

DECONSTRUCTING TERRORISM

SIMON GLYNN

On September 11, 2001, two planes were deliberately flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and another into the Pentagon. These acts cost more than 3,000 lives, and were perhaps more significant than even Pearl Harbor in reminding the citizens of the United States of their vulnerability to foreign attack. Yet despite this, and the increasing likelihood of even more devastating attacks on the U.S., attempts by the media, politicians and pundits to explain these events have, in the main, scarcely gone beyond the bland claim that the perpetrators were jealous of our economic success, and opposed “freedom”. Indeed efforts to give any further or more sophisticated explanation, grounded as it inevitably must be upon a deeper understanding of the circumstances that motivate people to martyr themselves in suicidal attacks, have met with almost universal hostility, and, in some cases even charges of terrorist sympathies.

Now it is an obvious point, but a point nevertheless worth making, that to attempt to explain individuals’ behavior by understanding how they interpret or make sense of the situations which motivate them, in no way implies either that one necessarily shares their view, or, even if one does, that one condones their chosen response. Furthermore, notwithstanding the fact that hostility to any such attempt at understanding usually increases in direct proportion to its plausibility—as if those who oppose such analyses do so because they are horrified by the thought that it might call into question their own world view, and perhaps even support an opposing one—it must surely be evident that an understanding of the causes of terrorism is, from a purely pragmatic standpoint, indispensable to any attempt to protect ourselves from it. We live, after all, in a world where, for example, five kilograms of Plutonium from a civilian nuclear power plant, when delivered by, say, freight container, or by mail in two separate 2.5 kilogram parcels to the same address, would constitute a “critical mass” and result in a

nuclear bomb.¹ In light of this attempts to limit or contain the *effects* of terrorism must clearly be supplemented if not supplanted by attempts to deal with its *causes*. And yet it is upon the former, rather than the latter, that the U.S. administration has concentrated. Consequently it is left to us to inquire into the causes of the acts and threats of terrorism which currently confront us.

ITS THE (POLITICAL) ECONOMY, STUPID

Some claim that the major cause of the current terrorist threat is “jealousy” of our freedom and/or wealth; a claim which, if it to make any sense at all must surely be supplemented by an analysis of the economic inequality inherent in the New World Order. Thus, along with the fact that we in the U.S., less than 5% of the world’s population, consume over 30% of its oil, and about 40% of many of its other significant resources, there are also the activities of multinational corporations, many with sizable U.S. share holdings and based in the U.S., which typically pay textile and other workers in undeveloped and developing countries around 10–20 cents an hour, or \$200–\$400 year. Nike recently set an example by doubling the wages of its Indonesian workers from 11 to 23 cents an hour or \$460 a year!

And as if this were not enough in itself, terms and conditions for entry into the global economy, determined by the U.S.-dominated World Trade Organization (WTO), require formerly sovereign nation states to forgo the control over the environment, wages and taxes, that hitherto enabled them to promote social justice and the well being of their citizenry. Further add the investment policies of the, largely U.S.-controlled, World Bank, and that the “structural adjustment” (i.e., austerity measures) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) upon defaulting nations almost inevitably require them to discontinue education, health, welfare and other programs, which is to say precisely those programs which would provide the greatest utility to the vast majority of the population in such “developing” nations, and it is perhaps unsurprising that what we in the “developed” world see as a picture of emerging economic freedom, which is to say the unfettered opportunity for profitable investment, is perceived by many in the underdeveloped world (though not of course their economic elites) as a pattern

¹ Although such a bomb would not necessarily produce the kind of explosions we saw at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, nevertheless, unlike the so-called “dirty bomb” which uses conventional explosives to spread radioactive contaminates, it would generate a truly nuclear explosion, which in addition to destroying very many city blocks and their inhabitants, would also produce high yields of radioactive contaminants, including, for example, Plutonium, which with a half-life of approximately 25,000 years, would render the much larger area over which it would spread unsafe for habitation for about ten times its half-life, or 250 millennia!

of exploitation or economic neocolonialization.² What we see as the mobilization of international institutions to remove impediments to the free market, they see as the elimination of the power of national governments to protect and promote the interests of their citizenry against the greed of corporate elites and the consumers they serve. Not that national governments wield no political power. However far from this being, as was traditionally the case, power to structure economic activity in such a manner that it serves the common good of the social or civic whole, the power currently left to national governments under free trade treaties and loan agreements is, for the most part, power consistent with the promotion and maintenance of “security” (for investments) and (economic) “stability”; power that therefore stands opposed to those who represent competing social and civic claims, who/which are therefore seen as disruptive.³

Consequently what we see as a fight to protect the “free world” against Communism, many—including presumably Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network (who, as the Mujahadeen fought a long and bitter war against Soviet Imperialism and therefore clearly do not see themselves as “Communists”)—see as yet another attempt to oppress the legitimate interests of the people. Thus from our former support of the Shah of Iran and of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, to our present backing of the Saudi Monarchy and the Egyptian leadership, what we see as an attempt to sustain those regimes committed to (economic) freedom and (market) stability, they see as the imposition and/or propping up of oppressive local elites prepared to collude in the expropriation of their fellow citizens.

