

**Aksan, C. & Bailes, J. (2013). *Weapon of the strong: Conversations on US state terrorism*. New York: Pluto Press.**

**Chapter 1  
Introduction**

The idea that terrorism is a 'weapon of the weak' has become a truism. We are constantly told that it is sub-state desperadoes with limited power and resources who resort to such indiscriminate and horrific violence, whilst states are left to defend the innocent. So if you happen to have political legitimacy, command a large and well-equipped military, and influence international affairs, you cannot be called a terrorist. However, to immediately associate a word such as 'terrorism' with one particular aspect of its possible meaning is to accept an ideology imbedded with certain political interests. Furthermore, the more dominant that meaning becomes, the more we lose any notion that there is an alternative; the whole concept becomes 'one-dimensional' and 'has no other content than that designated by the word in the publicized and standardized usage'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the question, 'Who is a terrorist?' already implies an answer, specifically one that excludes consideration of the 'strong'.

Undoubtedly, terrorism can be a tactic of the 'weak'. But this is not its predominant form, let alone its very definition. For instance, the US State Department estimates that the number of deaths caused by 'transnational terrorism' globally between 1975 and 2003 was 13,971. Meanwhile, the US National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) claims in its Global Terrorism Database that there were 3,292 fatalities from both domestic and international terrorist incidents in the United States from 1970 to 2007. Most of these, we hardly need reminding, were the result of the attacks of 11 September 2001.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, to take one extreme (but far from unique) example, from 1975 to 1999 Indonesia's US-backed repression in East Timor killed an estimated 200,000 people, one quarter of the population.<sup>3</sup> In sum, that the 'strong' can terrorise populations on a far greater scale than 'weaker' sub-state terrorist groups is hardly debatable. And yet we would never guess this from the way terrorism is discussed in the public sphere.

In this book we attempt to address the imbalance between representations of different forms of terrorism. In academic terms, this means that we take a firm stand against mainstream terrorism studies, which focus almost exclusively on the targeting of liberal democratic states by sub-state groups or 'rogue states'. With a more critical approach to terrorism studies, we aim to challenge prevailing ideas by demonstrating that it is in fact the United States,<sup>4</sup> the self-proclaimed 'leader of the free world', which is the most consistent perpetrator and supporter of terrorism in post-Second World War history. Obviously, such an assertion raises many questions: What do we mean by terrorism, and what counts as a terrorist act? How responsible has the United States been for various terrorist acts? What are the legal and moral implications? Does the United States have good reason to carry out or support terrorism? And how do the American people understand these actions? We answer such questions through a series of interviews with leading scholars from a range of fields, including politics, law, philosophy, economics, and social theory.

There is nothing immediately counterintuitive in the idea that a state agent can commit terrorism. Yet, in the dominant discourse, such thinking tends to be bracketed out from the start. Take, for instance, the *US Code*, which defines terrorism as 'premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents'.<sup>5</sup> This definition is used by the State Department and the CIA, and is the definition upon

which they rely in their official pronouncements on terrorism." Crucially, the *US Code* restricts terrorism to 'sub-national groups' and 'clandestine agents', which appears to exclude state terrorism. True, 'clandestine agents' could carry out terrorist acts on behalf of states, but this still rules out many cases in which states commit such acts overtly or at least in tandem with clandestine activity. Under the *US Code*, states and their authorised agents that commit crimes analogous to those of sub-state terrorist groups are not classified as terrorists.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the FBI uses the definition in the *Code of Federal Regulations* which claims that terrorism is 'the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives'.<sup>8</sup> This definition does not appear to have any clause explicitly excluding state terrorism, but the use of the word 'unlawful' carries certain implications. This is because (a) it suggests that state agents do not commit state terrorism in the lawful exercise of their official duties;<sup>9</sup> and (b) if state authorities introduce 'temporary' or 'emergency' legislation for 'security' reasons, or even build the whole apparatus of terrorising into the legal system, then their actions receive the backing of the law.<sup>10</sup> The *US Army Field Manuals* follow similar lines, stating that 'terrorism is the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear ... intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies'. They also claim that it is 'enemies who cannot compete with Army forces conventionally [who] often turn to terrorist tactics'.<sup>11</sup> The possibility that a non-enemy or state force could commit terrorism is never considered.

One question that might be asked is why should we focus on terrorism in the first place? Why not, say, genocide or war crimes? An obvious reason is that the word 'terrorism' has exceptional rhetorical significance, particularly in the United States. Ever since President Reagan declared war on international terrorism in the early 1980s, it has become central to the self-image of the American nation, allowing it to define itself against its enemies. The reinforcement of the message that it is always *they*, the enemy, that are the terrorists has resulted in a highly warped dominant idea of terrorism, and while terms such as 'genocide' and 'war crimes' are undoubtedly also appropriated in this way, they are nowhere near as ubiquitous or versatile. Clearly, when terrorism can be mentioned alongside acts of protest and civil disobedience such as the Occupy movement, for some people it has become synonymous with any resistance to the status quo. The much lauded terrorism 'expert', Walter Laqueur, claims that 'people reasonably familiar with the terrorist phenomenon will agree 90 per cent of the time about what terrorism is, just as they will agree upon democracy and nationalism or other concepts. In fact, terrorism is an unmistakable phenomenon'.<sup>12</sup> But this 'we-know-it-when-we-see-it' attitude only reinforces the double standards. It is precisely when theory is kept to a minimum (which Laqueur also advocates) that terrorism becomes what *they* do to *us*, and never what *we* do to *them*. The less we contest terms, the more people are likely to assimilate a dominant usage, and the connotations of the term 'terrorism' in particular mean it should be proactively reclaimed for more considered discussion.

Terrorism is also especially significant because it is an act defined by its political purpose. In other words, it is not only killing and maiming that constitutes terrorism, but the fact that such actions are irrevocably linked to a wider strategy. This book sets out to demonstrate a general trend in US foreign policy, arguing that terrorism describes the common thread running through a wide range of coercive and destructive measures employed under varying circumstances. Of course, such an argument requires a certain clarity about the meaning of terrorism as we understand it. We do not feel it necessary to be overly precise, but, in brief, we consider the following parameters to be central to the concept: (a) the intentional use of violence or credible threat of violence; (b) directed at civilians; (c) with the purpose of inducing widespread fear among an audience beyond the immediate victim(s); (d) to achieve political ends. With these parameters, we can at least establish which state actions can be viewed as terrorism.

Let us begin with war. Although war is not terrorism per se (since it does not *necessarily* involve targeting civilians in order to induce widespread fear), terrorism can be used in war, and can even be an overt military objective. Take the doctrine of 'shock and awe' through 'rapid dominance', which was famously used by the US military in Iraq in 2003. The authors of the doctrine explain that 'the goal of Rapid Dominance [is] to destroy or so confound the will to resist that an adversary will have no alternative except to accept our strategic aims and military objectives'.<sup>13</sup> This means that 'psychological and intangible, as well as physical and concrete, effects beyond the destruction of enemy forces and supporting military infrastructure will have to be achieved'.<sup>14</sup> So the 'adversary' is not only the military or political leadership of the target nation, but also the civilian population, which is forced through a terrifying show of mass destruction to accept political change. Moreover, the 'threats' considered significant enough to call for 'rapid dominance' are not only military aggression and WMDs, but 'actions that ... endanger ... access to free markets',<sup>15</sup> which effectively makes every single nation that undertakes economic restructuring counter to US interests an 'adversary'.

One mitigating factor for 'rapid dominance' could be its insistence that civilian casualties are not desirable, but this claim relies on some spurious twists of logic. The document frequently alludes to the importance of minimising 'collateral damage' (albeit if only 'to avoid the political pitfalls') and the need for 'increased targeting precision' in attacks. And yet while this 'collateral damage' is described as 'unintended', it is simultaneously deemed 'inevitable',<sup>16</sup> creating an obvious paradox which culminates in the audacious claim that it is

a responsible state's worst nightmare to have successfully struck a chemical, biological, or nuclear production facility with precision only to learn the next day that hundreds of civilians have been killed due to the inadvertent release of chemical, biological, or nuclear materials.<sup>17</sup>

The truth is that however precise the attack, if the target struck is known to contain civilians or likely to result in mass civilian casualties, then terror is intended. As critical terrorism theorist Ruth Blakeley argues, 'where [intimidation] was not the primary intention, but a welcome secondary effect of some other malign act, this still constitutes state terrorism'.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, 'rapid dominance' was designed to attack civilians and civilian infrastructure. How else is one to interpret the assertion that it 'seeks to impose (in extreme cases) ... the non-nuclear equivalent of the impact that the atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese'?<sup>19</sup>

Also, merely stating a desire to minimise civilian casualties does not mean it is carried through in practice. Even the most conservative estimates of civilian casualties during the invasion of Iraq run into the thousands. Afterwards, the death toll continued to rise in the occupation, with the sieges and assaults on Fallujah in particular demonstrating how cheap civilian lives can be. Journalist and eyewitness Dahr Jamail has described some of the tactics employed by US forces there, such as the 'use of illegal weapons (white phosphorous, cluster bombs, depleted uranium munitions), deliberate targeting of medical personnel, ambulances, hospitals and clinics, [and] deliberate targeting of civilians', leading to the deaths of between 4,000 and 6,000 civilians and the destruction of approximately 70 per cent of all buildings.<sup>20</sup> More recently, in response to negative publicity (those 'political pitfalls', when US aircraft bomb, say, a wedding party in Afghanistan), the United States has vowed to take more care with its 'targeted killings'. In June 2011, President Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, John Brennan, said that in over a year of drone strikes in Pakistan, 'there hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities we've been able to develop'.<sup>21</sup> This claim is contradicted by a report from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism which estimates that in 260 drone attacks in the first three years of Obama's presidency, 'between 282 and 535 civilians [were] credibly reported as killed, including more than 60

children'.<sup>22</sup> In one particular incident, US forces killed a Taliban member with a drone attack in a bid to draw out a higher-ranking commander at the funeral, and then bombed the funeral, attended by 5,000 mourners, killing 45 civilians and missing the intended target.

