West.

For my own part, I was a very young Australian who had spent only a de-

cade or so writing about aviation and maritime issues, and who, in San Francisco in 1972 had decided to publish *Defense Newsletter*.

Meeting the great Possony gave the proposed project an intellectual scope it may never have otherwise achieved. And we devised the service to particularly assist governments around the world, in that pre-internet time, in gaining an understanding of strategic trends which would impact them. At that time, virtually all great strategic minds were gathered around Washington, DC, or London, Paris, and Moscow. What we hoped to do was to ensure that leaders around the world would have access to first-rate analysis which had *not* been geared specifically around great-power needs.

The response was enormous. I sent out 100 letters to leaders and senior policy officials around the world and received subscriptions from all of them; a remarkable and unrepeatable response rate! With our second issue, on April 10, 1972, and with first-hand intelligence from one colleague who had been in Cairo with senior Egyptian officials, we said that Pres. Anwar as-Sadat would expel all Soviet advisors within six months.

That got the attention of Washington, and we were advised not to make such rash statements, because — as everyone knew — the Soviets were in Egypt to stay. They were, in fact, out within six months.

There was to be much more. Possony was already active in creating the concept of the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which was to be the great act which bankrupted the USSR in its competition with the West. Indeed, it was Possony's forecast at that time that the USSR would not be able to survive beyond the early 1990s. I still find, and learn from, writings of Possony, many found in the library he bequeathed me.

So what, after 50 years, has *Defense & Foreign Affairs* achieved? Did it change the world? Well, it helped many leaders cope with change. It has prepared a new generation of thinkers in contextual strategic analysis to cope with the immense changes which are now occurring.

Now it is time for *Defense & Foreign Affairs* to find new leadership of its own because it, too, must draw breath and gird for the coming fight. ★