

HEGEMONY, TERRORISM, AND WAR—IS DEMOCRACY THE ANTIDOTE?

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What would be the impact of a democratic global system upon terrorism and war? Before we attempt to answer that question let us first explore the nexus between the present undemocratic, in fact, hegemonic global system, and terrorism, and then examine the link between hegemony and war.

HEGEMONY AND TERRORISM

Al-Qaeda, the world's most notorious terrorist network, was, in a sense, a response to the most obvious manifestation of global hegemony, namely, military power. As soon as the United States had established a military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in 1991, immediately after the Kuwait War, the al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, announced to the world that he would attack Dhahran. He considered the establishment of an "infidel" military base in Islam's holiest land—Saudi Arabia, where Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, are situated—an act of sacrilege.¹ In June 1996, al-Qaeda was allegedly involved in a bomb attack upon the base, killing 19 American airmen and wounding 250 others. Two years later, al-Qaeda targeted U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. This was followed by the 2000 assault on a U.S. warship, the USS Cole, off the coast of Yemen.

The climax was of course the infamous 9-11 episode when al-Qaeda operatives allegedly smashed aircrafts into the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Almost three thousand men and women were massacred in those horrendous tragedies on the eleventh of September 2001. There is no need to emphasize that the WTC was a symbol of U.S.'s global economic power while the Pentagon represented its global military might.

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1. See Chandra Muzaffar, *The Empire: What It Is and What It Means for All of Us - A Global Empire in the Making: The First Global Empire*, GLOBAL RESEARCH, Dec. 30, 2005, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=MUZ20051230&articleId=1681> (based on a lecture given by the author at the Annual Public Lecture at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang (Sept. 2, 2005)).

After 9-11, U.S. global hegemony continued to provoke al-Qaeda and other terrorist outfits. Since the U.S. and its allies had invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 in order to oust the Taliban regime that was protecting Osama, the invasion became the justification for further terrorist attacks. The Bali bombings of October 2002, purportedly carried out by a group affiliated with al-Qaeda, the Jemaah Islamiyah, were primarily to avenge the Afghan invasion. Then in March 2003, the U.S. and its allies embarked upon a second military invasion. This time the target was Iraq. One year after Iraq was conquered, al-Qaeda struck again; it was responsible for a dastardly carnage at a Madrid railway station. The unconcealed aim was to compel the Spanish government to withdraw its soldiers from the U.S. led force in Iraq. Al-Qaeda succeeded in its objective.

If we reflect upon al-Qaeda attacks, it is obvious that the military, political, and economic dimensions of U.S. hegemony figure prominently on its radar screen. It is seldom acknowledged, however, that the cultural dimension of hegemony has also been a consideration. For instance, during their trial, a couple of the Bali bombers inveighed against Western cultural imperialism and how it was destroying the identity and integrity of indigenous communities.

By arguing that hegemony in all its manifestations breeds terrorism, we are in no way condoning terrorism. Al-Qaeda's deliberate targeting of non-combatants and civilians in general—in East Africa, on 9-11, in Bali, in Madrid—has been condemned by right-thinking people everywhere. Leading Muslim theologians and scholars have not only denounced al-Qaeda's misdeeds from a humanitarian perspective, but have also castigated Osama and his underlings as men who have shamelessly violated the essence of Islamic teachings.² Nonetheless, if we fail to recognize how hegemony—control and dominance over people—leads to acts of terror, we will be no better than the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand.

There is perhaps another interesting aspect to hegemony and terrorism that is not widely acknowledged. Al-Qaeda, which now claims to be fighting U.S. hegemony, in fact owes its origin to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which helped to arm and fund the outfit as part of the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the eighties. It served U.S. interests to create and sustain organizations like al-Qaeda since the U.S. was determined to defeat the Soviet Union at all costs.³ Indeed, the utter failure of the Soviet Army to maintain its grip upon Afghanistan—at least 20,000 of its soldiers were killed—was one of the more important reasons for the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. What this implies is that since al-Qaeda had also

2. This concept is discussed in several essays written by this author, collected in CHANDRA MUZAFFAR, *GLOBAL ETHIC OR GLOBAL HEGEMONY: REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION, HUMAN DIGNITY AND CIVILISATIONAL INTERACTION* (2005).