Civilians also pay a high price when the United States turns to terrorism outside of war. Take coercive diplomacy, an age-old instrument of statecraft. Its aim is to make non-compliance with a political demand so costly that the target nation is forced to reconsider its original position. The threat may be non-verbal or merely implied, but coercive diplomacy is nevertheless overt behaviour, with all parties fully aware of the stakes.<sup>23</sup> Examples include the threat of use and/or the actual use of limited military force, trade threats and retaliation, suspension of bilateral aid and credits, and blocking of credits from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) or private banks, although positive inducements and assurances can also be used alongside punitive threats to influence the target nation. It might be said that coercive diplomacy is an effective strategy in international relations since it has the potential to achieve political ends with little or no bloodshed. This underestimates the impact such pressures can have on a population, as in the case of nearly one million deaths due to US-led UN economic sanctions in Iraq. A declassified US Defense Intelligence Agency document shows that the United States was fully aware of the necessity of particular chemicals for water treatment, and the human cost sanctioning these chemicals would entail back in 1991.<sup>24</sup> It nevertheless went ahead with sanctioning them (having already intentionally destroyed Iraq's water treatment facilities in the Gulf War), thus exposing hundreds of thousands of children to potentially deadly diarrhoeal diseases. Is deliberately enacting a policy that deprives civilians of basic needs and causes mass disease and death not a form of violence? Is it any less indiscriminate, destructive or terrifying than, say, a biological weapon attack? While campaigning for the US presidency in 2008, Hillary Clinton said: 'I believe in coercive diplomacy. I think that you try to figure out how to move bad actors in a direction that you prefer in order to avoid more dire consequences'.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, a million deaths are not 'dire' enough.

Terrorism can also be intertwined with covert action. Turned into an art form by the CIA, covert action was discredited in the mid 1970s when highly embarrassing details were exposed by Congressional inquiries into CIA activities abroad. As a result, President Ford banned assassinations,<sup>26</sup> the CIA sacrificed a few veteran agents, and Congress imposed strict limits on covert activities. Covert action made a comeback in the 1980s (with great success in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan), lay low again in the 1990s (after the controversy of the 1987 Iran-Contra affair), and was unleashed with a vengeance after 9/11.<sup>27</sup> It is firmly outside the operations of traditional intelligence collection, and can include propaganda and disinformation campaigns, funding of opposition parties or media, sabotage, assassination, support for subversion, extraordinary rendition, and participation in coups d'etat. 'Plausible deniability' (where the sponsor is able to deny his or her involvement in the action undertaken) is crucial to covert action, although (as in, say, the case of President Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961) it is not always possible to maintain secrecy. Two of the many covert operations undertaken by the United States were in Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973), both of which subverted democratic processes and brought to power right-wing dictatorships. Aside from the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion, CIA agents also made numerous assassination attempts against Fidel Castro (including the infamous exploding cigar) and collaborated with exiled Cuban terrorists (including Orlando Bosch, who was implicated in the bombing of the Cubana airliner in 1976) to carry out terrorist acts on Cuban soil.

The United States has also used terrorism to advance its foreign objectives through sponsorship of other terrorist states. Throughout the Cold War, right-wing dictatorships were taken by the United States to be bulwarks against political instability and revolution, and thus received substantial assistance in spite of their undemocratic practices and shocking human rights records. The Nixon administration relied particularly heavily on dictators when it became clear that public disillusionment with Vietnam made further military interventions problematic. In

what later became known as the 'Nixon Doctrine', the United States would provide economic and military assistance, but local governments had to take primary responsibility for their own defence without relying on American troops. Nixon's visit to Jakarta in 1969, where he praised General Suharto for the political and economic 'stability' he had brought to Indonesia, well illustrates US foreign policy at the time. It was a side issue that this 'stability' had come at the expense of more than 500,000 lives (as well as another 750,000 arrests) in less than a year.<sup>28</sup> In 1968, a CIA report had claimed that the 'massacres in Indonesia rank as one of the worst mass murders of the twentieth century, along with the Soviet purges of the 1930s, the Nazi mass murders during the Second World War, and the Maoist bloodbath of the early 1950s',<sup>29</sup> but Nixon had not come all the way to Jakarta to discuss mass murder. Indeed, the United States had welcomed the 'clean-up' of the Indonesian Communist Party (to use the words of the undersecretary of state, George Ball),<sup>30</sup> contributing to the bloodshed by providing intelligence information on communists and supplying Suharto's troops with weapons and state-of-the-art communications equipment to help coordinate the killings.<sup>31</sup> Once Suharto had totally crushed all opposition, the United States (and its close allies such as the United Kingdom, as well as IFIs) opened the purse strings to ensure that the 'New Order' would survive.<sup>32</sup> Following Nixon's visit to Jakarta, the decision was made to increase military assistance to Indonesia from \$5.8 million to \$25 million, in accordance with the 'Nixon Doctrine'.<sup>33</sup> This helped Indonesia purchase new combat weapons and aircraft, which must have come in handy when Suharto launched the near-genocidal invasion of East Timor in December 1975.

Overall, between 1950 and 1979, US military aid programmes transferred \$107.3 billion in equipment and services to friendly powers, in addition to \$121 billion in arms sales.<sup>34</sup> Did these arms transfers promote state terrorist activities in those countries? Can it be said that without these arms transfers state terrorism would not have occurred or would have occurred at a much lower level?<sup>35</sup> It can certainly be argued that state terrorism rarely requires sophisticated weaponry. If a government wants to use repressive measures against its people, it can easily do so with a reasonably sized army and police force with access to small arms, armoured vehicles and counter-insurgency equipment. Also, as far as military sales are concerned, there are always alternative sources of supply for those governments intent on arming themselves.<sup>36</sup> However, it is not a recognised defence to say, 'If I didn't do it, someone else would', and there are clear cases where imported arms have allowed a repressive government to remain in power when it would otherwise have been overthrown by an internal rebellion. In El Salvador, for instance, US military aid helped the armed forces and allied right-wing death squads defeat the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMEN). True, the FMEN received support from Nicaragua and Cuba, but the massive US aid that poured into this tiny country (about \$6 billion, or an average of \$100,000 for each member of the Salvadoran armed forces)<sup>37</sup> meant that the guerrillas could never win. An estimated 75,000 people were killed between 1980 and 1991, with the Salvadoran army and the death squads reported to be responsible for 95 per cent of these deaths.<sup>38</sup> This could have been prevented had the United States not supplied the Salvadoran regime with the weapons to crush its adversaries.

More importantly, arms transfers are usually accompanied by economic assistance and training, which more explicitly connects the assisting state to the political crimes of the assisted state. For example, when the socialist Salvador Allende was elected president in Chile in 1970, Nixon famously ordered the CIA director, Richard Helms, to 'make the economy scream'.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, Washington reduced bilateral aid (from \$35.4 million in 1969 to \$1.5 million in 1971), cut credits (US Export-Import Bank credits went from \$28.7 million to zero in the same years), and pushed IFIs to cut Chile off.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, US military aid was significantly increased (from \$0.8 million in 1970 to \$15 million in 1973) to retain close contact with the Chilean military.<sup>41</sup> The military training programme was also expanded: the number of Chilean officers trained at the notorious School of the Americas (SOA) in Panama rose from 181 to 257 during the Allende years.<sup>42</sup> After the military coup, led by the staunch anti-communist

General Augusto Pinochet in 1973, US economic assistance resumed (\$5.3 million in economic aid and \$98.1 million in Export-Import Bank credit were given in 1974, in addition to \$15.9 million in military aid). Chile was also able to secure previously denied loans from the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (totalling \$111.2 million again in 1974).<sup>43</sup> So it has to be asked whether the Pinochet dictatorship could have taken power and lasted long enough to cause the deaths of thousands of men, women and children without such backing.

Why should we single out US state terrorism in particular? Is it not the case that practically every state has been guilty of some form of state terrorism in the past? Indeed, in all of the cases where the United States has supported state terrorism, the *primary* responsibility must fall on the state committing the terrorism. Complicity is criminal, but there is no doubt that Suharto or Pinochet should have been held accountable for the unimaginable terror they unleashed on their own people. However, this book focuses on the United States in recognition of the impact it has made on the international community over a sustained period of time. We all know that the United States is the only current power with a global reach, politically, economically, militarily and culturally. It is an undisputed leader in international affairs, with huge influence in NATO, and in the United Nations through its permanent membership in the Security Council. It has hundreds of military bases all around the world, with a military budget that is some 43 per cent of the world's total, five times larger than its nearest rival, China.<sup>44</sup> It also has control over the policies of major IFIs, such as the World Bank and the IMF, and many of the largest and most influential multinational corporations and private financial institutions are based in its territory, funding and lobbying political decision makers. Of course, all this does not make the United States some shadowy, omnipotent force whose hand guides all major international decisions. It is quite clear, for instance, that it has run into serious difficulties in its attempts to control Afghanistan and Iraq, and it also did not call the shots in the early days of the 'Arab Spring' - not to mention that its extremely high levels of military expenditure weigh heavily on the state budget, and have compounded the current economic crisis. There is nothing timeless or inevitable about current power relations.

