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DETENTE, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

15 July 1975

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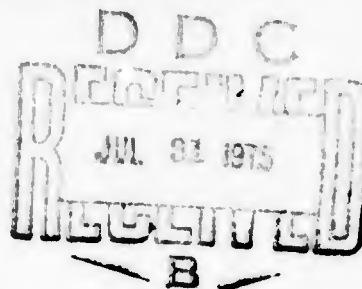
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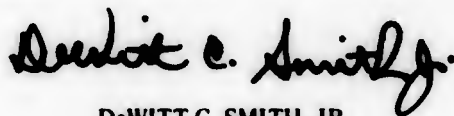
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## FOREWORD

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DeWITT C. SMITH, JR.  
Major General  
Commandant

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

**COLONEL JOHN G. PAPPAGEORGE** graduated from the US Army War College in 1973 and subsequently joined the Strategic Studies Institute. He is a West Point graduate and has a masters degree in government and politics from the University of Maryland. He has served in a wide range of command and staff positions including several tours in South Vietnam as well as tours in Korea and West Germany. Colonel Pappageorge has authored numerous articles which have appeared in professional military periodicals.

## **DETENTE, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS**

Much has been written about detente, national security and the multinationals. But, not enough has been written about the relationships among the three. This is due, in large part, to the fact that the multinational corporations (MNC's) are relatively new on the international scene. Only recently has a realization been growing of how they affect relations between nation-states and how they affect many aspects of national security. Thus, before proceeding further, a brief review of the growth and development of the MNC is in order. What it is today and how it came about has much to do with how it affects detente and national security.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF THE MULTINATIONALS**

The political and economic climate following World War II was most conducive to expansion of US business abroad. The currency convertibility guaranteed by the newly-created International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the move toward freer trade exemplified by the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) did much to reduce the risks of direct foreign investment. The big US companies led the way - the same companies that after the American Civil War grew from

regional to national business giants. For them, experienced as they were in large-scale operations, movement overseas was the next logical step.

Initially US direct foreign investment took the form of building production facilities in host countries to service the local market, e.g., assembly plants in Europe to sell autos to Europeans. Later, production facilities were expanded past the mere assembly of final components. Eventually the entire manufacturing process was conducted overseas and, because it was cheaper, products for the US market were produced overseas and imported back to the United States. This latter situation was prompted by the fact that as European and Japanese firms recovered from World War II, they began invading the lucrative American market. Among other factors, an overvalued US dollar in the 1950's and 1960's gave them a marked advantage. US firms countered by moving production facilities for finished products or components destined for the US market to countries where labor costs were cheaper. In the process, overseas subsidiaries were not set up merely to serve their local market but to service a global market as well. The superb capabilities of the MNC's in management technology, finance capital, and communications were harnessed to create what Dr. Ronald Muller of American University calls "export platforms" to service worldwide demands.<sup>1</sup>

The final step occurred sometime in the late 1960's. Up to that time research and development facilities had remained in the home country and technology transfer was pretty much a one-way affair from the United States to its subsidiaries. By the early 1970's, however, subsidiaries had begun to produce items with technological innovations that had been developed by the overseas subsidiaries. The operation of the MNC had thus become truly global. Now the goal was not so much growth and profit maximization for the parent company, but growth and profit maximization for the global entity.<sup>2</sup>

Concurrent phenomena were the homogenization of international demand for world-renowned product lines (a tribute to the advertising-communications power of the MNC's) and the growth of multinational banking facilities to handle the financial requirements of the MNC's. Eurodollars and, more recently, petrodollars became the means whereby financing for the MNC's could be arranged while bypassing many regulations by the home country with respect to limiting direct foreign investments for balance of payments reasons.<sup>3</sup>

### **MNC POWER AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY**

The vertical organization of the MNC's gives them tremendous

power that can be exercised in a variety of subtle and indirect ways. Through a series of interlocking, jointly-owned subsidiaries, they control the retail and wholesale outlets which service the consumer (demand) as well as the extraction and manufacturing outlets that produce the product (supply) to begin with. They also control intermediate operations (transportation, merchandizing, and the like) through still other sets of subsidiary corporations. Thus, the parent companies move a commodity "downstream" from the original extraction of the necessary raw materials to the selling of the finished product by literally selling it to themselves through their subsidiary companies. Hence the parent company can vary the amount of money that subsidiary A pays to subsidiary B, as the product is passed on, without changing the overall profit that is realized by the parent. This means that the parent company can intimidate local governments by adjusting transfer payments and thereby affecting the amount of locally *taxable* revenue each subsidiary will accrue. Thus, the MNC's do not compete for markets; they instead try to expand the existing market because, after all, they *are* the market.