Thus the U.S., currently responsible for about half of worldwide exports of advanced weaponry, exports to 140 countries, 90 percent of which are either not democratic, and/or are major human rights violators. Further as was the case with China and Taiwan, Iran and Iraq, and much of the “Arab World” and Israel etc., we often export to both sides in a conflict.⁴ So that even those regimes friendly to U.S. business interests find themselves having to spend increasingly larger proportions of what revenues they do manage to derive from trade with us, revenues that might otherwise be used in part to improve the welfare of their people, in boosting the profits of U.S. weapons manufacturers in an effort to protect themselves

² See for instance ex World Bank chief economist and 2001 Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2002).

³ The undermining of the sovereignty of those nation states that might stand opposed to the new world order, together with the infiltration of others by members or representatives of the corporate elite, who then utilize their political power to aid and abet them, means that political power which has traditionally acted as a constraint on unbridled economic exploitation, is increasingly employed to further the interests of corporations rather than to promote civil society.

⁴ See Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Cost and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000) 88–89.

both from invasion by foreign forces also armed by the same weapons manufacturers, and from internal dissent exacerbated by the consequent austerity.

Turning from military hardware to training the U.S.-sponsored Joint Command Exchange Training (JCET) with programs in 110 countries, trains foreign militaries in advanced sniper, close combat, urban military operations and other “Foreign Internal Defence” or “domestic security” techniques. As Christopher Smith, Republican chair of the House of Representatives subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights has observed:

Our joint exercise and training of military units—that have been charged over and over again with the gravest kind of crimes against humanity, including torture and murder—cry out for explanation⁵

For instance 70,000 El Salvadorians were killed in the 70s and 80s by Salvadorian Death Squads largely composed of graduates from The School of the Americas at Fort Benning Georgia, while more were also killed in Nicaragua and Honduras. Similarly there was the massacre of 30,000 dissident peasants on Cheju island and the bayonetting and burning to death of student demonstrators in Kwangju by the U.S.-backed South Korean army. And let us not forget the 200,000 Timorese killed subsequent to the U.S.-endorsed invasion of East Timor, to which we may add the more recent killings in Sumatra.

Nor is our defense of “freedom” limited to propping up client regimes. Rather we are ambitious enough to support, and sometimes even to sponsor, regime change. Thus more than 500,000 Indonesians were killed when President Sukarto was ousted by U.S.-backed military General Suharto, while our support of the coup against the land reforming government of Jacobo Arbenz subsequently resulted in the massacre, beginning in the 1980s, of 200,000 sympathetic Guatemalan peasants, presided over by a U.S. trained officer corps.⁶ And in Greece, the very cradle of democracy, the U.S. supported the military coup against the democratically elected Papandreou government, and in the 1970s in Chile we orchestrated the overthrow of the democratically elected president Salvador Allende, who was executed, and his replacement by U.S.-backed General Pinochet. As Christopher Hitchens has observed, it seems to many that a free market protected by death squads is not, as its advocates often attempt to suggest, a foundation on which to build democracy and justice.

Not that we have been shy of direct intervention either, as is evidenced by the Vietnam war in which the U.S., having called off the elections we had promised on the grounds that those who had overwhelming popular support were not

⁵ Ibid: 74. See also 72–84, 90–91.

⁶ See the 1999 report of the UN sponsored *Commission for Historical Clarification*.

sympathetic to us, proceeded to slaughter well over one million Vietnamese in our attempt to suppress democracy,⁷ and our bombing of Cambodia, which killed 3/4 of a million, not to mention the U.S. invasion of Granada. Small wonder then that what we see as the protection of free market Capitalism against the sinister forces of Communism, others see as the stifling of democracy, and the promotion of exploitation and oppression by violence.

In view of all of this it seems reasonable to argue that it is economic factors, together with the political relations and military actions shaped largely by economic interests, that are responsible for provoking the terrorism with which we are here concerned. Indeed this view seems to gain credence from the fact that the two major targets of the terrorist attacks were the World Trade Center (or hub of our economic empire) and the Pentagon (or headquarters of our military establishment)—the Capitol Building (or center of political power) being, according to the 9/11 Commission, the target of the other (“unsuccessful”) plane—as well as from Osama bin Laden’s explicitly articulated complaint that we have plundered the riches, and dictated to the rulers, of the Arab World.