Even so, US hegemony means that criticising its foreign policy is a matter of restoring balance. In many countries, US political and popular culture feature heavily in broadcast media, so American elites (or their products) have a voice around the globe. We have all grown to understand the potential import of US political reactions, so when, say, revolution erupts in Tunisia or Egypt, everyone has one eye on America's response. Meanwhile, a deluge of entertainment media, mostly propagating a specific glamorised aspect of American culture, finds its way through sheer financial weight into the homes of billions of people. Consequently, to measure the kind of media presence the United States has in other countries against that of, say, China, is to identify a colossal difference. In the British 'quality' media in early 2012, minor developments in the US Republican Primaries made the news daily, while coverage of China's approach to its crucial Communist Party congress was almost non-existent.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it is rare in the West to hear about Chinese politicians at all, and most reporting on China is reduced to its human rights abuses. This is not to say that China does not deserve criticism. The problem is that this criticism becomes skewed because either we do not hear about similar US abuses, or we experience them alongside a continually reiterated US rhetoric of democracy, freedom, justice, and counter-terrorism. To focus on *US* state terrorism therefore has the distinction of challenging common perception.

Most importantly, however, we want to emphasise the consistency of purpose behind US foreign policy. This book concentrates on US actions since the Second World War, an important moment of American ascendancy. Our argument is that the motivation behind these actions has predominantly been to spread an economic model conducive to American business interests. In other words, what the United States calls 'free markets' (which is effectively 'freedom' for the

wealthy nations to exploit the natural resources and restructure the economies of poor nations according to strict Western dictates) has always formed the core of its foreign policy objectives. There is even continuity in the face of apparent change: the end of the Cold War mainly presented a problem of propaganda, demanding new narratives and enemies to act as alibi for US interventions abroad. State terrorism is not the preserve of particular presidents, or particular political parties, operating under extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, the personality traits and intentions of individuals can quickly be sidelined as the realities of US power structures become apparent.

The best way to illustrate this point is by considering the US administrations with the least aggressive reputations, most notably those of Carter and Clinton. It is often convenient to blame US state terrorism on 'madmen' such as Nixon (who, incidentally, used the 'madman theory' to make the North Vietnamese think that he was capable of anything),<sup>46</sup> Reagan (who, some critics claim, was already in the grips of Alzheimer's disease during his presidency), and more recently George W. Bush. There appears to be an understanding that Republicans are more inclined to dismiss human rights considerations and place what they call 'national security interests' above all else. This might be a valid point, but it refuses to take into account how even well-meaning Democrats operate within hegemonic structures. Carter, for instance, refused to undertake military interventions, but still continued to interfere in the internal affairs of other states by supporting repressive regimes. However much we may want to call Carter's foreign policy 'benevolent hegemony' or 'empire lite', it must be recognised that the United States was still an accessory to state terrorism at the time.

When Carter became president in 1977, he promised to advance the principles of human rights and non-intervention, and thus distance the United States from right-wing dictatorships. In his inaugural address to the nation, he declared that 'our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights'.<sup>47</sup> Two years later, on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he reiterated that

our deepest affinities are with nations which commit themselves to a democratic path to development. Toward regimes which persist in wholesale violations of human rights we will not hesitate to convey our outrage nor will we pretend that our relations are unaffected.

Clearly aiming at his many critics, Carter also highlighted the achievements of his human rights policy:

In some countries, political prisoners have been released by the hundreds, even thousands. In others, the brutality of repression has been lessened. In still others, there's a movement toward democratic institutions or the rule of law when these movements were not previously detectable.<sup>48</sup>

How serious was Carter about human rights? How did he act when human rights principles clashed with national interest? Take Iran, for example. In the late 1970s, when the Shah of Iran's repressive rule was finally met with an outburst of popular anger, Carter found himself in a difficult position. Ever since the CIA had deposed the democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953, Iran had been supported by the United States. Back on his Peacock Throne, the Shah had received more than \$1 billion in US aid in the decade following the coup,<sup>49</sup> even though the torture chambers of his notorious security services, SAVAK, were among the Middle East's most terrible institutions. When Carter visited Tehran in December 1977, he praised the Shah for turning Iran into 'an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world'.<sup>50</sup> Countless reports had by that point emerged on a SAVAK torture method

called 'cooking' where the victim would be strapped to a bed of wire that would then be electrified to become a red-hot toaster.<sup>51</sup> But Carter made no mention of this. Instead, the Shah was told that 'the cause of human rights is one that is also shared deeply by our people and by the leaders of our two nations'.<sup>52</sup> When the Shah's soldiers responded to the ever increasing unrest by murdering thousands of people in a demonstration in Tehran in 1978, Carter still refused to withdraw support from Iran's ruler. As it became clear that the Shah could no longer cling on to power, Carter was urged by his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to take military action to prevent the Shah's downfall. But he refused. Just a day after the Shah left Iran, Carter told a news conference that 'we have no desire nor ability to intrude massive forces into Iran or any other country to determine the outcome of domestic political issues'. Remember: 'We've tried this once in Vietnam. It didn't work well, as you well know'.<sup>53</sup>

Carter's human rights policy never really rose above rhetoric. In both Iran and Nicaragua (where Anastasio Somoza's repressive regime was challenged by the National Sandinista Liberation Front), he resisted calls to cut aid and arms deliveries to dictators accused of human rights abuses, only withdrawing support when their rule became untenable. Declassified documents show that Carter also continued to back the Suharto regime, providing military assistance to the Indonesian armed forces at a time when near genocidal violence was taking place in East Timor.<sup>54</sup> Further, he increased aid and arms transfers to many other repressive governments (South Korea, the Philippines, El Salvador and Morocco are just a few examples), particularly towards the end of his presidency.<sup>55</sup> In an interview with the *Observer* in 2011, Carter was asked what he was most proud of when he made a reassessment of his presidency. He replied: 'We kept our country at peace. We never went to war. We never dropped a bomb. We never fired a bullet. But we still achieved our international goals'.<sup>56</sup> True, Carter refused to undertake military interventions, even when he came under fire for not preventing the downfall of Somoza and the Shah of Iran. But it is unlikely that many administrations would have taken the military road when Americans were still in the grips of the so-called 'Vietnam Syndrome'. According to Stephen Cohen, deputy assistant secretary for human rights and security assistance during the Carter administration, Carter 'exhibited a remarkable degree of tentativeness and caution, so that the pursuit of human rights goals was anything but single-minded'. The result was that in many cases 'other US interests were found to outweigh human rights concerns under the exception for "extraordinary circumstances"' and money continued to flow to repressive regimes.<sup>57</sup>

It could still be said, of course, that the Cold War was a time that necessitated extreme foreign policy. It is important to examine the validity of this justification. The orthodox version of the Cold War paints a picture of a bipolar world in which one of the poles (the Soviet Union) is an inherently hostile and expansionist power while the other (the United States) is a benign and democratic power that has no choice but to respond to this grave threat to its national security and hold back the former by any means necessary. This formed the basis of the US policy of 'containment', often credited to George Kennan, who argued that the Soviet Union aimed to fill 'every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power' and called for 'a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies'.<sup>58</sup> NSC-68, the formerly classified report issued by the National Security Council in April 1950 and signed by President Truman in September 1950, reflected Kennan's assessment when it claimed that the Soviet Union sought 'to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world'. In stark contrast, the 'fundamental purpose of the United States' was 'to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual'. This 'free society' was open to 'diversity', and in fact 'derives its strength from its hospitality even to antipathetic ideas'. It was also marked by 'generous and constructive impulses' and 'the absence of covetousness' in international relations. But the 'Kremlin design' had put 'the integrity and vitality' of the 'free society' in 'greater jeopardy than ever before', and thus it was critical that the United States should contain this 'aggressive threat' by maintaining 'a strong

military posture'. This meant that the United States had to allocate more of its resources to defence and investment in war-supporting industries, although public relations demanded that the military build-up be explained as solely defensive.<sup>59</sup> Shortly after NSC-68 was completed, US military spending soared on the grounds that the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950 had set in motion the Soviet takeover of the world. In just a few years, US military production had increased sevenfold, the army had grown by 50 per cent, NATO had been strengthened, West Germany had been rearmed, and military aid to the French army fighting anti-colonial forces in Indochina had been stepped up, paving the way for the Vietnam War.<sup>60</sup>

A more realistic historical interpretation of the Cold War, however, is that US foreign policy was overwhelmingly driven to promote the expansion of American capitalism into every corner of the world. Indeed at the start of the Cold War, Kennan had written: 'We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population ... Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that will permit us to maintain this position of disparity'.<sup>61</sup> This required that the South, along with its highly prized markets and cheap sources of labour and raw materials, be fully incorporated into a free market system and brought under the control of the capitalist economies of the North. The planned economy of the Soviet Union challenged US plans to build a free-market world order dominated by its own corporations. Moreover, Soviet support for the targets of US interventions in the South imposed unacceptable limits upon US hegemonic power.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the Soviet threat was overstated because it served as a highly convenient pretext for justifying US interventions, which were necessary if nationalist and left-leaning governments considered inimical to US economic interests were to be stifled or overthrown. Many formerly classified documents reveal how the United States considered 'radical nationalism' in the South as a major threat. To take one example: in 1953, NSC 144/1 warned that there was 'a trend in Latin America towards nationalist regimes' due to the 'increasing popular demand for an improvement in the low living standards of the masses'. Its advice was that action had to be taken to 'arrest the drift in the area toward radical and nationalistic regimes', including 'encouraging Latin American countries to recognize that the bulk of capital required for their economic development can best be supplied by private enterprise'.<sup>63</sup> 'Encourage' is an interesting word here, since in most Latin American cases this involved replacing the democratically elected government with a right-wing dictatorship brutal enough to implement US-friendly policies using any means necessary.