MNC's (some 1000 in number half of which are US-based) represent a considerable part of worldwide trade and finance. According to Dr. Muller, they control somewhere between \$160 and \$270 billion in liquid assets. This represents one or two times the world reserves in the hands of governments. With respect to trade, the US-based multinationals account for 40 percent of the US imports and 70 percent of US exports. Thus, it becomes obvious that to a very large degree the MNC's have become the very medium by which economic interdependence has grown, while at the same time having had a great deal to say—through their business practices—about what the terms of that interdependence would be.

Step by step the nationality of the parent company has become less of a factor in the business decisions of the MNC's. The ability of the MNC's to move men, money, material, and technology around the world contrasts markedly with the inability of national governments and labor to control such movements. The MNC's have the capability of employing a number of techniques whereby they can maximize profits to the detriment of the host and the home countries in which they operate. These include the manipulation of transfer fees (for tax purposes and as a form of cross-subsidization of affiliates who are fighting for a larger share of a particular local market), the use of loan "rollovers," third country tax havens, the threat of what labor calls the

"runaway shop," i.e., if labor demands become too high the factory will be closed down and another one overseas will pick up the slack, and other such practices.

The goals of MNC are primarily economic.<sup>4</sup> For, after all, "the business of business is business." Yet their operations have been bringing about major changes in the world environment—not only economically, but politically, sociologically, technologically, and militarily as well. Their business dealings have a "spillover effect" that influences matters other than those of profit and loss and supply and demand.

The very nature of the business of the multinationals creates political interest groups in each host country in which one of their affiliates operates. Interest groups form to preserve (or even destroy) the subsidiary, thereby causing it to become an integral part of the local political process. Similarly, the affiliates influence the local society by introducing a differing set of social values and cultural perceptions. In short, the society is penetrated and the local government finds itself increasingly sensitive to public and private attitudes not of its own making.

Every government, including the home country of the multinational corporation, is affected by the ease with which a national society can be penetrated today. Every impulse to keep the "foreign devils" out must be tempered with the desire to gain the maximum revenue from each company without allowing the pursuit of radical policies that might "kill the goose that lays the golden egg." Furthermore, in seeking ways to control the multinationals for their own national purposes, governments are faced with the oligopolist's dilemma, "If I don't allow my own MNC to do it because of controls I set on my MNC then somebody else's MNC will do it instead." Accordingly, governments have tended to be ambivalent toward MNC's and can be expected to proceed slowly—and frequently ineffectually—in deciding how to bring them under control.

#### THE PEELING AWAY OF SOVEREIGNTY

To summarize, multinationals grew and prospered during the very special conditions of US political and economic hegemony in the non-Communist world that followed World War II. However, that environment has been changing with time. Furthermore, the MNC's have themselves become more than learning systems that adapt to the

environment. They now have the ability to influence their environment. In the process of becoming global concerns, a "structural transformation" is occurring. Many of the institutions (business, financial, and governmental) which fostered the loyalty of the MNC's to their parent countries are losing their ability to do so. The mobility of the MNC's appears to be outstripping the ability of governments and labor to control them.

The net result has been, and will continue to be, what might be termed a "peeling away of sovereignty." Each nation becomes a part of a symbiotic relationship wherein the interruption in the flow of important goods and services becomes increasingly unacceptable to the citizens of many countries. Increasingly, the individual is able to separate his ideological from his economic preferences and to express his desires in each area through an appropriate interest group. In this regard, the operations of the MNC's provide the strong cement which binds together the economic interests of many individuals, groups and institutions throughout the world.<sup>5</sup> The multinationals are reinforced in their role of creating economic interdependence at the operational level by the steps being taken by governments to promote economic development and a higher standard of living within their own country. This has frequently taken the form of surrendering some degree of sovereignty to a supranational organization such as the European Economic Community. Thus, each nation is becoming more willing to allow corporate solutions to vexing international problems. Decisions that were once considered solely the prerogative of each sovereign nation—such as the fixing of exchange rates—are no longer practical on a unilateral basis. Instead corporate bodies such as the IMF or cartels such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries are increasingly voicing the opinion of like-minded interest groups in a number of countries.

What is at issue, basically, is who has the power to determine the nature of trade among nations. Increasingly, that power appears to be shifting from the home country of the MNC to the MNC itself or to the host countries of its subsidiaries. This, in turn, raises serious questions about the role, and the mechanisms for the control, of MNC's in a milieu where the nationality of the parent corporation is becoming less important and where competition among the MNC's themselves for a share of the market is increasing the leverage of the host countries.

