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## **Scarcity as a cause and means of conflict and war**

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**ILERI**

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Scarcity is inscribed in human fibres; it concerns the limited time of life of the individual, but also the survival of man. Sometimes it is natural with the depletion of mineral resources; sometimes it is the result of an economic system of domination and the expression of a political power of power. The security of a community depends as much on the existence and appropriate exercise of weapons systems or expressions of power as on the sense of relative incapacity of potential adversaries to engage in aggression against it. It is, however, a costly service, especially in the context of economic globalisation that produces growing inequalities. Moreover, economics is sometimes a weapon in a system of non-self-governing nations, artificially creating pockets of poverty through predation or political coercion.

La rareté est inscrite dans les fibres humaines, elle concerne le temps limité de vie de l'individu, mais aussi la survie de l'homme. Parfois elle est naturelle avec l'épuisement des ressources minières, parfois elle est le résultat d'un système économique de domination et l'expression d'un pouvoir politique de puissance. La sécurité d'une collectivité dépend autant de l'existence et de l'exercice adapté des systèmes d'armes ou d'expressions de puissance que du sentiment de l'incapacité relative des adversaires potentiels d'engager une agression à son encontre. Il s'agit cependant d'un service coûteux, notamment dans le contexte d'une globalisation économique productrices d'inégalités croissantes. En outre, l'économie est parfois une arme dans un système de nations non autarciques, en créant artificiellement des poches de pauvreté par la prédation ou la contrainte politique.

Economic conflicts, scarcity, economic warfare, inequality  
Conflits économiques, rareté, guerre économique, inégalités

Originally, political economy was based on the concept of scarcity and its management, notably through the organisation of production, but also through the exercise of power and predation.

Today, the scarcity of a good is based both on an imbalance between supply and instantaneous demand, on the disappearance of natural resources necessary for certain productions, but also on political decisions that can prohibit certain forms of use of products for ecological, environmental, political or health reasons. Raw materials may run out, and oil will become a rare liquid in less than a century, unless it becomes abundant again if the fight against the greenhouse effect leads to its use being eliminated. Similarly, drinking water will become so scarce that people will be forced to reproduce it in increasingly commercial ways. Clean air may also become a commodity, if advanced technologies can reduce the deleterious health effects of polluting emissions.

The security of a country depends first and foremost on a collective feeling about the moral, economic and political weight to be given to threats to the state, its components and its citizens from potential enemies, whether internal or external. It is therefore not directly measurable. It depends on ontological, philosophical or religious perceptions of the collective systems and structures in place, and on a more or less justified need for security expressed by the citizens (in the case of democracy) or by the powers that be. It is therefore not limited to the military and civilian (police and justice) sectors of national security

Scarcity can also be the result of a mismatch between the productive system and consumer needs. It can then be short term, which leads to forms of inflationary pressure (for neoclassical analysis, scarcity is an essential element of price formation), or long term due to inappropriate production choices or physical constraints on the availability of production factors. Scarcity can be societal, based on an unbalanced distribution of income, on more or less violent and exacerbated conflicts between social actors and on a refusal of exchange. Scarcity is then dependent on the social organisation and the conflict relations between institutions, communities and individuals. In this context, it is the economic system that creates more or less important 'pockets' of relative scarcity. Finally, scarcity can be an expression of power. When a country imposes an embargo on another country, it creates scarcity in order to convince the victim to act in accordance with its demand.

In a less conflictual world, scarcity in the face of the satisfaction of human needs could lead to a spirit of solidarity, which the market economy, based on individual interest, hardly values. In fact, the history of humanity seems to highlight the struggle of humans against an endemic scarcity that could

threaten them. The feeling of scarcity is therefore not shared in the same way between men and nations. In time and space, the security of people is achieved by reducing uncertainty about the survival of the species, by creating the goods necessary for it, through the instruments of law, power or arms. The first scarcity concerns human security, which includes the struggle to provide for oneself and avoid extreme precariousness, the protection of one's physical integrity and the guarantee of a societal organisation adapted to individual survival. As a result, man being a fundamentally social animal, an important part of security is provided by the social group of each individual, even if within this community problems of scarcity may also arise in inadequate social inequalities.