We concede that it is not always helpful to interpret US interventions in terms of capitalist expansionism, and there is something to be said for the 'commie hysteria' which sometimes provoked the CIA into action. But this does not change the fact that economic interests were the primary motivation for US relations with the South at the time. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has reduced its reliance on right-wing dictatorships (mainly because the state terrorism exercised by most of these dictatorships was so successful in destroying practically all opposition during the Cold War), but it still continues to undertake military and non-military interventions to preserve a world order conducive to American capitalism. Take President Clinton, whose liberal internationalist grand strategy never shied away from reinforcing US hegemony. Indeed, his promotion of democracy, free trade, and multilateral institutions, ostensibly to help maintain peace and security, always worked hand in hand with his support for repressive regimes. Under Clinton, the Colombian government continued to receive economic and military assistance even though it was widely known to be engaged in state terrorism. Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were also backed by him, and Turkey (whose military actions in the Kurdish-dominated regions had killed tens of thousands of people, destroyed 3,500 villages and created over two million internally displaced persons and refugees) was given more US military aid in 1997 than in the entire Cold War period.<sup>64</sup> For much of the South the Cold War never really ended. Colombia in particular demonstrates the continuities between the Cold War and post-Cold War US foreign policy. Doug Stokes explains how during the Cold War, Colombia was one of the largest Latin American recipients of US military aid (it was only surpassed by El

Salvador when President Reagan came to power in the 1980s), primarily for anti-communist counter-insurgency.<sup>65</sup> Yet, Stokes continues, in the post-Cold War era, US funding of the Colombian military has remained extremely high (with more than \$2 billion given between 2000 and 2002 alone),<sup>66</sup> although new reasons like the 'war on drugs' and the 'war on terror' have replaced the 'red scare'. Between 2000 and 2001, the Clinton administration made a commitment to Plan Colombia, a \$1.3 billion US military aid package to the Colombian military, making Colombia the world's third-largest recipient of US military aid after Israel and Egypt at the time. The stated objective of Plan Colombia was the eradication of coca plantations and the targeting of the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (PARC) rebels, who were accused by the United States of funding their campaign against the Colombian government through the coca trade.<sup>67</sup> It did not matter that the Colombian military had one of the worst human rights records in the western hemisphere, and had forged close ties with well-funded and well-armed right-wing paramilitary groups, such as the AUC (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia).<sup>68</sup> And even though the United States's own agencies, such as the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), have stated on the record that the right-wing paramilitaries are more heavily involved in drug cultivation and trans-shipment to the United States, the only targets have been the coca plantations within the FARC zones of control.<sup>69</sup> AUC's involvement in a campaign of terror against thousands of teachers and lecturers, journalists, human rights investigators, community activists, and indigenous leaders have also been brushed aside by Colombia's US backers.<sup>70</sup>

Colombia is the United States's seventh-largest oil supplier, and the discovery of vast oil reserves within its territory make it invaluable as the United States tries to decrease its reliance on Middle Eastern oil and shift its purchasing to Latin America.<sup>71</sup> Since the FARC has consistently bombed major oil pipelines (which prompted the Bush administration to request \$98 million for a Colombian military counter-insurgency force devoted to protecting the US-owned Occidental Oil's Cano Limon oil pipeline in Colombia),<sup>72</sup> and has destabilised the Colombian government through its decades-long campaign, it constitutes the primary threat to US interests in Colombia. It is also the case that the PARC's alternative socio-economic project is an unacceptable challenge to the US-led neoliberal restructuring of Colombia's economy, which makes PARC's destruction all the more necessary.<sup>73</sup> Plan Colombia represents the continuation of US interventionism in Latin America, with American economic interests still acting as the main motivating factor. It is a classic counter-insurgency war, and shares many characteristics with the strategies employed during the Cold War, including the targeting of civilians whose only crime is to demand political reforms.

The transition to the post-Cold War era can be understood through the lens of neoliberalism, which since the late 1970s has taken the economic exploitation of the South to new levels. The market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed had made laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to state intervention in the economy unpopular in public-policy circles. But in the economic turmoil of the 1970s, neoliberalism's three-part formula of deregulation, privatisation and cutbacks to social programmes became orthodoxy. Neoliberalism was very effective in restoring (or, in the case of China or Russia, say, creating) the power of economic elites everywhere. For example: in the United States, the share of national income of the top 1 per cent of income earners increased from 8 per cent to 15 per cent (which was very close to the pre-Second World War share) after the implementation of neoliberal policies.<sup>74</sup> Neoliberalism rapidly spread around the world, opening up new commercial frontiers and tearing down the barriers that stood in the way of the free movement of capital at the level of the global economy. The South paid a particularly heavy price. When the neoliberal vision could not be implemented democratically, it relied on right-wing regimes to force it upon unwilling populations. The 'hidden hand' of the market was often accompanied by the 'iron fist' of the dictator.

Neoliberals claim to distrust all state power, but in reality they require a strong and, if necessary, coercive state 'to protect our freedom both from the enemies outside our gates and

from our fellow-citizens: to preserve law and order, to enforce private contracts, to foster competitive markets', in the words of Milton Friedman.<sup>75</sup> Friedman himself visited Chile with his wife in March 1975, and later wrote a letter to Pinochet, advising him that the Chilean economy needed a 'shock treatment', by which, as Naomi Klein has shown, he meant a rapid and no-holds-barred adoption of free-market policies.<sup>76</sup> The fact that the 'shock treatment' was inextricably linked to the torture and disappearance of thousands of Chileans did not unduly concern Friedman. In spite of my profound disagreement with the authoritarian political system of Chile', he claimed in *Newsweek*, 'I do not consider it as evil for an economist to render technical economic advice to the Chilean Government.'<sup>77</sup> Since then the mission to force this 'shock treatment' on countries around the world has continued through strong US-led initiatives, backed up by economic and military pressures when necessary. The extreme 'structural adjustments' that neoliberalism demands from national governments are forced on unwilling populations through pliant or corrupt governments and conditional IFI credits. In the South, the majority of people have sunk deeper into poverty than ever before, with vast areas of the Earth's surface turning into slums. And even in the affluent North, subjected to much milder forms of neoliberalism, people have begun to suffer burdened with massive debt, and facing increasing class disparity and the destruction of the welfare state. State terrorism pays, but only for the few.

The 13 interviews that comprise the rest of this book expand on many of the issues raised here. Those interviewed are all leading academics in the areas they have been called upon to discuss. Our aim is to analyse US state terrorism from as many perspectives as possible, and the interview format has allowed us access to authoritative views on a hugely varied range of subjects, including politics, law, philosophy, economics, and social theory. Importantly, each interviewee is asked not simply to reiterate positions they have already published, but to expand on, clarify and defend those positions. In each case, however, we ultimately aim to demonstrate one aspect of our claim that the United States is the most consistent perpetrator and supporter of state terrorism in post-war history.

The chapters are ordered according to theme. In Chapters 2 to 5, we attempt to develop our concept of state terrorism and illustrate certain norms of obligation, both legal and moral, that may act as standards of judgement over US policy. Chapters 6 to 8 examine how the dominant discourse of terrorism is reproduced in the public sphere through both media representation and academic research. In Chapters 9 and 10 we focus on the core motivations behind US state terrorism, showing how the dominant discourse often hides the economic objectives. The final four chapters are case studies which demonstrate in greater detail the nature and impact of US interventions in particular geographic areas. The interviews were conducted either in person, by telephone, or by email, and took place between October 2010 and April 2012. Those interviews conducted in the early stages were also revisited and updated in 2012.

**Chapter 2: The Definition of Terrorism.** Following some of the issues raised in our introductory chapter, we discuss with Noam Chomsky the different definitions of terrorism (particularly the varied and ever shifting official US definitions), and show how the dominant conceptions that ignore state violence and repression often aim to legitimate US foreign-policy practices. Chomsky explains that the definitions available when he first started researching the subject in the early 1980s when President Reagan declared a 'war on terrorism' were generally adequate to the task, and the range of clauses inserted and/or deleted since are mostly cynical exercises designed to exclude US state actions from liability. Even so, Chomsky convincingly concludes that it is difficult for the United States not to fall foul of its own definitions.

Chapter 3: International Law and Human Rights With Richard Falk we explore the standards set by international law for the behaviour of states, with particular emphasis on US attempts to

exempt itself from liability or punishment. Falk explains how international law often acts to maintain hegemonic interests (for instance, in the way that the United Nations Security Council is set up), but also underscores the very real possibilities for a progressive counter-hegemonic turn in international law. We also discuss how the United States employs a limited concept of human rights which excludes social and economic rights, and evaluate the ideological support it receives from apparently neutral international human rights groups. Finally, we turn to the idea of terrorism, and consider how the international community's inability to agree upon a definition has impacted international law. The importance of including states and their authorised agents in any future legal definition of terrorism is stressed.

**Chapter 4: Torture as Terrorism.** Our discussion of torture with Marjorie Cohn begins with its definition in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which the United States has signed and ratified, thus making it part of its body of laws. We then discuss the more recent use of torture by US agents in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more broadly in the 'extraordinary rendition' programme, and evaluate the inability of domestic and international courts to bring those responsible to account. Other issues explored with Cohn include the connection between race and torture (with questions such as, 'Is it really easier to torture a person who is considered to be racially or culturally inferior?') intended to broaden our understanding of the horrific images which emerged from Abu Ghraib in 2004), as well as the media representations of women as both victims and perpetrators of torture. Finally, Cohn explains how the US prison system is also guilty of cruel and inhuman punishment, thus making torture part of US domestic policy.