RELIGION

In apparent contradiction of this view however, some, noting that bin Laden has also cited the U.S. presence in Islam’s holiest places—Saudi Arabia’s borders encompass Mecca and Medina—as another reason for his attack, and further noting that many in the Arab World who oppose the U.S. are strong supporters of the Palestinian cause, have suggested that it is religion, and in particular a “fanatical” intolerance which they regard as an essential feature of Muslim religion and Islamic culture, which is responsible for such attacks. In support of their claim they invoke the Taliban’s recent and well documented destruction of Buddhist rock statues in Northern Afghanistan, their apparent hostility to mainstream Western culture in general, and Wahhabist⁸ opposition to video, film and television images in particular, as well as Palestinian suicide bombers.

In response, while it would certainly be an error to deny or in any way discount the significance of the religious *dimension* of the current conflict by an overly hasty or simplistic economic reductionism, nevertheless it seems at least

⁷ Following a string of Communist military victories against French colonial forces in the north of the country, Ho Chi Minn’s forces were set to attack Saigon, when a temporary cease fire was brokered by the U.S., who proposed that the country be divided for two years to allow for an orderly withdrawal of colonizers, etc. from the south, after which time a nationwide election was to be held. However Eisenhower, fearing a victory at the poles for the Communists, who had numerically overwhelming support in the country, decided to renege by calling off the promised election, and attempting to suppress the democratic aspirations of the people of Vietnam by force.

⁸ A sect of Islam based upon the teaching of Mohammed ibn ‘abd al-Wahhab, (1703–87).

plausible to suggest that so far from being a wholly independent source of conflict, like political institutions religion also is, in some not insignificant way, both grounded in, and shaped by, material or economic conditions. Thus Freud argued that religion was to be understood as an escape from the harsh reality of everyday existence, into an idealist illusion,⁹ a view reflecting that of Nietzsche (for whom the popularity of Christian religion was to be understood in terms of the comfort it provided to its Jewish originators suffering under Roman oppression¹⁰) and, Marx for whom religion was, of course “The opium of the (oppressed) people”. In light of such an analysis linking the otherwise disparate economic, political and religious reasons given by Osama bin Laden for the attack (see above) can be coherently reconciled. Furthermore in this same light it also becomes apparent, and this is no small point, that in opposing and undermining supposedly “socialist” political movements which seek to represent the economic aspirations of the “Wretched of the Earth”, and thus denying legitimate expression of their interests and concerns, U.S. foreign policy has thus helped provide a fertile environment for the propagation of the very religious fundamentalism that we now perceive as such a threat. Indeed there could be no clearer example of this than in Iran, where the attempt by Hedayat Mossadegh, in the name of the people of Iran, to wrest control of their Iranian oil from the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, resulted in a CIA backed coup by the Shah, and the institution, with strong U.S. support, of an oppressive police state; a state in which the oppressed sought solace in religion, and the mosque became the center where opposition to the Shah could be articulated and organized, and from which the Ayatollahs emerged to fill the vacuum of political leadership.

Turning secondly to the charge of intolerance, it is by no means clear that Muslims have been nearly as intolerant of other religions and cultures as for instance Christians have as the historical record, from at least the time of the Crusades—when, in 1099, Frank and English Christians massacred Muslims, Jews and Eastern Christians who had been coexisting relatively peacefully in Jerusalem—shows. And let us not forget that Talmudic scholarship is widely regarded as having reached its apogee in Spain under the Moorish Empire, and that it was to the Muslim Ottoman Empire that the Jews, who had enjoyed Muslim

⁹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. J. Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989).

¹⁰ Thus Christianity’s “Transvaluation of Values” by which the virtues of courage, strength and bravery were replaced by those of forgiveness, humility and forbearance, etc., in giving credence to the view that the meek would inherit the earth, that the first would be last and the last first, and that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven, etc., not only offered solace to the oppressed, but also, through the conversion of the Roman Emperor, helped facilitate “The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire” and therefore the liberation of those oppressed by it.

protection under the Moors, fled when the Christian conquerors arrived! While more recently it was of course the Christian Serbs who were responsible for the “ethnic cleansing” of Albanian Muslims in Kosovo. Nor let us forget that it was a Christian Phalangist Militia unit which was allowed, by Ariel Sharon, commander of the 1982 Israeli occupation of Lebanon, to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, where, under the gaze of the Israeli occupying army and with the help of floodlights provided by them, they proceeded into the night with the massacred of over 1,000 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, including many women and children. The same Ariel Sharon who, having been rightly relieved of his command by an indignant Israeli government, is currently Prime Minister of Israel.