**National and international security is therefore essential to combat relative scarcity.** To fight predation and protect its citizens, states organise national defence. The production of arms is then an instrument to fight against an essential scarcity, primordial according to Adam Smith, namely the defence of the country. "Hell is other people. In this context, the security of a country depends on the actions of other states, their propensity to seek power, their appetite for predation, their ability to exert domination effects.

To ensure this specific scarcity, it is necessary to devote significant resources, which could have been used for other purposes. The opportunity costs, *ceteris paribus*, are therefore significant. However, if these means make it possible to avoid a war, they will perhaps have made it possible to wage a war, with significant costs. When one compares the price of a tank to that of a school, one implicitly makes the assumption that the weapon itself does not meet a need. Such reasoning leads one to think that there is no need for security *per se*, or, more precisely, that this need is satisfied in a natural way, without any productive effort on the part of a defence instrument. For liberal and neo-classical theorists, the market creates the conditions for equity and the expression of conflicts is immersed in economic competition, provided that states throughout the world accept the functioning of the market economy. In this context, war and conflict are the exception, the norm being peace. The military effort is then analysed as a burden. The costs of preparing for and waging war are considerable and steadily increasing. Under these conditions, the state takes on a major importance in economic life.

Today, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the globalisation of the market economy dominates all international trade, but power relations, domination effects, social conflicts and wars are still relevant. The military effort is supposed to produce a national and international security function. The expenditure of other countries is a potential threat, except in cases of military alliance. If, in the face of this effort, no national army is formed,

confidence in the country's economy may be undermined. Under these conditions, investors turn away from the country, thus causing a situation of economic and social crisis. The military effort, if it is likely to increase confidence in the proper functioning of the national system, produces new investment opportunities that increase the economic potential of a country.

However, in certain situations, the use of power relations is a means of strengthening the coherence of states under construction. For the German historical school, military demand is an important stimulus for the development of capitalism; instead of asking whether war is an inevitable consequence of capitalism, it considers capitalism to be a positive consequence of war: for it, military demand exerts an increase in industrial production and has allowed the diffusion of the capitalist system in Western Europe.

**The modern state is the provisional result of past wars and the organisational demands of armed conflict** (Porter, 1994). For Braudel (1993), artillery, printing and ocean navigation are at the heart of the great technical revolutions of the 15th to 18th centuries. Firearms brought about a tremendous transformation of warfare, states and economic life. Many sectors of national economies (iron and steel, aeronautics, electronics, shipbuilding, etc.) were also the vectors of new industrial developments. Armaments and warfare have played an important role in modern history as a driving force for the acceleration of industrialisation and the expansion of markets" (Mandel, 1972).

In addition, public investment was often driven by military demand: for example, state orders were a decisive instrument in the economic development of Japan, where several zaibatsu benefited from the transfer of industrial equipment created for the needs of armaments. Finally, the US government has always pursued a real industrial policy, especially in the field of research and development, through the military-industrial complex.

Keynes also questioned whether rearmament would help fight unemployment (1939). Indeed, an increase in military expenditure allows the stimulation of economic activities in the armament sector and its intermediate consumption, with a correlative increase in employment and wages. Such an effect would, however, have additional, longer-term effects if other public expenditures were involved. Military spending, while useful for national defence, is the most unproductive form of public spending. It is not a temporal transfer of purchasing power, but a definitive withdrawal of production factors from the economic circuit. National security has a cost. Its production lies in the absence of war for countries favourable to non-aggression through the effect of dissuasion. For the aggressor countries, it is then a question of expressing an overpowering attitude towards the

declared enemy and/or a desire for predation. Under these conditions, in the short term, collective resources will be spent on military purposes, thus exerting a considerable opportunity cost for all goods and services, increasing, at least momentarily, the overall scarcity of the citizens of the countries concerned.