**Chapter 5: Morality, Justification and Responsibility.** In this interview, we discuss with Ted Honderich the philosophical issues surrounding the morality of terrorism and questions of democratic responsibility. We question Honderich's understanding of state terrorism in regard to legality, and examine whether acts such as unilateral or covert intervention should be considered wrong in and of themselves. Honderich argues that they need not be, and, following consequentialist philosophical theory, insists that even self-interested, violent acts may be justified if they accord with his 'Principle of Humanity'. However, it is made clear that many US actions have not been justifiable under the rules of this principle. What is more, this is unlikely to change under the 'hierarchical democracy' of the United States, in which certain political and economic interests disproportionately control decision-making processes,

**Chapter 6: The Media Image of Terrorism.** This interview with Edward Herman examines the role played by the corporate news media in propagating dominant ideas of terrorism. In choosing to cover only particular kinds of terrorism, the media tacitly accept that state terrorism (especially by the United States) does not count. Furthermore, Herman argues, they actually contribute to terror by exaggerating terrorist threats against the United States and pushing for aggressive foreign policy, including appeals to racism and other ideological hatreds, to encourage public support. We also return to Herman and Chomsky's famous media 'Propaganda Model', first published in the 1980s, to re-evaluate its relevance in coverage of recent conflicts, particularly in light of controversies such as Abu Ghraib in Iraq.

**Chapter 7: The Discourse of Terror.** Following on from our discussion with Herman, we examine with Judith Butler the ways in which dominant visual and linguistic representations of terrorism affect public perception and debate on the subject. Butler's concept of 'framing' shows how wars and political situations may come to be understood as conflicts demanding allegiance to sides rather than principles. We also explore the psychological impacts of the discourse on terrorism, especially after 9/11, including how the state and media use fear to heighten demand for greater security and shut down critical analysis. Finally, we turn to

Guantanamo Bay, discussing the way in which it acts as a clear warning, and potential source of terror, even to US citizens.

**Chapter 8: Terrorism Studies and Academia.** In this interview, Richard Jackson explains why state terrorism is not widely researched in the academic field of terrorism studies, pointing to factors such as its development from an orthodox Cold War perspective, the lack of critical-skills teaching in universities, and the lack of institutional support for criticism of (Western) state crimes. Instead, a good academic career is defined by its adherence to predefined pathways, leading to promotion, research funding, and supplementary government or media work. For the most part, Jackson argues, it is institutional structure that guides scholars in this direction. We finish by examining the growing sub-discipline of critical terrorism studies, and evaluate the possibilities of resisting the tide.

**Chapter 9: International Financial Institutions and the Economics of Terrorism.** This interview with Patrick Bond demonstrates how US state terrorism functions in parallel with IFIs, in particular the IMF and the World Bank, to further economic objectives. Bond explains how, under US influence and behind a rhetoric of poverty reduction, these IFIs allow the global North to appropriate the resources of the South. Repressive regimes are encouraged to borrow funds (provided they act in accordance with neoliberal interests), creating a double impact - first strengthening the regime's capacity for terror, and then crippling subsequent democratic governments with a demand to service the debts incurred. Using South Africa during and after apartheid as an example, we show how a kind of economic terror has replaced direct violence in the continuing repression of Southern populations.

**Chapter 10: The Guiding Force of US Militarism.** Here we discuss with Ismael Hossein-zadeh his work on the military-industrial complex. Hossein-zadeh explains how, to a great extent, US wars, military aid, and security demands are ends in themselves, the product of an increasingly 'parasitic' imperialism allowing a global military and corporate elite to siphon off national wealth. Accordingly, he disputes various official reasons for US military interventions, both during and after the Cold War, and demonstrates the economic drives behind them. At the same time, we challenge Hossein-zadeh on the importance of other critical interpretations of US policy, most notably that of oil, in order to demonstrate a range of corporate interests competing to shape state actions.

**Chapter 11: The United States in the Middle East.** In this interview, Gilbert Achcar provides a brief history of US involvement in the Greater Middle East. We examine the importance of the US presence in the Saudi Kingdom, and its alliances with fundamentalist Islam against progressive nationalism, before moving on to US support for the dictatorship in Iran before the Islamic revolution, and the motivations behind more recent military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. A pattern emerges in which the United States has consistently sought to maintain regional control, regardless of the human cost. Achcar also emphasises the central role of oil in Middle East policy, thus forming a counterpoint to Hossein-zadeh's thesis. We feel that together these arguments highlight the complex network of influences on US political processes.

**Chapter 12: US Support for Israeli State Terror.** This interview with Norman Finkelstein deals with the history of US-Israeli relations since the beginning of their close alliance in the 1960s. We examine specific events in which the Israeli military has been responsible for committing or facilitating terrorism, such as the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon, and the 2008 invasion of Gaza. We show how continued US support, particularly with the vetoes cast to United Nations resolutions, has allowed these widely condemned acts to go unpunished,

and ask to what degree Israel is reliant on the United States, economically, ideologically, and politically. Finkelstein expertly explains how, despite its regional military dominance, Israel would be unable to maintain its aggressive stance without such consistent backing.

**Chapter 13: The United States in Latin America.** Our interview with Greg Grandin investigates a number of cases of US involvement in the horrific violence that swept through Central and South America during the Cold War. We begin with Guatemala, the United States's first full-scale intervention in that period, with Grandin explaining how the communism it sought to destroy was precisely the driving force behind the nation's progressive democracy. We next turn to the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the important lessons Castro and his comrades learned from the Guatemala experience, and how, in turn, the United States reacted to the possibility of more revolutionary Cubans by talking up nation-building social programmes on one hand, while employing stronger terror tactics on the other. Finally, we show how, in Colombia, terroristic US foreign policy continues, with a concerted effort to destroy progressive movements, long after the Cold War's end.

**Chapter 14: NATO's Secret Armies in Europe.** This interview with Daniele Ganser centres on how a network of clandestine anti-communist armies was set up in western Europe by the CIA and the British secret service MI6 (in close collaboration with NATO and other European secret military services) after the Second World War. Initially designed to build a resistance in the case of a Soviet invasion of western Europe, the network nifty developed into a force fighting internal enemies, such as communist and socialist political parties. Although no official documents have been declassified (despite repeated requests by scholars working on the subject), Ganser provides an excellent analysis of these secret armies through his knowledge of reliable secondary sources, and explains how the United States turned Europe into a secret battleground, with devastating consequences.

Cihan Aksan and Jon Bailes Nicosia, April 2012

## NOTES

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## Chapter 2

### Noam Chomsky: The Definition of Terrorism

#### How would you define terrorism?

**Noam Chomsky:** I started writing extensively on terrorism as soon as the Reagan administration came in. One of the first acts of the Reagan administration in 1981 was to declare a 'war on terror', although that has kind of been forgotten because the outcome was so horrendous; nobody wants to talk about it. The administration stated that the focal point of their foreign policy would be the war against state-directed international terrorism, which they called a return to barbarism in our time and the plague of the modern age. So I started to write about it, and I used the official definitions: the ones in the US Code, the army manuals, the British government definition. They're all pretty much the same, but essentially it is the calculated use of violence or threat of violence against civilians for the purpose of intimidation or coercion or changing government policy. It's stated more explicitly, but that's the gist of it.

But if you use that definition there is a problem. It immediately follows that the United States is one of the leading terrorist states in the world, if not *the* leading terrorist state. But that's an unacceptable conclusion for them, so the reasoning is that there must be something wrong with the definition. In fact there is a huge academic literature on terrorism, but they don't use the official definitions, and the reason they don't use them is because of this 'flaw'. So, there have been many attempts to define terrorism, and discussions about whether it is definable, how it can be defined, and so on. But the basic problem is quite simple: it's necessary to find a definition of terrorism that will include *their* terror against *us*, but exclude *our* terror against *them*, and that is a difficult, if not impossible, task. So you have elaborate literature trying to define terror, basically to overcome this problem.

But if you look at the US record, the kindest judgement is that it is a record of terrorism. Maybe a more accurate judgement is that it's a record of aggression, which is a much more serious crime than terror. For example, take the state that has been the target of more terror than any other in the world, maybe more than all of them put together: Cuba. Within a few months of the Castro government taking over, the Eisenhower administration had a formal, internal plan to overthrow it, and the planes started bombing Cuba. Then Kennedy came in shortly after, and there was the Bay of Pigs invasion. When that failed, the Kennedy administration became hysterical. The internal records describe how they couldn't deal with the fact that this small country, which had been the first target of US foreign policy back in the 1820s, was refusing orders and beating back an invasion. So, Washington initiated a programme of terror, and it wasn't even hidden internally. The assignment to run the campaign was given to Robert Kennedy and he took it as his highest priority. According to his biographer, Arthur Schlesinger, the Kennedy administration historian, he said the goal was to bring 'the terrors of the Earth' to Cuba. And if you look at the record it was pretty ugly: murders, sabotage, attacking ships in the Cuban harbour, probably even biological warfare attacks. It peaked with the blowing up of the Cubana airliner in 1976, killing 75 people or so. The perpetrators are known; in fact they are living happily in Florida, although one, Orlando Bosch, died in April 2011.

#### **So this is not considered as the harbouring of terrorists, which is what the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was accused of?**

**NC:** It's interesting because according to the Bush Doctrine those who harbour terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists themselves. There is no question that the United States is harbouring terrorists. To begin with, for a long time, terrorism was carried out by CIA agents, but later it was farmed out to people like Bosch and others in Florida. That they were terrorists was not in question. During the first Bush administration, the Justice Department wanted to deport Bosch

because they said that he was a terrorist who was a threat to the security of the United States. The Justice Department and the FBI listed about 30 acts of terror committed by him, but Bush pardoned him.