3. For a detailed analysis, see generally MAHMOOD MAMDANI, *GOOD MUSLIM, BAD MUSLIM: AMERICA, THE COLD WAR, AND THE ROOTS OF TERROR* (2004) (providing a detailed history of the political influence of the United States leading to radical Islamist groups).

contributed to the Soviet demise, it would not be wrong to hold it partially responsible for the emergence of the U.S. as the world's sole hegemonic power.

It may be appropriate at this point to ask: if American hegemony comes to an end, will al-Qaeda terrorism also cease to exist? Without American hegemony, al-Qaeda will lose much of its constituency. That segment of the Muslim population that applauds Osama because he is prepared to stand up to the arrogance of hegemonic power will disappear immediately. Besides, it will be more difficult for al-Qaeda to recruit its operatives. In this regard, it is the U.S. led occupation of Iraq—more than any other event—that has accelerated al-Qaeda's recruitment drive! Having said that, we must nonetheless concede that even without U.S. hegemony, al-Qaeda may still be around. It nurses a foolish dream of establishing a global Islamic Caliphate based upon its doctrinaire Wahabist ideology—an ideology that dichotomizes the world into pure Muslims and impure infidels, deprives women of their dignity, subscribes to a bigoted, punitive concept of law, and has no qualms about employing violence in pursuit of its atavistic goals.⁴

HEGEMONY AND WAR

From terrorism let us now turn to war. There is no doubt at all that hegemony uses war to extend and expand its power. Recent examples provide the evidence.

The U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 enabled the superpower to plant its flag in that country, and, at the same time, to extend its influence over Central Asia—a region of the world where Russia still carries some weight and which China eyes with some interest. Apart from American bases in a couple of Central Asian republics, its geopolitical presence in the oil rich region also means that it is capable of exercising some control over the export of that commodity. This has enhanced its hegemonic power both regionally and globally.⁵

Similarly, the U.S.'s conquest of Iraq in 2003 was designed to strengthen its dominant position in the world's largest oil exporting region. Iraq itself has the second largest oil reserves in the Middle East. It is also blessed with an abundance of water—a fact of some significance since the Middle East, according to some analysts, may be one of those areas that could well witness conflicts over water in the future. Besides, Iraq is strategically located, with Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia as its immediate neighbors.

Going to war in Iraq had another motive. It was to oust President Saddam Hussein and to destroy the Baathist government because Saddam was a staunch opponent of Israel. Weakening and eliminating governments and people's movements in the Middle East that regard Israel as a morally and

4. An overview of the history and evolution of Wahabism can be found in REZA ASLAN, *NO GOD BUT GOD: THE ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND FUTURE OF ISLAM* (2006).

5. CHANDRA MUZAFFAR, *MUSLIMS, DIALOGUE, TERROR* 113-132 (2003), available at <http://www.just-international.org/article.cfm?newsid=20000244>.

politically illegitimate entity has been central to U.S. foreign policy for almost four decades now. Given Iraq's oil wealth and its scientific military infrastructure, it was potentially a formidable foe of the U.S.'s closest ally and partner in the Middle East. This is why Saddam had to be crushed—for Israel's sake.⁶