Economic competition, often savage, is not the modern form of armed warfare and an extension of economic warfare conducted by one group of states against another state deemed guilty of actions detrimental to the citizens of the world. It is true that the victims of hunger or epidemics are often more numerous than those who die under the fire of bombs or machetes. The natural effect of trade is not peace, as Montesquieu pointed out in his time. Rivalry prevails over cooperation and the whole of the European Union is destabilised by this policy, which is applied within the framework of a common currency, the paradoxical result of cooperation and agreement between governments. The cosmopolitan economy to which the neo-classical and liberals refer in their analyses proposes to define rules that lead to universal well-being. Political economy is more concerned with the conditions of the relative power of a nation in relation to other nations in the globalised markets.

In the market economy, economic crises follow one another. With the process of globalisation, tensions are always present in time and space, far from the optimal and benevolent system proposed by liberal and neo-classical theories. The role of the state is always contested in a crisis situation, while the market, but perhaps in the financial field, is often spared from criticism. For a time, the market appeared to be the solution to all ills, but by appealing to unbridled individualism, it is gradually destroying the necessary solidarity. In 2020, the violence and instability of the markets are a cause for concern, with the continuous development of slugging that disfigures the objectives of the market world. Growing income and wealth inequalities, tax evasion and optimisation, unbridled contestation of public goods, public and private indebtedness, the dictatorship of an ever less precise and increasingly blinding GDP, global warming and growing pollution are all factors that testify to the explosive nature of the world's future societal life.

**Is it that "capitalism carries war like the cloud carries the storm" (Jaurès, 1914)?** Competition constitutes an anarchic form of production regulation, which generates fundamental instability; military expenditure then makes it possible to reduce the growing and structural gap inherent in the capitalist system between supply and demand. Permanent armament has become the fundamental lever to solve the problem of surplus capital. Profit is not random in military production, so it is no longer justified by

risk. Military equipment is a unique good with a unique specification, having no alternative use, which makes it difficult to refer to a market price to fix its value. It is difficult to enter the competitive process. Military companies can therefore benefit from excess profits, without having to bear the burden of competition and uncertainty.

According to Baran and P. Sweezy (1966) argue that military expenditure can destroy part of the surplus, thus counteracting the tendency of the capitalist mode of production to over-accumulate and to lower the rate of profit. However, military expenditure cannot remedy the contradictions of capitalism. The conditions for its maintenance are incompatible. In the end, it is a question of buying arms, arms and more arms. In this context, military expenditure is a major solution to the contradictions of capitalism. The analysis of the permanent arms economy does not allow us to understand the motivations of capitalists, nor the internal social conflicts.

This analysis has been criticised. Ron Smith (26) argues that other public expenditures are more effective in addressing the overproduction of the capitalist system and that military spending has other functions than ensuring demand. Defence industries offer capitalists the advantages of market mechanisms, without the disadvantages. The state finances research and development, and guarantees markets through long-term orders and export subsidies. In fact, capitalism is a factor of "permanent war at worst, armed peace at best". It creates scarcity to keep the working class impoverished. The fear of warlike action by other states allows capitalism to demand more and more effort from the poorest citizens, in order to allow the capitalists to increase their rate of surplus value, and thus their rate of exploitation of humans.

With the process of economic globalisation, international trade is presented as a process favourable to universal peace. However, the market economy is based on competition, which can sometimes amount to a permanent conflict between producers, consumers and citizens. The economy is taking over the life of humanity today. Public controls are weakened. The strategies of economic agents consist in obtaining the most market advantages, independently of a collective interest often placed at the direct or indirect service of private interests. Globalisation does not call for global citizenship, let alone corporate citizenship. Above all, it defines the freedom of the owners of capital to settle wherever and whenever they want, with the fewest social or political constraints. Globalisation can only be affirmed by reducing social protection, by diminishing the spaces of the collective and of solidarity. In this context, scarcity is created both in space and between social strata. If capital has always been speculative, it also creates the conditions for economic war between nations. "Economic

globalisation is an egalitarian sham" (Labarde, Marris, 1998). The existence of tax havens, tax evasion behaviours, is a strong sign of the system's inability to reduce the scarcity for the misfits of an increasingly unequal system, especially in terms of wealth and potential for action on all national and international economies (Fontanel, 2016a,b,2017, Zucman,2016). There is a quasi-irreversibility, towards ever greater fortunes and, for the plebs, recurrent difficulties in finishing the end of the month without the appearance of a lack of financial means, which is akin to artificial scarcity with regard to the world's capacity to produce wealth. The members of GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft) have the capacity to generate huge profits, out of proportion to their size. They are primarily interested in "doing business", "making money", without any reference to the social consequences of their practices and innovations.