If then a terrorist is to be defined, as seems reasonable, as any one who deliberately targets, or aids and abets in the targeting of, noncombatant civilians, then while many suicide bombers, (many of whom are Muslims but some of whom seem to be secularists) are, without doubt, terrorists, so too are the Serbian “ethnic cleansers” of Srebrenica, and the Christian Phalangist Militia unit in Lebanon. And so too, of course, are Ariel Sharon, if not directly in Lebanon, then—at least according to the 27 Israeli air force pilots (including a Brigadier General) as well as large numbers of military and ex-military personnel, who claim Israeli Defense Forces are deliberately targeting not only suspected terrorists, but also noncombatant civilians (albeit allegedly in response to Palestinian suicide bomber)—arguably in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and certainly in the Qibia village massacre earlier in his career. And so also is former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, a leader of Irgun, responsible for the bombings of Heifa fruit market and the King David Hotel which claimed almost 200 lives, and yet another former Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, who was a leader of the Stern gang responsible for the murder of UN nonmilitary personnel, and, along with Irgun, for the cold blooded massacre of 300 or so civilians, including many infants, in the village of Deir Yassin.¹¹ And, of course, any Israeli military forces which *may* be currently engaged in targeting noncombatant civilians. And the members of any government, such as that of the United States, which provides armaments and other aid to such forces or the governments they represent, are, on this view, terrorists as well. Not that the U.S. government is incapable of directly initiating its own acts of state terrorism, as is evident from the nuclear targeting of civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not to mention the fire bombing of Tokyo, and of course those bombings of Cambodia and Hanoi which similarly targeted civilian populations.

¹¹ This massacre, which occurred during the 1948 war, was accompanied by widespread rape, and mutilation of pregnant women.

CULTURE WARS: POSTMODERNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Clearly then, those few “fanatics” to be found among Muslim Fundamentalists are certainly not alone in their level of intolerance of others. Nor are they alone in their opposition to mainstream Western culture, an opposition shared by a large number of Christian Fundamentalists, who regard not only video porn, cyber sex and online sex industry advertising, for example, but even MTV, as the work of the Devil. While even with respect to its aversion to images *per se*, and its concomitant preference for the more abstract understanding that is characteristic of symbolic conceptualization,¹² Wahhabism—which is of course backed by many Saudis and influential upon the Taliban and upon bin Laden—is in step with Jehovah’s Witnesses in particular, and indeed with Protestants more generally, who displayed a not entirely dissimilar aversion to Catholic Iconography.

Clearly then opposition to many of the elements of contemporary “Western” culture is by no means limited to Muslims. Nor, indeed, is it necessarily related to the religious *per se*, for just as there are many Muslims, as there are many Christians, who openly embrace, and even actively promote, such contemporary culture, equally there are many secularists, including not a few members of the American Militias who, like Timothy McVeigh, also oppose much that is central to such culture.

If then we inquire into what most of the fundamentalists of either religion have in common with many of the secularists who stand opposed to so much of contemporary culture, we notice that they are perhaps more likely than their more liberal counterparts to come from traditional, rural or at least relatively unurbanized, largely self-governing *communities* (*Gemeinschaft*) characterized by tribal, family or other close (often blood) relations carrying reciprocal obligations and responsibilities; communities which offer ways of life or *Being* often infused if not with religion then with some form of intrinsic, mythico-poetic, significance. As therefore premodern or barely modern these opponents of contemporary culture are to be contrasted to the fully modern, who are much more likely to live in urban *societies* (*Gesellschaft*)¹³ where behavior, if constrained at all, is so not

¹² I take the term *symbol* to refer to those *signs* which, unlike *images* or *icons*, do not depend upon resemblance in order to signify. Thus while the picture of a man or woman on a toilet door, like normal television, film and video images, signifies iconically, which is to say by resembling what they represent, the words “Men” and “Women”, like the print in books or the spoken word, are symbols. This being so it should be clear that symbols are able to signify abstract ideas in a way that images or icons, being constrained to resemble what they signify, cannot.

¹³ I am drawing here upon the old German sociological distinction between *Gemeinschaft* or “organic” community, characterized by “bottom up” reciprocal face to face relationships, and *Gesellschaft* or “mechanistic” society, characterized by the “top down” legal-rational structural relations prescribed by the State.

by reciprocal obligation but by the rule of law, promulgated by the state; societies whose members increasingly turn to largely superfluous symbolic consumption, or *Having*, as a substitute for the diminishing significance of their industrially dominated *Doing* and *Being*, or way of life. They are also to be contrasted to the rootless cosmopolitan postmodern individualists, who like the multinational postindustrial corporations characteristic of *Empire*,¹⁴ are not only free of traditional, premodern, forms of constraint and obligation, but also of the state sovereignty which came to replace it, and consequently altogether lacking in civic or social responsibility.

