

to manoeuvre. That manoeuvrability is not entirely an unmixed blessing. In just the first nine months of this year, for example, Viet-Nam has invaded Cambodia, China has had a border war with Viet-Nam, South Yemen has attacked North Yemen, and Tanzanian soldiers have invaded Uganda. All this in nine months -- and without the direct intervention of either of the super-powers. Political instability now pervades many regions. Civil uprisings and internal conflicts are apparent in many regions.

The re-emergence of China onto the world stage adds an almost incalculably important new factor into the equation. Not only is China renewing its political interests in South East Asia -- interests that date back thousands of years -- but its intent to frustrate Russian ambitions on one hand, and its expressed interest in Western technology on the other, is leading to involvement in other parts of the world as well. The impact of this enormously important development is still difficult to evaluate. Not for over a thousand years has the world seen China, with its vast and energetic population, devote itself to a single set of international objectives under an effective central leadership. The coupling of such resources to modern western technology is bound to bring about enormous changes to the international scene, and a major shift in the balance of power.

Another factor that has emerged in the past decade is the increasing self-reliance of many of the newly emerged countries of Africa and Asia. In many cases, internal instabilities or external pressures have led to the build-up of substantial armed forces in areas where such were previously relatively unknown. This wide-spread increase in the capability to make war also introduces an unsettling element into the scene.

There have, of course, always been a number of areas of active armed conflict around the world. I am told that since the Second World War there have been no fewer than one hundred and fifty such outbreaks. It would be naive and unrealistic to think that human nature could change so completely that the recourse to war will be a forgotten and disused device. What is particularly worrying at the moment, however, is the duration of some of the conflicts, such as the thirty-year struggle in South East Asia. For conflict has its own dynamic, its own inexorable logic. Once a generation is born and raised to maturity in an unremitting atmosphere of war, the stoppage becomes enormously difficult. Peace and war are not two marks on a switch to be turned on and off at will, and the longer a state of war exists, the longer the period it will take to achieve a thorough peace. South East Asia is the prime example.