But the MNC's are more than just the middleman between nations with competing interests. Viewed from another perspective the ultimate

aims of the MNC's are antithetical to those of the nation-state. The ultimate goals of the MNC are growth and profit maximization. Those of the nation-state are the stability and social welfare of its citizens. These are often incompatible goals. In this context the MNC's are not "between" nations with competing interests but rather are arrayed against them. The MNC's are not particularly interested in protecting the French farmer. The government of France is. And a decision by the Ford Motor Company to close an unprofitable plant in England, for example, certainly conflicts with attempts by the British government to maintain high employment. Similarly, the MNC's are not necessarily interested in increasing the supply. They tend, instead, to be interested in sustaining a given price and manipulating supply in order to maintain the price. Governments, on the other hand, are generally interested in increasing and diversifying the supply in order to prevent their being held hostage by a nation that controls a key resource.

#### MULTINATIONALS AND DETENTE

The MNC's tend to enhance international order—or at least to increase the unwillingness of the major powers to resort to war—by virtue of the economic interdependence they have fostered through their global outlook to trade and finance. But, the MNC's are also a source of consternation because, in the process, they have been placing limits on the ability of nations to exercise greater political control over their own destiny. As the "structural transformation" alluded to earlier runs its course, governments will be striving to gain more political—but not necessarily national—control over the economic entities that they have nurtured. This, then, should be the context within which the political process of detente will be played out.

With regard to detente, the US Secretary of State has said,

There can be no peaceful international order without a constructive relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. There will be no international stability unless both the Soviet Union and the United States conduct themselves with restraint and unless they use their enormous power for the benefit of mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Detente defines a process, not a product. In fact, it is seen mainly as a political process. It necessarily implies that governments have sufficient control over the commercial entities within their own borders and that governments can address questions of economic relations as

acts of policy rather than commercial opportunity. But the phenomenon of the multinational corporation challenges that assumption. And that challenge is not sufficiently understood—primarily because lack of sufficient information by individual governments on MNC operations hampers their ability to focus on the problem. And, like as not, what information is available tends to be fragmented between various branches of the government. As a case in point, the US Congress, for political reasons, has balked at providing most-favored-nation status to the USSR. The Russians have been limited to \$300 million in credits over a four year period. This, of course, is peanuts and much talk and activity has ensued about the effect this action will have on detente. And certainly it should because this is a very important policy consideration. Nevertheless, this has not stopped the Russians from discussing specific projects with Exxon, Gulf, IBM and Tenneco. The fact of the matter is that the MNC's can still turn to American commercial banks or to the overseas MNC banks to finance the exploitation of commercial opportunities with the Russians.<sup>7</sup>

Talks between IBM and the Russians, for instance, elicit differing responses from various branches of the US government, depending on their perspective. The Commerce Department might look at the talks in terms of increasing US sales overseas. Justice might look at the negotiations from an antitrust perspective. State might look at them in terms of their effect on detente and Defense might worry about technology transfer. The Congress, in the meantime, might be more interested in Soviet policy toward emigration. While all seem to have varying degrees of interest in the MNC's, no one person or agency appears to be focusing on the overall aspect of the problem—or even on a major portion of the problem such as national security.<sup>8</sup>

#### MULTINATIONALS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Detente originally meant the loosening of the tension in the bowstring of a crossbow. From the military point of view that analogy is very apt today. It presupposes that each nation is completely in control of its own crossbow and that the size, shape, and design of the crossbow results from national decision. But again, the MNC's intervene. US SMART bomb components are made by Westinghouse-Japan. Trucks are assembled in General Motors plants in some 25 countries. As a result, the questions of proper control over

those elements important to national security, and the growth of multinational corporations beg to be considered together.

Every 20 minutes or so, day and night, an ore boat passes by the City of Detroit. Iron ore moves from the Mesabi Range in Minnesota to Pittsburgh. Steel moves from Pittsburgh or from Gary, Indiana to Detroit. Almost all of that ore boat traffic must pass through the locks at Sault Sainte Marie which connects Lake Superior to Lake Huron and thence to Lake Michigan. If something were to happen to the Soo Locks many important industrial plants in Detroit, Gary, Pittsburgh, and other smaller cities which depend on the ore boats for basic resources would soon be forced to close down. The railroads could carry, perhaps, 20 percent of what the boats carry—certainly no more. Under those kinds of conditions the military planner would be very happy to discover that the Japanese are making components for SMART bombs and that General Motors can get truck axles from Australia, Brazil or Zaire. The word "discover" was deliberately chosen in the preceding sentence because I am of the opinion that the military planner is not fully aware today of the US dependence on key foreign-produced resources and subcomponents. In fact, most would tend to think that anything of military importance should be manufactured within the continental United States and that anything manufactured overseas is undesirable. Perhaps so, but the foregoing example indicates otherwise.

The fact of the matter is the US military community has not yet thought through the implications of the global operations of the MNC's. Nor does there appear to be any single office or agency within the Department of Defense which is focusing on these implications. Yet there are a number of key issues that need to be addressed.