Thus understood as a conflict between the Pre or Barely Modern and the Fully and Postmodern,¹⁵ between the *traditional* and the *contemporary*, it might appear as if we have altogether abandon the previously proffered economic explanation, if not the religious dimension, altogether. However, while it would clearly be an error to deny this most important cultural *dimension* to the current conflict, insofar as the transition from the premodern to the postmodern, from traditional to contemporary culture is largely a consequence of the transition from predominantly hunter/gatherer and agricultural economies, through predominantly industrial economies to predominantly postindustrial economies, it clearly follows that as previously suggested with regard to the religious dimension, economics is here again clearly implicated, this time in the cultural dimension.

But while *economics may be central to the nevertheless irreducibly religious and cultural dimensions of the current conflict*, it is evident that it is Globalization—understood not merely as the New World Economic Order, but as the spread of formerly Western social and cultural relations, modes of interaction, attitudes, values and beliefs etc. facilitated by advances in communications and other technologies associated therewith—that has become the immediate issue. Thus to the film and video images, the online sex industry and cyber sex that the traditionalists find objectionable we may add:

1. the breakdown of community and civic responsibility, to the point where we in the U.S. now imprison well over two million of our adult population;
2. the breakdown of the family, more than half of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce, while the abandonment of the elderly by their families is now almost the norm;
3. sexual promiscuity with the associated accelerated transmission of AIDS etc.;

¹⁴ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2000).

¹⁵ For a far more complete and nuanced analysis of this opposition see Benjamin R. Barber's excellent book, *Jihad vs McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

4. the high incidence of drug addiction, depression and psychological disfunction;
5. the exploitation of others and of the world's limited resources in futile pursuit of fulfillment through consumption; and, of course
6. the strategic backing of often oppressive regimes which aid and abet this.

REAL MOTIVES, OFFICIAL JUSTIFICATIONS, AND THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The reason initially given by the Bush Administration for invasion of Iraq was national security. Thus it was claimed

1. that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime were giving material support to bin Laden and Al Qaeda, to which was then added
2. the claim that Iraq was in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Later it was suggested
3. that we were motivated by a desire to bring democracy to Iraq, and
4. that Saddam Hussein was a brutal and oppressive dictator, with the fact
5. that Iraq was in contravention of UN resolutions thrown in for good measure.

In light of such justifications it follows directly, as I shall now prove in detail, that the administration is composed either of fool or of knaves, or, neither being exclusive of the other, both.

Thus to begin with fools and national security. Having bombed much of Afghanistan, with the result that, intentional or not, the U.S. is responsible for the deaths of more than 9,000 noncombatant civilian deaths, or over three times as many as the 3,000 killed by bin Laden's Trade Tower and Pentagon bombing, the invasion of Iraq has, as was eminently predictable, again produced, along with an as yet undisclosed number of Iraqi military casualties, civilian casualties certainly greatly exceeding those in Afghanistan.¹⁶ Far from decreasing the threat of terrorism this, as testimony by intelligence sources to the bipartisan Congressional 9/11 Commission confirms, has predictably resulted in a very marked

¹⁶ Thus the Orwellian sounding "collateral damage" (as it is called in "newspeak") which already runs into the thousands include, amongst many similar incidents, the deaths of 57 noncombatant civilians from U.S. ordinance falling in a crowded market in Baghdad, of 80 noncombatant civilians in one rocket attack upon a village, of 10 women and children shot to death in a vehicle approaching a checkpoint, and of 13 unarmed Iraqis shot to death in Fallujah in the early days of the occupation for having the temerity to demonstrate against their "liberators," etc.

increase in recruitment into terrorist organizations, as the number of people who feel sufficient aggrieved to engage in acts of terrorism against us has grown. Indeed such recruitment, together with a U.S. military response before UN approval was obtained, which predictably resulted in our diplomatic isolation and our consequently having both to provide the lions share of the “peacekeeping” forces and to pay for most of Iraqi reconstruction, has left the U.S. politically isolated and financially impoverished, and thus less able to fight the increasing threat of terrorism that our actions have provoked; surely an outcome which exceeds bin Laden’s wildest hopes.