They are criticised for the commercial use of private information, the patenting of information technology, lobbying to avoid anti-trust laws, financial speculation, tax optimisation in tax havens and the creation of a control and surveillance society.

Market-driven globalisation creates inequalities and relative scarcities. Multinational companies are the beneficiaries of a globalisation whose laws they dictate. Political democracy is not accompanied by economic democracy. A plutocracy is being established, with less and less democratic control, as most sources of information belong to the ruling class (Fontanel, 2020b). The exercise of state power is also present.

The war in Iraq is based on the assumption of American power. The possible willingness of the Gulf States to use oil scarcity for economic purposes may have pushed the US government to intervene on the basis of implausible pretexts. Like war, competition benefits the generals and the gun merchants. For J.K. Galbraith (1968), the threat of war is an indispensable element in controlling social disagreements and anti-social tendencies. Negotiated disarmament processes are only wishful thinking. Hypotheses for the conversion of the arms industries are not always politically acceptable, as they do not take into account elections and vested interests. Above all, there are no valid substitutes for the military functions of conflict in American capitalism. The threat of war, as an instrument of government stability, provides the most effective means of controlling national economies. The subordination of citizens to the state and the control of social dissent are factors largely dependent on international security. The war-based system has proven its effectiveness since the beginning of history. It has provided the basis for the development of many civilisations.



**The economy is sometimes itself an instrument of conflict by creating relative scarcity.** Economic warfare has always existed, from sieges to embargoes, in situations of war (scorched earth policy or economic terrorism) or peace (boycotts or embargoes, for example). It can also aim at weakening the military power of a state, either in a war situation (blockade) or in a situation of relative peace.

Several strategies (Fontanel, Bensahel, 1993) have been employed, which do not aim at the well-being of the national economy, nor its development, but rather at the weakening or subjugation of another economy. Sanctions to cause significant economic damage to a country to change its policy (apartheid, violation of minority rights, tyrannies or war) are a key instrument of economic power, used extensively during the Cold War. Economic factors become permanent weapons which, in order to regenerate, cannot be constantly diverted from their essential functions. The economy has become an instrument of power often applied to the conflictual relations of states. Insecurity depends on the arms race, inequality, international domination and even social exploitation.

Oblique strategies of dissuasion, economic retaliation, embargoes and boycotts are all powerful weapons, whose economic and political effects depend on defence measures, international solidarity and the potential for substitution. The economic weapon is often part of warfare. Today, direct (or military) strategy is made difficult by the power of nuclear forces. States are therefore led to exercise a strategy of "indirect manoeuvre". There are several types of economic weakening strategies:

- The state considers that it must control the sale of weapons that could be turned against it: this involves developing strategies to control the export of dual products, half-civilian, half-military, in order to prevent the adversary army from increasing its economic potential; in this context, the reduction of the military-economic strength of the potential enemy is sought and unequal exchange is claimed.

- The collapse of the Soviet economy was undoubtedly aided by the application of the strategy of impoverishment through the effort to prepare war. The arms race is a cost, which the richer countries can more easily take into account. The less developed countries are impoverished more rapidly, as they do not have enough 'discretionary income'. Under these conditions, the arms race leads to the weakening of the poorest state, with a view to destabilising it socially and economically first, and then politically.

- The strategy of disruption aims to create economic problems in the rival country in order to increase its political and social difficulties: the disruption of trade or financial flows destabilises the target country. The embargo is an instrument of retaliation intended to exert strong pressure on a sovereign decision of another state. It is a dangerous weapon for the

one using it, unless there is sufficient international consensus. However, the "attacking" country always suffers from this policy, which is part of a "negative sum game" for the protagonists.

- The strategy of encirclement aims to develop economic interdependence that can guarantee peace. The new economic solidarities are the best deterrent to aggression. This strategy has not yet been used effectively.