It's a sort of point of principle that you don't investigate your own crimes. So we don't know how many people were killed in Vietnam, for example. On the other hand in, say, Kosovo, every bit of earth is uncovered to see if you can find a bone that could be attributed to a Serb crime. In East Timor at the same time there was great care to assure that there would be no serious investigation of crimes for which we shared primary responsibility. In fact, in 1984 the US was brought to the World Court on a charge of either terror or aggression against Nicaragua - to be nice to the United States, let's call it terror.<sup>1</sup> The case was presented by a distinguished Harvard University international lawyer, but most of it was thrown out for straightforward reasons: when the United States accepted the jurisdiction of the World Court in 1946, it added a reservation that the United States cannot be charged under any international treaty, which includes the UN Charter, which bans the use of force in international affairs except under conditions that certainly do not apply to the US war against Nicaragua, or the OAS Charter, which bans any interference in any country of the hemisphere. So the United States is immune to international treaties. The Nicaragua case nevertheless went through on very narrow grounds. The court had to consider just the bilateral treaty between Nicaragua and the United States and common international law. And on those narrow grounds they charged the United States with 'unlawful use of force', which is either terror or aggression, depending on how you see it.<sup>2</sup>

**Doesn't this undermine the argument that some scholars put forth, that it's unnecessary to define state terrorism or make laws against it, because state agents have alternative liabilities like War Crimes Tribunals?**

**NC:** They have liabilities only if they accept jurisdiction. The United States does not. In fact, the United States is self-authorized to carry out genocide. That actually came to the World Court. In the case that Yugoslavia brought against ten NATO countries in 1999, one of the charges was genocide. The United States withdrew from the case, and the court accepted that,<sup>3</sup> because when the United States signed the genocide convention, after 40 years, it added a reservation excluding the United States. In fact, in international agreements generally - the enabling conventions for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and so on - the United States always adds a reservation excluding themselves. The United States does not surrender sovereignty, in courts or for anybody else.

**Let's return to the official US definitions of terrorism. The one you quoted earlier was from the US Army Manual.**

**NC:** That's the brief one; there's a longer one in the US code.

**Yes, the US code 22, section 2656 f (d): 'terrorism means premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents'.<sup>4</sup>**

**NC:** That's a later one, that's not the one I quoted. The one I quoted has nothing about subnational groups. Because remember that Reagan was claiming to be carrying out a war against state-directed terrorism. But when it became understood that the original definition also implicated the United States, they used their various tricks to try to get around it, and one of them was to restrict it to subnational groups.

**Also the definition refers to 'clandestine agents', but most state terror isn't clandestine, so that appears to exclude state terrorism too.**

**NC:** That's the idea. There is a problem as I said that you cannot have a definition which applies to the United States, so this is one of many devices to try to get around it. That's a revision.

**So you would not use the US Code definition as it stands?**

**NC:** I wouldn't, but in fact the US government doesn't either. That's why it has a list of states allegedly supporting terror, which have to be punished. Like Iran right now, which is accused of being a major sponsor of terrorism.

**The current list of 'state sponsors of terrorism' according to the US State Department is Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Syria.**

**NC:** What is interesting is that, in 1982, Reagan wanted to support Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran, and they gave lavish aid to fight the war. In order to do that they had to remove Iraq from the list of states supporting terror because there is congressional legislation saying you can't give aid to such states. So they had a gap on the list, and they put in Cuba in recognition of the fact that it was the main target of terrorism. The cynicism of this is just indescribable.

Also during the 1980s, Reagan was supporting South Africa, which was by then already in violation of congressional sanctions that they had to get around. There was a UN study later which estimated that about a million and a half people were killed by South African atrocities just in Mozambique and Angola, not to speak of South Africa, and the US administration was supporting the apartheid regime. In 1988 the Pentagon declared the African National Congress was one of the 'more notorious terrorist groups' in the world; in fact Nelson Mandela was only removed from the terrorist list in 2008.

**Perhaps we could look at the definition closely and focus on the meaning of 'innocents', 'civilians', or 'non-combatants'. Some scholars refuse to use the word 'innocent' because it opens up too many more questions. For instance, how do you define the guilt or innocence of a victim, or if terrorism is simply about killing innocents how is it different from murder?**

**NC:** OK, let's take that. In October 2010, for example, there was a major trial under the revised Military Commissions Act of a young man, Omar Ahmed Khadr, who was 15 years old when he was captured and charged with killing an American soldier invading his country, Afghanistan. And he was charged with terror. He spent a year in Bagram, then seven more in Guantanamo Bay. Finally he was given a choice: plead guilty and serve eight more years, or plead innocent and the roof will fall in.

**The term 'non-combatant' is also interesting as it is stretched to include a soldier when he or she is not actively engaged in combat.**

**NC:** Non-combatant means somebody who Ed Herman refers to as a 'worthy victim', which is somebody on our side. Whereas if we attack somebody else, they are combatants or terrorists.

**Who should count as a civilian then, if we focus on that word? Particularly thinking about state terrorism, if we restrict the definition to civilians, what about non-civilians**

**such as members of the armed forces or police officers within a country or even members of armed resistance? Would they be legitimate targets?**

**NC:** That raises another question. If you invade another country, is the resistance to your invasion terrorist? So, for example, was George Washington's army terrorist after they uncontroversially carried out all sorts of acts of terrorism? The fact they were withstanding a foreign occupation means we would not consider that terrorism. And, for example, the United States and the West do not say that the USA was engaged in terrorism in Afghanistan in the 1980s, because it was supporting resistance to the Russian invasion. They say, 'Well, it was an invasion, people have the right to resist.' But it doesn't work the other way round. I mean, say, when Israel invades Lebanon, it's the Lebanese who are terrorists.

**What about if it's not an invasion? Take Chile, for example, and the kidnap and murder of General Rene Schneider, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean army, to clear the way for the military coup. Or if we think about Turkey, throughout the 70s and 80s, where army and police officers were also arrested and tortured. There was also armed resistance by people who called themselves an army, and therefore they wouldn't have considered themselves non-combatants. So was the fact that they were tortured, murdered and massacred still terrorism?**

**NC:** But we are talking about a different phenomenon, we are talking about something internal to the state.

**But the US was supporting that, so was it funding terrorism, if the targets were what we would regard as non-civilians?**

**NC:** I would say so. But it's not as clear a case as the ones I mentioned. I feel in this discussion it would make sense to keep to the crystal-clear cases, but there are a lot of ambiguous cases. The only respect in which the ones I mentioned are not crystal clear is that we are bending over backwards to give the benefit of the doubt to the United States by calling it terror. The more natural definition for many of these cases is aggression.

**How would you distinguish terrorism from aggression?**

**NC:** Aggression, which is reasonably well defined in international law, if you believe international law and the Nuremburg judgement, is the supreme international crime, which differs from other war crimes in that it includes all the consequences that follow. So, for example, in the *New York Times* there was an article about the revival of sectarian conflict in Iraq, which says that sectarian conflict is one of the consequences of democratisation.<sup>5</sup> It's not a consequence of democratisation. It's a consequence of the cruel, vicious occupation, where the leadership should be hanged according to the standards of Nuremburg. But that's not discussable in the mainstream media. Let's take Iran. The worst threat at the moment is supposed to be the Iranian threat, so that is the leading focus of foreign policy. That's accepted in the United States and in Europe, which is a kind of vassal of the United States, virtually without comment. So it does raise the question of exactly what the Iranian threat is. Actually, we have an authoritative answer to that, but there isn't any discussion and it's never cited. Every year the Pentagon and the intelligence agencies present an analysis to Congress of the global security situation. The most explicit recent report is from April 2010 (a later one is less specific and adds nothing new). It says there is really no military threat from Iran. Iran has very low military spending even by the standards of the region, and only limited capacity to deploy force abroad. Iran's strategic doctrine is designed to deter an invasion; to try and hold back an

invasion long enough so that diplomacy can set in. The analysis says that if Iran is developing a nuclear capability, it would be part of their deterrent strategy. And of course the reason they have a deterrent strategy is that two countries on their borders are occupied by a brutal, vicious, hostile superpower which is constantly threatening an attack (which is a violation of the UN Charter, if anybody cares). Obama especially is building up offensive forces, so if anyone in the world needs a deterrent, Iran does.

So the US official estimate is that if Iran is developing a nuclear capability, it would be for deterrence, so there is essentially no military threat. But then the report goes on to say Iran is the major threat in the world. Why? Well, primarily because they might be a deterrent to the free resort to force by the US and its clients. And furthermore, they are trying to extend their influence into neighbouring countries. So if we invade the neighbouring countries and occupy them, that is called stabilisation, but if they try to extend their influence, say in Iraq and Afghanistan, the latter in a traditional area of Iranian influence, that's destabilisation. One of the crimes they are charged with is supporting the resistance in Iraq. Whether they did actually support it or didn't support it, I think the whole thing is surreal - we invade a country, and somebody else is charged with supporting the resistance. Once aggression takes place, the discussion is in a different dimension because that is such a severe crime anything else pales beside it.

**Just to go back to one of the other definitions, in the *US Army Manual* it actually says that terrorism is 'intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies', and that 'terrorists usually pursue political, religious, or ideological goals'.<sup>6</sup> Is there any reason for distinguishing ideological or religious from political goals? Aren't all state terrorist goals political?**

**NC:** To give you the honest truth I don't really see much point in that because the definitions are political acts. Going back to what you're quoting, which is probably the late 70s or early 80s, terrorism was given the obvious definition. It was in the 80s that they had to re-craft it, redesign it so you could sort of parse that and ask whether it was ideological or religious or different. But what it really means is that something we don't like is terrorism.

It's the same story with aggression. For example, when the Kennedy administration invaded South Vietnam in 1962, Adlai Stevenson, the UN representative at the time, said they were defending Vietnam from 'internal aggression', and Kennedy added they were defending it from 'the assault from within'. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had given their own definition of aggression, which included unarmed aggression, namely by political warfare. So if there's a political party which is not doing what the state wants, then by US standards that's aggression, the worst international crime which justifies anything in self-defence. If we were on Mars looking at this, we'd figure it was a comic strip, it's so ridiculous. But it has to be taken seriously by elite opinion; the task is to create some kind of ideological structure which will justify state crimes.

**Some definitions also mention social objectives as well as political ones. Is that not effectively leaving the definition open to almost any interpretation?**

**NC:** If you take that definition literally and you're serious about it, it completely falls apart. What follows is that the most powerful states, like the United States, are the worst terrorist states.