As for knaves, as the 9/11 Commission, and Richard Clark, former Senior National Security Advisor to the White House, confirmed, despite investment of substantial resources in their search intelligence agencies were unable to find a single shred of credible evidence linking Saddam Hussein to the operations of Al Qaeda or Osama bin Laden,¹⁷ while to suggest otherwise is, in light of this fact, clear knavery. Nor would anyone but a fool ever think that there was such a link, for there would seem to be an insurmountable gap between Osama bin Laden, an extremely religious Wahhabi, who, we have argued, stands opposed to much of modernity, and Saddam Hussein, the secular military leader who has presided over both the killing of many Muslims, particularly Iraqis in the South of the country and of course Iranians, and the transformation of Iraq into the most technologically advanced nation in the Arab World. Moreover, even in the extremely unlikely event that bin Laden would have been prepared to accept, and indeed could have got, support from a leader who he had publicly denounced as apostate, this would surely have put him at odds not only with the Pakistani fundamentalists who were acutely aware of Saddam’s persecution of Muslim fundamentalists, but also with the Saudi Wahhabist Princes who feared Saddam, who they perceived as set upon invading their country in 1991. Thus given the support that bin Laden derives from both, to ally himself with Saddam Hussein would clearly have been a colossal error, no less strategically foolish than our response; and whatever else he may be Osama bin Laden is clearly no fool!

Nor did the claim that we suspected the Iraqi regime of attempting to build Weapons of Mass Destruction ever provide either a justification, nor indeed, in and of itself, even a motive, for U.S. action. Turning firstly to justification, Britain, France, China, Russia, India, Pakistan, South Africa and Israel, along with the U.S. of course, all have nuclear weapons, while the U.S. and Israel, to take but two cases, also have biological and chemical weapons, the U.S. being in addition

¹⁷ Nor does the presence of Ansar al-Islam in the mountains up near the Iranian border suggest any such link, for as a consequence of the “no fly” zone established by the U.S. to protect the Kurds the Iraqi military have been unable to operate in this Kurdish enclave.

not only the one country ever to have used nuclear weapons, but also a country which has used both chemical weapons (e.g., “Agent Orange” in Vietnam) and biological weapons (e.g., blankets knowingly infected with smallpox against Native Americans) as well. As for motive, Donald Rumsfeld, as an envoy of Ronald Regan’s, met Saddam Hussein in 1983, and Tariq Aziz in 1984, and proposed resumption of diplomatic relations severed by Iraq during the 1967 Arab/Israeli war, despite the fact that the UN reported that Iraq had used poisoned gas on Iranian Troops. Furthermore in 1988 the U.S. and British governments denied Iraqi use of poisoned gas on Kurdish civilians at Hallabja, and the Pentagon denied an ABC News report on the Iraqi biological weapons program that same year.¹⁸ Iraqi weaponry, clearly not sufficiently threatening at that time to dampen our enthusiasm for the regime, was less so at the start of the war. For since that earlier time the UN inspectorate, UNSCOM, had presided over the destruction of much of Iraq’s chemical weaponry, had reported that its main biological weapons facility was destroyed in 1996, and had affirmed that previous inspections substantially disabled its nuclear weapons program. All of this, seemingly supported by the failure to find any such weapons, together with CIA analysis which suggested that attack on Iraq would make it more, rather than less, likely that it would use any limited capacity it might have conceivably still possessed, indicates that any limited threat that Iraq’s remaining weaponry may have posed was not, in fact, the motive for invasion, suggestions to the contrary thus again seemingly exemplifying knavery.

Nor, in light of the history of our support for antidemocratic authoritarian regimes chronicled above, and currently exemplified by our continuing support of dictatorships and monarchies in countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, is it credible to suggest that it was the desire to promote democratic freedom that motivated our invasion of Iraq. Clearly, up to and including our failure to follow through with support for the anti-Saddam uprising we initially inspired after the end of the first Gulf war, the U.S. foreign policy has consistently been directed toward opposing those populist movements unlikely to serve U.S. interests. Indeed Donald Rumsfeld is on record as indicating that the U.S. will not let an Islamic Fundamentalist government rule post Saddam Iraq.¹⁹ And this despite the fact that, unsurprisingly in a society lacking developed civil institutions or any political infrastructure other than that of the defeated Baath Party, such a regime seems to be precisely what the majority of Iraqi’s want and would vote for in a free and open election! In this respect not unlike Hitler and the National

¹⁸ See Charles Glass, “Iraq Must Go,” *The London Review of Books* (3 Oct. 2002): 12–13.

¹⁹ See the *New York Times* report of the Associated Press filing of April 25, 2003. <<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/international/AP-Iraq-Muslim.html>>

Socialist Party,²⁰ it seems that the Bush Administration, following the precedent enshrined by previous U.S. administrations with regard to Guatemala, Grenada, Greece, Chile, Vietnam, etc. is also only willing to support democracy so long as it is likely to produce, and/or ultimately produces, the results it wants, as the fiasco surrounding the 2000 U.S. presidential “succession” clearly signaled.²¹ Indeed U.S. citizens who are truly committed to democracy should surely demand regime change begin in Washington with the Bush junta!