- With the strategy of political violence, it is a matter of a state taking over the economic power of another country when the latter is hostile and weakening the dominant social strata. It is then necessary to control the political forces of the state apparatus and the trade unions, through nationalisation or privatisation, through strikes or riots.

- The strategy of domination leads the dominant countries to influence the dominated countries in their military-strategic decisions. The economic weapon allows a country or group of countries to dominate another country through the power conferred by the monopoly of the supply of goods and services vital to its survival. The White House has sometimes used the food weapon against developing countries.

**The potential of economic conflict as an expression of a country's quest for power remains high.** The instruments of foreign economic policy (protectionism, economic sanctions or control of strategic products) serve the political objectives of a nation. The national interest must take into account the overlapping of national interests (Baldwin, 1985). According to Sun Zi's Article 14, of all the methods of waging war, safeguarding a country is better than destroying it, subduing the enemy without fighting is the best. Today's economic warfare is more insidious: it focuses on international rules deemed 'liberating' in the long run, while ensuring, in the short term, the violence of excessive inequalities. International economic relations (such as foreign aid, capital flows or trade negotiations) are instruments of political pressure (or reaction).

In this context, the distinction between war and the search for power is blurred. With the end of the Cold War, Washington has engaged in economic warfare, with military imperatives often an excuse to develop industrial policy, promote research and development, and subsidise domestic firms. The well-being of Americans depends on their ability to produce goods and services, to develop international trade laws, to promote democracy and human rights, to strengthen the national potential for competitiveness, but also to have a dominant military power for the benefit of American companies and citizens.

Economic factors often dominate the agenda of strategic considerations. Every nation competes with others in global markets. It is therefore a

question of protecting high-tech sectors, indirectly supporting national companies, helping sectors with high added value and acting firmly in international forums to promote the development of the dominant economy. This time, the enemy is officially considered as a partner. The role of states is discussed in this respect.

While for K. Ohmae (1995) saw the end of nations as part of the peaceful and rather benevolent logic of the market economy, Reich (1993) sees the inevitable disintegration of national economies as increasing insecurity and impoverishment. Indeed, the events of 11 September 2001 have challenged these preconceptions, reminding us that there are many other factors than economic ones that lead to war and conflict.

Competitiveness is in the DNA of companies in a market economy system. However, competition is not necessarily fair, on the one hand because the search for the maximum rate of profit makes it possible to accommodate the legal rules that are most favourable to firms, and on the other because the economy is an essential element of national security. As a result, states can intervene to favour or disadvantage companies according to their relations with the countries from which they originate or according to political criteria expressing power relations exercised both directly between states and indirectly through international economic organisations. Finally, competition can also lead to social wars, with the application of "least-deficiency" policies.

With President Trump, who favours "positive economic nationalism" (Fontanel, 2018; 6, Saby& Saby, 2016, 2019) through an adapted industrial policy, the United States intends to become the sole arbiter of a now globalised economy, by maintaining its world hegemony and spiritual leadership of the planet. The aim is to combat the efforts of China, which itself wants to take over world leadership. The instruments of foreign economic policy (protectionism, economic sanctions or control of strategic products) serve Washington's political objectives.

Peace is a construction, not a natural state of affairs. People seek to appropriate production and they retain a predatory spirit. It is true that war is no longer praised, it is no longer socially "recognised" as a means of crisis management, even because of the existence of nuclear weapons. War is no longer a strategic means; it is a matter of conscience. However, the multiplication of the number of states, the absence of a supranational order and the inability to enforce the law everywhere open up a bright future for war, especially for the control of scarce resources.

The economy is a cause of war, but it is also a means to war. Disarmament is no longer relevant, because even if "war" is not the main concern of today's societies, it is a recurrent threat. Moreover, disarmament process creates, on the short run, some additional economic problems for

the regional and national economies (Shkaratan, et al. 1998; Fontanel, Chatterji, 2008).

Conflicts changed in nature: it no longer places battalions on a battlefield; it becomes insidious, continuous, based on inequalities and relative scarcity. Economic warfare is terrorist. Scarcity and peace do not mix. When a society creates relative scarcity, it also produces conflict; and therefore war.

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