Take the US sanctions against Iran. There was an interesting document - it doesn't have official status but it is important - by five former top NATO generals, denning what the strategies should be, and their recommendations for a strike and so on.<sup>7</sup> They also had a definition of 'acts of war', and one of the acts of war that they defined was threats to the financial system. Well, the US is trying to force all financial institutions out of Iran with threats; it's threatening to close

off the American market to those who violate US unilateral sanctions against Iran. So that's an act of war according to Western concepts. Obviously, they don't say that.

One important example is the pressure on Belgian-based SWIFT, the international communication centre for international banks, demanding that they exclude Iran, an unprecedented step. As always, the US arrogates the right to dictate to others, including international institutions, what they must do. No other state can do so, and others must obey or there are sharp penalties. Another example is China, which observes the UN sanctions on Iran, which are pretty toothless, but does not observe the US sanctions, which have absolutely no status. But even though the US has no right to issue international sanctions, the State Department issued stern warnings to China - if they want to be accepted into the international community, they have to meet international responsibilities, namely to obey US sanctions. And within imperial ideology that makes sense. Essentially it says, 'Look, we own the world, and we decide what your responsibilities are. And you meet them, or else you're in trouble.' And the imperial ideology is so deeply rooted that Westerners can't even see this.

**Would you distinguish conceptually between non-state terrorism and state terrorism? There are those who argue that they are conceptually different, and therefore equating them just spreads confusion. I am talking about people like Walter Laqueur, who's no fan of yours. How do you respond to that?**

**NC:** Of course, they're different, but there are other kinds of terrorism which are also different.

**Do they require different definitions then?**

**NC:** They don't require different definitions. Any definition you have is going to have many different types of action that fall under it.

**So it's a matter of all the actions sharing core characteristics?**

**NC:** That's right. Now Laqueur, who is a very strong advocate of terrorism - he thinks it's wonderful - has to find a definition of terrorism that meets the primary condition of excluding the states that he serves and incorporating anything they don't like. And that's the same difficult problem I mentioned earlier. But it doesn't make sense to take any of this seriously. It's like asking Iranian clerics what they say about terrorism. Who cares?

**I want to quote from your book, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*: 'The basic fact is that the United States has organised under its sponsorship and protection a neo-colonial system of client states ruled mainly by terror and serving the interests of a small local and foreign business and military elite.'<sup>18</sup> This was written in 1979. Would you say that this is still the case?**

**NC:** It's there, but it's a little harder to spell out the details. The world has become more diverse. So, for example, a lot of that book was about Latin America and Indochina, and we didn't fully know how terrible things had been there at the time; a great deal has come out since. Some of it is really mind-blowing. But the US can no longer do what they did in Latin America. Latin America, just in the last ten years, has drifted out of US control. Take, say, Brazil. The first major national security state, or neo-Nazi terrorist state, in Latin America was installed in Brazil in 1964 where there was a military coup that overthrew the democratic government, organised by the Kennedy administration. Actually, the coup took place shortly after the Kennedy assassination, but the groundwork was laid by Kennedy. It was a pretty awful terrorist state. And

so the wheels were in place, and that was when the dominoes started to fall. There was this huge plague of repression all over Latin America, ending up in South America with Argentina, which was Reagan's favourite, the worst of the terrorist states. And then it centred in Central America, after this long period. But the government that the US overthrew in Brazil - the Goulart government - was not all that different from Lula's. At that point if anyone dared make policies that went against US liberals like Kennedy, we'd say, 'OK, time to institute a neo-Nazi state.' But in the case of Lula, he was their fair-haired boy, most of the time. But it's not that the attitudes have changed, it's just that the capacity to overthrow governments has changed. Take, say, military coups. In the last decade the US has been involved in three. The first was in Venezuela, where the US quite openly backed the forces that overthrew the government and kicked out the president, but it was overturned and he returned in a couple of days after an uprising that reversed the coup. The second was in Haiti, where France and the United States, the two traditional torturers of Haiti, moved in and basically invaded and kidnapped the president and sent him off to central Africa. For years the US insisted that he never must be allowed to return and his party must be excluded from elections. The reason is that he would almost certainly win. Finally they permitted him to return, but barred his party from elections, presumably for the same reason. The third coup was in Honduras. There was a military coup that threw out the president. At first the US joined the international condemnation, tepidly to be sure, but slowly it shifted position and became one of the few countries to recognise the coup regime, ignoring the crimes it committed and the destruction of Honduran democracy. The US then supported an election under the coup regime.

Venezuela of course is one of the main targets of Western demonisation. Take, for example an article in the *New York Times* by Simon Romero, their Latin American correspondent, about the terrible homicide rate in Venezuela. Of course it is pretty bad - it's safer to be in Iraq than in Venezuela - but the idea is, 'Look what a demon Chavez is!'<sup>9</sup> What he didn't bother saying is that by far the worst rate of homicide in Latin America is in Honduras, the second is in El Salvador, and the third is Jamaica. So, yes, Venezuela is high, but there are a few other things to say.

**So it's as though murder in Venezuela is directly related to Chavez, but in Honduras it's just something that happens?**

**NC:** Yes, it's just the 'Latin American temperament'.

**Do we still need a definition of terrorism after all this?**

**NC:** I think the early definitions in the US Code and Army Manuals and British law are pretty good definitions.

**But again, don't those definitions contradict each other?**

**NC:** In detail, but you have to be careful about the concept of definition. Even in mathematics, definitions came along only when they were needed to advance understanding. Take, say, the concept of proof, which is essential to mathematics. There wasn't really a clear definition of it until about a century ago. All the great mathematics was done with just an intuitive concept of proof. If you take a look at Newton, his work on calculus was internally contradictory. So, for example, in one line of the proof, zero would mean zero and then a couple of lines later zero would mean as small as possible. That's not the same thing. It was pointed out that the proofs just didn't follow through. But there was an interesting split at that time - the British mathematicians tried to fix up the definitions and didn't get anywhere because not enough was understood, whereas the European mathematicians ignored the contradictions and created the

great mathematics. They were working with self-contradictory notions; they knew it but they just went ahead. Finally by the mid-nineteenth century, things had reached a point where you really needed a clear concept, so leading mathematicians developed the notion of limit clearly and provided a good definition which is the one that you learn in graduate school today.

But the point is, even in mathematics definitions come along when you need them. You can't take the terms of domestic or international affairs, or any human affairs, and give them clear definitions. Definitions are internal to explanatory theories and short of a real explanatory theory, which we just don't have for any aspect of human affairs, there's not much point in truly sharpening a concept.

**What about for legal purposes? Should there not be a precise definition of terrorism for legislation and punishment?**

**NC:** The definitions in legal systems are very far from precise, in the technical sense. They are supposed to be good enough for the purposes at hand.

**You say in *Perilous Power* the task is not necessarily 'to find a sharp definition but to identify a concept'.<sup>10</sup>**

**NC:** Clear enough for the purpose at hand. But to try and sharpen them up would be like doing an experiment to the seventeenth decimal place, when you don't understand the second decimal place. You do things to the point where they contribute to understanding. In the case of terrorism, the early definitions are perfectly adequate to the situations we have. Though ever since there has been this huge project to try to find a new definition because the consequence of the official definitions is unacceptable. But it's nothing that people on the outside should take seriously. We should understand the social and political meaning of these efforts to develop a notion of terrorism which will apply to them but not to us.

**The US Department of State currently lists, as we said earlier, Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria as state sponsors of terrorism. If you were compiling your own list, who would be on it?**

**NC:** The United States would be on top of the list. Britain would maybe be second. France is high up there, and so is Israel. With Israel, take, say, the Mavi Marmara crime, which is by no means the worst act of terror, but it was piracy, kidnapping in international waters and brutal murder. If Cuba had done that, we'd practically have a nuclear war. But in this case, it's just defence. And in fact what's rarely discussed is that Israel has been doing this for 30 years. They've been hijacking boats in international waters between Cyprus and Lebanon - killing, kidnapping, and taking people to prisons in Israel. Some of them are kept as hostages for long periods; they have disappeared into the Israeli secret prison system and we don't know what's happened to them. But it's all authorised by the godfather, namely the US, so therefore it's OK. And if you want to be honest about the talk about wars and definitions and so on, although we shouldn't dismiss it, as it's of some interest, the fact of the matter is that international affairs are run like a mafia. The godfather decides what counts, and the intellectual classes are there to justify it.

## NOTES

1. See International Court of Justice, 'Case Concerning the Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (*Nicaragua v. United States of America*)', <<http://tinyurl.com/y5tn5s4>>.
2. Ibid.
3. International Court of Justice, 'Case Concerning Legality of Use of Force (*Yugoslavia v. United States of America*) (Provisional Measures)', <<http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/114/14129.pdf>>.
4. US Congress, 'US Code, Title 22, Section 2656f (d)', <<http://tinyurl.com/6m5f532>>.
5. Steven Lee Myers, 'Iraqi Festival Falls Prey to the Forces of Democracy', *New York Times*, 4 October 2010.
6. *Operations: US Army Field Manual*, FM 3-0, 9-37, 14 June 2001, <<http://tinyurl.com/cuod9w2>>.
7. Klaus Naumann, John Shalikashvili, et al., 'Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World', <<http://tinyurl.com/f5t3ttce>>.
8. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism: The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume I* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1979), p.ix.
9. Simon Romero, 'Venezuela, More Deadly Than Iraq, Wonders Why', *New York Times*, 22 August 2010.
10. Noam Chomsky and Gilbert Achcar, *Perilous Power: The Middle East and US Foreign Policy* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007), p.5.