Furthermore it has not gone unnoticed in the rest of the world that it is precisely the French, German and Turkish governments, which is to say those governments whose foreign policies—unlike that of Tony Blair, who has simply ignored widespread British opposition to an invasion of Iraq in the absence of a second United Nations resolution—have been a genuine reflection of the democratic will of their people, that have come in for the greatest criticism from the Bush regime. Similarly it is obvious to all but the most obtuse that it is precisely the knowledge that a fully democratic expression of the interests of the Palestinian people would almost certainly result in more power for Hamas that has been central to U.S. foreign policy in that region.

Finally while Saddam Hussein was undeniably an extremely brutal leader of an extremely brutal and oppressive regime, and therefore not an unreasonable candidate for removal, neither this, nor the fact that Iraq was in contravention of United Nations resolutions 687 and 1441—which in demanding Iraqi disarmament infringes upon the notion of national sovereignty in a way precluded by the UN charter—provide either a credible motive or justification for our action, and this for a number of reasons.

To begin with, the brutality of Saddam Hussain was, as I have already indicated above, well known 20 years ago, when Rumsfeld the leading architect of his removal, courted him, and we supplied helicopter gunships to him, which he subsequently used on his own people. Moreover we continue to support other dictatorial regimes with much blood on their hands. Further it is difficult to square the U.S. profession to be concerned with human rights in the region with its allowing private contractors to hire Serbian mercenaries and self-confessed members of South African pro-apartheid death squads to operate in Iraq,²² or with the substantial body of evidence that U.S. forces in Afghanistan worked “intimately with

²⁰ It will be remembered that the National Socialist Party, from which the Nazi party emerged, initially gained power through democratic elections!

²¹ It will be remembered that George II did not win election to the presidency of the U.S., but was, of course, appointed by a Supreme Court, many of the members of which had been previously appointed by his father, George I.

²² Katha Pollitt, “Show and Tell in Abu Graib.” *The Nation* (24 May 2004): 9.

‘allies’ ” who knowingly and intentionally killed hundreds of Taliban and other POW’s in the most gruesome way by locking them in container trucks in the middle of the desert, or with other reports indicate that between 30 and 40 U.S. Special Forces soldiers were present at the cold-blooded execution of 600 Taliban POW’s.²³

As for as the contravention of UN resolutions, the U.S. continues to supply weaponry and aid of \$4 billion a year to Israel, despite its being in violation of resolutions 267, 271 and 298 (demanding that it withdraw from East Jerusalem) as well as many other resolutions calling upon it to cease violating the Fourth Geneva Convention (with its deportations, collective punishments, seizure of private property and demolition of homes) and its violation of UN Security Council resolutions 446, 452 and 465, (demanding it evacuate all illegal settlements on occupied Arab land).²⁴

All of this, together with memos to and between members of the Bush Administration suggesting that U.S. torture of detainees in contravention of UN Human Rights standards, Geneva Conventions and international law, is legally defensible not to mention morally unexceptionable, along with the discovery that torture of Iraqi and other prisoners, and in some cases rape, were carried out by U.S. personnel at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, and the fact that at least 37 detainees have died in U.S. custody, has rightly served to render our claim to be motivated by the desire to protect human rights and/or the rule of law clearly knavish. While our credibility gap on the human rights issue cannot but be exacerbated by the appointment as first ambassador to post-Saddam Iraq of John Negroponte, who, as ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s denied the kidnapping, torture and killing, by a CIA-trained Honduran army intelligence unit and others linked to death squads, of citizens who opposed the government and its policies, which activity was confirmed in a 1997 investigation by the CIA’s own Inspector General!²⁵

In sum then it seems that even a cursory examination of the justifications given by the current administration for its policies towards Iraq reveals them to be both fools and knaves. A point which will surely not be lost upon those who, taking note of the way in which the Bush Administration moved beyond its original insistence upon weapons inspections to the call for regime change, will cite this as

²³ Alexander Cockburn, “Green Lights for Torture.” *The Nation*, (31 May 2004): 9. See also British television producer Jamie Duran’s documentary on the subject, Newsweek’s investigation and the Toronto *Globe and Mail* of December 19, 2002, referred to by Cockburn in his article.

²⁴ See Stephen Zunes, “U.S. Double Standards.” *The Nation* (28 Oct. 2002): 6–7. Note also that Israel now occupies 78%, as opposed to the 54% sanctioned by the UN, of what was previously Palestinian land.