First, there is the problem of determining what kind of shifts are occurring in the US labor force and whether certain critical skills of US workers are not decaying over time because certain manufacturing processes are now being done overseas.<sup>9</sup>

Second, there is the question of direct foreign investment in the United States or direct foreign investment in the key industries of our allies. What is the effect, for example, of Iran buying into 25 percent of Germany's Krupp Corporation? Does this not give the Shah some leverage over Germany's attitude toward arms sales to Middle Eastern countries?<sup>10</sup>

Third, there is the question of extraterritoriality. Certainly there is some capability for nations to influence other nations through the

operations of MNC subsidiaries for foreign policy or national security reasons. The example of shifting some of the domestic taxes paid by US oil companies in the 1950's to the treasuries of Middle Eastern oil producers as a means of increasing their ability to withstand a communist incursion comes to mind. But the process can work the other way too. There is the example of the Saudis demanding information from ARAMCO on the deliveries of petroleum to the American military. Also there is the problem of "co-determination." In West Germany workers and government have a great deal more to say about the policies of their business firms. Increasingly, the Germans are insisting that co-determination be expanded to include the operations of foreign-owned (primarily US) subsidiaries within their borders.

Fourth, there is the problem of the transfer of technology. This is especially the case where important new technological innovations are being developed overseas by the subsidiary company rather than by the parent company. The Japanese subsidiary of Westinghouse might be a case in point.

Fifth, there are the problems of countering cartels that form to control scarce resources and of how the multinationals might either help or hinder that process. The behavior of the US oil multinationals might have been instructive if the Arab oil boycott had lasted longer. As it was, the loyalty of Exxon and the others was not seriously tested. In the relatively short time that the boycott was in effect the consumer countries could not agree on what action to take and the MNC's became heir to the problems of distribution. They, in turn, engaged in a most sophisticated form of decision avoidance by making much of their daily allocation decisions without addressing the question of long-term policy. Hence, the only conclusion to be drawn is that, in the short run, neither MNC's nor governments can be expected to act promptly.

Lastly, there is the problem of resolving what the responsibilities of US-based multinationals (and those of US subsidiaries of foreign-based MNC's) are toward US national security and how US antitrust laws and the national government should be structured to exercise better control over them.

Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to pursue any of the six issues outlined above because the first step of any such endeavor has not yet been taken—namely, the establishment of a single organization empowered to collect information which can shed enough light on the situation to warrant the beginning of a policy which harmonizes US policy toward the MNC's, the interests of detente, and national

security. The three are interrelated. Unless a reasonable amount of control is exercised over the operations and further evolution of MNC's, it will be difficult to make economic policy in furtherance of detente rather than merely for the exploitation of commercial opportunities. Similarly, it makes less and less sense to talk about how loose the string ought to be on your crossbow if you increasingly lose control over the use of the bow.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Much of the material contained in this paper is derived from the work I have done on a project for the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, on the economic prospects for the future and from the panel discussions held during the National Security Affairs Conference at the National War College, July 7-10, 1974. I was the rapporteur for the panel on multinational corporations.

2. Parallel developments occurred in the extractive industries. Space does not permit a more detailed discussion, nor for the purposes here is it necessary.

3. This was one of the reasons why President Johnson's "jawboning" efforts to limit foreign investments by US firms during the Vietnam War didn't work well.

4. Some would argue that they are entirely economic. That might be the case in some Western countries. But MNC's can also be government-owned as might more likely be the case in Communist countries. More often there is a convenient marriage between business and government as aptly expressed by the term "Japan, Inc."

5. It is this action of the multinationals that has made the conditions of increasing trade and thus economic interdependence different from those occasioned after World War I.

6. Dr. Henry Kissinger, "Detente: The American View," Statement of September 19, 1974, *Survival*, January-February 1975, p. 35.

7. "Simon and Dent Go to Moscow Next Month to Discuss Trade," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1975, p. 3.

8. I and some of the students in the 1975 Army War College class, who are also working on a paper with regard to the national security aspects of MNC's, have visited a number of offices in Washington, DC in an attempt to determine if anyone is looking at the total problem. Visits have been made to the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Justice, and Labor. The Interstate Commerce Commission and the Tariff Commission were also visited; so, too, were the headquarters of the AFL-CIO. The labor unions appear to be one of the more interested nongovernmental organizations. None of the offices visited seemed to have the inclination or the authority to look at the entire problem. A relatively new office, that of the Office of Private Corporations, in the State Department may be the focal point. Its charter appears to include looking into the social benefits of MNC's.

9. Even beyond considerations of national security is the whole question of the export of jobs which is of great interest to the labor unions.

10. There is also the psychological shock to the general public upon hearing that a national enterprise of great prestige and status might now be exposed to foreign manipulation. The recent acquisition of 14 percent of Mercedes by Kuwait is an example. According to German press reports, the West German government was not even consulted. This has prompted legislative proposals that would require prior consultation or even government approval for such transactions in the future.

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