Deploying the U.S.'s massive military might serve to secure its hegemonic power and to assist its allies to enhance their strength which is at the core of the agenda of the Bush Administration as defined by the "neo-cons." Even before George W. Bush assumed the presidency in early 2001, the neo-cons like Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, John Bolton, and Lewis "Scooter" Libby among others, in association with Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, were already planning and plotting to use U.S. fire power to re-shape the politics of the Middle East in order to reinforce its grip over the region's oil and to fortify Israel's position.⁷ Crippling the democratically elected Hamas in Palestine and trying to replace it with a leadership that is subservient to Israel's interest, attempting to eliminate an autonomous movement like Hizbullah in Lebanon with the aim of bolstering a weak pro-U.S. regime in Beirut, targeting the independent-minded government in Damascus, and most of all, manipulating the nuclear issue to prepare the ground for some sort of military action against an Iran that refuses to bow to the U.S. and Israel—apart from the Iraq war—are all part-and-parcel of the neo-cons' elaborate agenda for establishing total hegemony over the Middle East as a prerequisite for global hegemony.

After five years, some commentators are convinced that the agenda is in tatters. The people's resistance to the U.S. led occupation of Iraq compounded by the unrelenting Sunni Shi'ite violence, the continuing popularity of Hamas in spite of the immense suffering that the masses have had to endure, Israel's failure to defeat Hizbullah in the thirty-four day Lebanon war and the latter's success in forging a multi-confessional coalition against the Beirut government,⁸ and Iran's expanding geopolitical significance in the region due to an extent to the emergence of a Shi'ite-dominated regime in Baghdad brought about ironically by the U.S. occupation, have separately and collectively helped to thwart the neo-cons' grand design. The neo-cons have also been checkmated by the situation in the U.S. itself. A majority of Americans are now opposed to their country's involvement in Iraq and want their soldiers to come home quickly.

The failure of the neo-con agenda in the Middle East shows that war and violence are not necessarily the most effective instruments for establishing

6. See Patrick Seale, *War Is the Climax of the American-Israeli Partnership*, MID-EAST REALITIES, Mar. 21, 2003, <http://www.middleeast.org/premium/read.cgi?category=Magazine&num=822&month=4&year=2003&function=text> (last visited Aug. 6, 2007).

7. The neo-con agenda and other related issues are studied in DAVID RAY GRIFFIN, *THE NEW PEARL HARBOR: DISTURBING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND 9/11* (2004).

8. For a balanced perspective on the movement see *HIZBULLAH-PARTY OF GOD: AN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE* (Abdar Rahman Koya ed., 2006).

hegemony. Indeed, their defeat testifies to the limits of hard power in reshaping political realities. The American leadership has forgotten that war, as the ultimate expression of hard power, has not helped the U.S. to acquire hegemony in the post-second world war decades. The U.S. debacle in Vietnam in the late sixties and early seventies offers irrefutable proof of the folly of the hard power approach.

This brings us to the question that we posed at the end of our discussion on hegemony and terrorism. If the U.S. government realizes that seeking and perpetuating hegemony does not serve the nation's interests or if the U.S. ceases to be a hegemonic power, will wars also come to an end? Since the end of the Cold War, there have been three major wars led by the U.S.—the Kuwait war in 1991, the Afghan war in 2001, and the Iraq war in 2003—which were all in pursuit of its drive for global hegemony. To this list, one should add the July-August 2006 Lebanon war and Israel's long drawn war against the Palestinians and other Arabs. It is indisputably true that the quest for hegemony is a cause of much of the violence and war we are witnessing today. There are other causes of war however, which have very little to do with global hegemony. Scores of wars rooted in economic or political conditions sometimes with cultural, religious, or even tribal overtones have occurred in the last two or three decades. The wars in the now-demised Yugoslavia in the early nineties and the war in Rwanda in the mid-nineties would be among the outstanding examples. This is why even without the drive for global hegemony, there are bound to be wars, big and small. Nonetheless, hegemony should be acknowledged as a significant contributor.

DEMOCRACY: THE ANTIDOTE?

Because hegemony contributes to both terrorism and war, we have to find out if a non-hegemonic system—specifically a democratic system—can help to check these two threats to peace and security. By democracy here we mean not just democracy at the global level but also at the national level.