²⁵ See David Corn, “Bush’s New Iraq Viceroy.” *The Nation* (10 May 2004) 8, 24.

evidence for the claim that the current administration's *principal* goal was clearly the destruction of the Iraqi state, giving the U.S., with the help of its Israeli allies, strategic control over the Middle East as a whole. And, irrespective of whether this, certainly highly plausible, interpretation of the facts, is, as it seems to me, true, or not, it will surely outrage much hitherto moderate Arab opinion; the more so in light of current U.S. financial and weapons support for Israel in face of UN condemnation.

Further, with the "Cheney Report"²⁶ projecting U.S. importation of oil rising from its current level of 50%, to 66% by 2020, it will surely not go unnoticed in the Arab World that the destruction of the existing Iraqi state gives the U.S. and its U.K. allies access to what, at 112 billion barrels, is the world's second largest (after Saudi Arabia) proven oil reserves, thereby enabling it to undercut OPEC control of oil prices, and to ignore Saudi pressure to support the Palestinians, thus ensuring the continuation of the U.S.-Israeli strategic alliance. This, together with the fact that, with as much as *another* 200 billion barrels of oil potential as yet unproven, Iraq may well turn out to be richer in oil than Saudi Arabia (with 261 billion) and in any event almost certainly has the largest remaining *unclaimed* oil reserves in the world,²⁷ and the fact that—notwithstanding the failure of the Iraqi National Congress which, having signaled its intent, once installed in Baghdad, to reconsider all existing oil contracts Iraq had with Russia, China and France, was originally favored by Washington to lead the new regime—U.S. occupation chief Paul Bremer has passed a series of orders and laws, which the interim government is prohibited from changing, opening up the Iraqi economy to foreign ownership, means that, as after the liberation of Kuwait, U.S. and U.K. oil companies may expect to profit greatly. Moreover such an oil grab can only be seen as further evidence, if it were needed, that the U.S. means to continue with its present policy of using more and more of the world's rapidly diminishing stock of non-renewable resources for its own benefit, and that the globalization which many find so threatening can be expected to proceed unabated.

Thus it should be obvious that the invasion of Iraq has not only increased the sense of injustice which many in the world see as the direct consequence of U.S. economic interests and the politics they engender, but it is further seen as both exemplifying and exacerbating the inequalities, exploitation and cultural hegemony accompanying globalization. This seems to be galvanizing and uniting such hitherto feuding factions as (Pan)Arab Nationalists, Shi'ite and Sunni Fundamentalists, Baathists, Arab Socialists, and even Arab Monarchists, who have an increasing pool of righteously indignant relatives of the civilian casualties of our military actions to enlist in attacks upon U.S. forces and citizens both abroad and

²⁶ *The National Energy Policy Report* of 2001.

²⁷ See Michael T. Klare, "Oiling the Wheels of War." *The Nation* (7 Oct. 2002) 6–7.

at home. And in a world in which the free market requires the dismantling of national borders and other impediments to the flow of capital, resources and labor, a technologically advanced world of Plutonium reactor fuels and global communications in which a collapsing Soviet Union not only left thousands of nuclear warheads, as well as much Plutonium and many KGB suitcase bombs unaccounted for, but also gave rise to an even more virulent and violent strain of Mafia than those traditionally associated with capitalist societies, plainly our invasion of Iraq has served to make attacks on the United States and its citizens more, rather than less, likely.

In this context then it is particularly chilling to learn from former World Bank Chief Economist and Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz that he “got hold of secret agreement between USEC” the hastily privatized United States Enrichment Corporation “and the Russian agency” charged with collecting nuclear warheads for them. “The Russians had offered to triple their deliveries” he writes, “and USEC not only turned them down but paid a handsome amount in what can only be termed ‘hush money’ to keep the offer (and the USEC’s refusal) secret”.²⁸ And they did so, one supposes, precisely because they realized that keeping nuclear material out of the U.S. and thus away from U.S. jurisdiction, they could more easily sell it on elsewhere for more money. In view of this, and the ease with which a U.S. television documentary team was recently able to import a lead pipe containing Plutonium concealed in a container shipment of furniture from Indonesia into downtown Los Angeles (the second time in two tries it had succeeded) the claim that national security interests trump neoliberal “free market fundamentalism” or corporate greed as it is colloquially known, is revealed as either knavish, foolish or both; the more so in view of the historical record with regard to U.S., British and French based corporations’ weapons exports.

In light of all we have seen above then, it should be obvious that if we really wish to insure our long term strategic security, and reduce the number of attacks we may expect to suffer, our best strategy would be to decommission all nuclear weapons, world wide, invest in alternatives to oil and nuclear energy, and most importantly work towards alleviating the perceived exploitation and inequities and concomitant conflicts which feed the righteous indignation which makes suicide bombers and others willing to lay down their lives in pursuit of justice.

²⁸ Joseph Stiglitz (2002): 176–7.

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