We have seen how Osama reacted to the American military base in Dhahran. Strictly speaking, it was not a terrorist attack as we have defined terrorism since the target was military personnel. Nonetheless, Osama resorted to violence. Let us contrast this with the campaign against American military bases in the Philippines in the late eighties and early nineties. The aim of the Filipino people was to get rid of the Subic naval base and the Clark air base, which they viewed as symbols of American hegemony over their nation. Using non-violent democratic methods they achieved their objective in 1992. The Filipinos could depend upon the tools of peaceful protest because the Philippines, in spite of the authoritarianism of the Marcos era that preceded the protest, was, and is, a functioning democracy. Osama, on the other hand, was the subject of a feudal autocracy, which offered hardly any channels of dissent to anyone who was aggrieved by certain fundamental policies of the Saudi regime. Needless to say, dissidents in such situations sometimes turn to violence—or even terror.

The contrast between the Saudi and Philippine situations shows that a democracy is able to check violence if that violence is a response to some aspect of global hegemony that impinges upon that particular nation-state. This is indisputably the superior strength of a democracy. There are, however, other dimensions of global hegemony, such as the double standards pertaining to the possession of nuclear weapons or the debilitating effects of currency speculation, which go beyond the capability of individual nation-states to handle and can only be addressed from a truly global perspective.

But how does one address these issues when there are no global institutions or processes which can be utilized to remedy the challenges at hand? For instance, it is not possible to achieve total nuclear disarmament—which is the only way to curb nuclear proliferation and to eliminate nuclear weapons once and for all—when the U.S. and other nuclear weapons states are not prepared to work towards that goal as stipulated in the 1970 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Likewise, how can we check global currency speculation when the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has the biggest say over international monetary policies, is subservient to its most powerful member, the U.S., and refuses to consider any meaningful reform of the global financial architecture?

In fact, existing global institutions more often than not only serve to perpetuate global hegemony.⁹ This is particularly true of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). While it formally concentrates power in the five veto-wielding permanent members, the UNSC, in reality, is dominated by the U.S. both in theory and in practice, it is that one global institution which is the biggest stumbling block to the emergence of global democracy. Time and again, the U.S. has used and abused its power over the UNSC to prevent the world body from acting effectively against injustices especially in the context of the Middle East. If there is any one institution within the UN system which has a semblance of global democracy and which has from time to time espoused the cause of global justice and global peace, it is the UN General Assembly in which all the UN's 192 members are represented. Unfortunately, it has no executive authority and can only exercise moral suasion which, given the existing global power structure, is often ignored.

If there was global democracy—it would be interesting to speculate—would terrorism of the al-Qaeda variety or of some other species have become so rife? If the major global issues of the day from Palestine and Iraq, to yawning disparities between rich and poor, to the threat of cultural homogenization, could be resolved through democratic global institutions and mechanisms, it is quite conceivable that a lot of young people would not seek refuge in the politics of violence and terror. In any case even if they did, they

9. The legal dimensions of the quest for hegemony are examined in HANS KÖCHLER, *GLOBAL JUSTICE OR GLOBAL REVENGE? INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE AT THE CROSSROADS* (2005).

would be easily isolated and insulated by a global citizenry that has faith and confidence in the workings of a viable global democratic system.

Would democracy at the national and global levels also help to prevent war from occurring? Though the majority of the citizens in democracies such as Italy, Spain, and Britain opposed the Iraq War, their governments supported and participated in the war. Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain in particular was an enthusiastic advocate of war and worked in tandem with U.S. President George Bush to concoct lies in order to justify the assault on Iraq. It was different in Turkey, which was perhaps one of the few democracies where the people's rejection of the war was reflected in a parliamentary vote that refused U.S. troop's passage through Turkish soil for their planned invasion of its neighbor.

It is apparent that democracies intended to embody the popular will do not always succeed in stopping their parliaments or governments from going to war. Vested interests and the political orientation of the elite are obviously more influential factors in determining the course of action that a state adopts. In other words, democratically elected leaders have often ignored the democratic will of the people.

It was not just the people in Turkey or in the West European democracies who were against the Iraq War. Millions and millions of men, women, and even children on every continent on earth did not want the U.S. and its allies to attack Iraq. Massive demonstrations in hundreds of cities around the globe, huge public rallies, candlelight processions, prayer meetings, letter-writing campaigns, articles in the print media, and radio and television programs in hundreds of languages all over the world reflected the magnitude of popular sentiment against the war. As commentators noted, at that time there had never been a worldwide anti-war movement on such a mammoth scale. Yet as we know, Bush and Blair and their allies went ahead and attacked Iraq on the nineteenth of March 2003. They demonstrated to the world that the will of the entire human family expressed right across the planet is not enough to dissuade determined warmongers from pursuing their diabolical agenda.¹⁰

If "the global will" cannot prevent war, what hope is there for humankind? Is there perhaps some mechanism that one could develop within the framework of democratic governance that can stop wars from happening? This is a question that we will return to later.

SOLUTIONS: GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Since our analysis has shown that it is the absence of global democracy that has contributed to global terrorism, we should now explore the possibility of evolving institutions and mechanisms, which will eventually lead to global democracy. An institution that is worth considering is the Global Parliamentary Assembly (GPA), a concept proposed and elaborated upon by American academics Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss.

10. Dissent in relation to global power is analyzed in FRED DALLMAYR, *SMALL WONDER: GLOBAL POWER AND ITS DISCONTENTS (NEW CRITICAL THEORY)* (2005).

Falk and Strauss envisage people electing representatives to a Global Parliamentary Assembly, “which would provide the world’s citizens for the first time with a forum to express their planetary aspirations and grievances outside the traditional nation-state context.”¹¹ Elections to the GPA could be held in a small number of states and initially followed by other countries. The GPA’s role would be advisory in the initial stages. To be effective, it will eventually have to be given legislative authority.

What is attractive about this idea is that it is modest and practical. All that is needed to get it going, as we have observed, is the consent of perhaps twenty or thirty democratic states that would allow elections to the GPA to be held. Once the GPA comes into being, it will attract a lot of attention, especially if it focuses on issues that are fundamental to the future of human civilization, such as the threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the widening gap between the global rich and the global poor, or the environmental crisis. Later, when it has acquired some legitimacy, it can grapple with longstanding conflicts like Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Ireland, and Sri Lanka.

If in the long run, the GPA is perceived as a body that is capable of offering solutions to global and even national injustices, it will give hope to people. Even “those with extreme agendas will [] be drawn into the process.”¹² Terrorists, we have argued, will go out of business.

SOLUTIONS: REFERENDA

There is however one area where the GPA in spite of all its potential may be ineffective. Given the experience of national parliaments, the GPA’s legislative authority may not be sufficient to prohibit governments from going to war. It may therefore want to propose a new mechanism at both national and international levels to empower the people to act against war.

National governments should be requested to incorporate into their constitutions a law that bars a country from going to war unless the decision has been endorsed by two-thirds of the citizenry. At the global level, any nation or group of nations that seeks the imprimatur of the UN for a war should allow the world body to conduct a global referendum to determine whether it should give its approval. It is only if two-thirds of the world’s population above the age of eighteen endorses the war that the UN should give the green light.

11. Andrew Strauss & Richard Falk, *For a Global Peoples’ Assembly*, INT’L HERALD TRIB., Nov. 14, 1997 available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/1997/11/14/edstrauss.t.php> (last visited Aug. 6, 2007).

12. Andrew Strauss, *The Compelling Need for a Global Parliamentary Assembly* 6 (unpublished proposal of Citizens for Global Democracy Foundation, on file with author).

By proposing referenda of this sort at the national and international level, we are emphasizing that declaring war is such a weighty matter that only the people have the right to make the decision. It is too important an issue to be left only to the politicians.

Simply put, it is only when the people are bestowed with the power that is legitimately theirs, will it be possible to prevent wars, curb terrorism, and eliminate hegemony.