## Chapter 6

### Edward S. Herman: The Media Image of Terrorism

**Margaret Thatcher referred to publicity as the oxygen of terrorism, and this is quite a widely accepted idea; the implication being that terrorism requires mass media coverage to gain support, legitimacy, and sympathy. What would you make of this point in regards to state terrorism?**

**Edward Herman:** First, I should note that Mrs Thatcher's point is very misleading. For one thing it obscures the fact that terrorists often resort to violence, and seek publicity, in response to grievances of marginalised and weak people that cannot be addressed through the mainstream media or existing political or judicial processes. So they may need that publicity 'oxygen' to gain desperately needed attention and to breathe at all. A second point that Mrs Thatcher evades is that the state often uses the terrorism of the weak (which I have labelled 'retail terrorism', as opposed to 'wholesale' - large-scale - terrorism, carried out by the state) in order to create fear, so as to divert the population from unpopular economic policies or to justify the abridgement of civil liberties and arms build-ups and war. The George W. Bush administration in the United States was notorious for regularly using terrorist scares for electoral advantage or to justify some military or political action, scares that were in virtually every case based on trivial, out-of-date, or manufactured incidents. It is also not true that retail terrorist actions usually create support or legitimise those who engage in them - almost always the publicity given to the terrorists is negative and their cause is not advanced by these acts.<sup>1</sup>

State terrorism may be used either at home or to pacify people abroad, the latter often done indirectly through proxy forces. If a state is using terror to crush its own people, it needs to make the threat known to the populace to make them acquiesce through fear. So in this case a certain amount of publicity 'oxygen' would serve state terror, although the state may deny and limit information on its terror in order to avoid damaging publicity abroad. At home not much publicity may be required, given that policy actions, such as people being shot or dragged out of houses and 'disappeared', and word-of-mouth information flows, may suffice to alert and terrorise the populace.

Where state terrorism is carried out abroad, directly or through foreign proxies, publicity in the home country is of course undesirable. Supporting state terrorism abroad, if described honestly, would be deemed immoral, so truthful publicity would be avoided by the state and discouraged for the media. The publicity itself would be deemed 'unpatriotic', and in the case of the Reagan administration's support of the terrorising Guatemala government in the 1980s, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were harshly condemned by administration officials for alleged exaggeration, but also for providing aid to the enemy insurgents and populace under terrorist siege.<sup>2</sup>

State terrorism, direct or through proxy, is also defended by claiming that it is not terrorism at all but 'retaliation' or 'counter-terrorism'. By this means the real terrorism is ignored or explained away, and the publicity serving as 'oxygen' is the actions of the retail terrorists or resistance to the wholesale terrorism. In short, the state terrorism is kept in low key as regards publicity, and greater attention and indignation is given to those supposedly inducing the retaliation. By this means US sponsorship of a system of National Security States in Latin America between the 1950s and the 1980s, with a huge rise of death squads and organised torture, was given little publicity, and the US image of opposing terrorism was successfully maintained. It may be noted that the Argentinean military regime of 1976-83, which was supported by the United States, was allowed by the US mainstream media to be fighting 'terrorism', but not to be engaging in terrorism itself. But following the ousting of that regime an Alfonsín government-appointed 'National Commission on Disappeared Persons' concluded that 'the armed forces responded to the terrorists' crimes with a terrorism infinitely worse than that which they were combating'. But this was *ex post facto*, and this important estimate of relative terrorisms was barely mentioned and never reflected on in the mainstream media of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

**Do the media play a role in spreading terror (perhaps we could say terrifying as opposed to terrorising) when it comes to coverage of terror attacks against the US and its allies? Do they help to promote anti-US terrorist aims in this regard, or US interests?**

**EH:** The media play a key role in producing fear in the case of actual or allegedly threatened terrorist attacks. In fact, they play such a role perhaps most importantly on the basis of alleged *plans* of terrorist attacks. There have been very few foreign-sponsored terrorist attacks against the United States - in fact, none within the United States itself since 9/11. But there have been numerous claims of plots that never materialised, and which were often disclosed just in time to meet some kind of political need (an election, a planned escalation of a war). The Bush administration's political successes were built heavily on this willingness to use alleged terrorist threats to make 'security' a major issue and to suggest Bush's prowess in meeting these threats. In a number of cases the evidence of the plot was stale or the plot was clearly encouraged by paid government informers,<sup>4</sup> but the plots and threats are invariably treated seriously and intensively by the mainstream media. The media cooperate because this is cheap and easy 'news' that feeds into already conventional and institutionalised fears, and the media do not want to be charged with excessive liberalism or lack of patriotic ardour.

The United States has evolved into a permanent war economy and polity, and the media are an integral part of this system. Stoking fear and normalising war in the minds of the public are essential to justifying the enormous outlays of the permanent war system; the government, both major political parties, and the media simply take that spending for granted and do not debate the trade-offs involved. The permanent war system has been relabelled a 'war on terrorism', but this is ideology and propaganda. It is arguably a war 'of terrorism - of state terrorism fighting against recalcitrant states or insurgents quickly labelled terrorists, often brought into action by the primary terrorism. So yes, the policies and media actually provoke terrorism. This serves some US interests, but not that of the underlying population which bears the human and economic costs of militarisation and permanent warfare, just as it does the costs of the recent and ongoing economic crisis.

**How do you see the relationship between 'mainstream' news media coverage of terrorism (at home and abroad) and the US government? Do the media influence government decisions and policy (the so-called 'CNN effect')? Does the government gain more leverage to dictate what should and should not be reported under a threat of terrorism?**

**EH:** The mainstream media are part of a closely integrated corporate and political system, and they consistently serve as a propaganda arm of the state on foreign policy issues. There is in fact a steady revolving door between news media personnel and government foreign policy agencies, and there is a class and structural commonality and a sharing of interests that profoundly affect media performance. The United States is now an openly imperial power, projecting power across the globe with its huge military establishment and its global system of bases, and through its domination of a reinvigorated NATO. The media follow in the wake of this expansionism.

There is no doubt an interactive process at work between government and media, with the media sometimes affecting government responses, usually pushing it toward more aggressive external actions, especially with the increased importance of the right-wing media. We should perhaps speak more of a 'Murdoch-Fox effect' rather than a 'CNN effect', although both tend to push the government in the same (readier resort to force) direction. There is also little doubt that the fear of terrorism, or rather fear of appearing soft on terrorism and insufficiently hard on terrorists, gives the government more leverage both to suppress information and to publish information that is highly problematic and doesn't pass the smell test.

The Wikileaks disclosure of vast details on the United States's death and torture dealing in Iraq, and the media's response to these revelations, have been enlightening. For one thing, much of the material made available was of events and decisions that the media shouldn't have missed if they were serving the public interest. For another thing, the major media treated this disclosure too briefly, too selectively (often stressing claims of Iranian intervention in Iraq), and with hostility, assailing and denigrating the author, Julian Assange. This led one commentator to note that whereas Nixon had had to organise an attempt to discredit Dan Ellsberg, who with the help of the *New York Times* released the Pentagon Papers in 1971, in 2010 the media itself, led by the *New York Times*, took on that attack-dog responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

**Would you go as far as to say that, in some cases, the media has pushed harder than the government for military intervention? Are we talking about the kind of influence which could drum up demand for action that could force the government's hand in a case where it might not otherwise intervene militarily?**

**EH:** The government is often far from united in decision making on war, and it is true that the media may strengthen the hand of one or another decision-making faction. It is also true that

there is a long history of media pushing hard for military intervention or creating the moral environment in which it happens. This is still true in the cases of Iran and Syria where the mainstream media have been either pushing for war or making it easier to do so by featuring and demonising the target governments. The *New York Times* has had almost daily articles about civilian victims of government action in Syria, showing not only crowds of people protesting but more pictures of dead bodies within a few weeks than they have shown of dead Palestinians or Afghans over the past decade.

**If fear of the Soviet threat was the greatest weapon for gaining public consent for military interventions and sponsorship of state terror during the Cold War, during the 1990s we had a period in which the more positive narrative of 'humanitarian intervention' became dominant. Yet after 9/11 the media and government have both seemed all too keen to abandon that and again adopt the threat narrative. Is terror an important part of US democracy?**

**EH:** It is true that 'humanitarian intervention' and 'responsibility to protect' took something of a back seat after 9/11, when al-Qaeda, Afghanistan and the Taliban, and the new 'war on terror' rose to top propaganda service. 9/11 was a 'big bang', a new 'Pearl Harbor' that the war party had longed for and got in September 2001. It has been used relentlessly, and actually has provided the basis for a new 'war of terror', capped recently by the US administration's declaration of the right to kill 'terrorists' anywhere by administrative-military fiat. This in effect makes the entire world a US 'free-fire zone', and also, in effect, a global terrorist state.

But it should also be noted that 'humanitarian intervention' and R2P (responsibility to protect) are not dead, and made a major comeback in the run-up to the NATO war on Libya, justified in PR and by the UN and ICC authorities by the need to protect Libyan civilians. Similar arguments, and a huge volume of selective government-media propaganda are being used to push for international intervention in Syria - but not in Yemen, Saudi Arabia or Palestine!

**So, in general has there been a shift away from the rhetoric of 'war on terror', at least tentatively, under Obama and after the publicity failure of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars? Indeed, have the so-called Arab Spring and the 'humanitarian' justification for intervention in Libya forced a change in narrative? In other words, has 'terrorism' as an idea lost any of its propagandistic purchase?**

**EH:** These are all verbal weapons of propaganda that move into and out of service depending on circumstances. The 'war on terror' would not easily apply to the Arab Spring cases, unless one were to oppose state terror, which the West could not do as the terrorists in leading governments like those of Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Yemen were our old allies. But humanitarian intervention and R2P could be used, discretely and selectively, against Arab governments engaging in repression who are on the Western hit list. This has worked very well, with the important cooperation of repressive Arab governments who are Western allies. The Western media have also done a fine job of playing dumb on this selectivity, inflating the charges against the hit-list governments and ignoring the very substantial civilian costs of supporting the 'resistance' (often yesterday's 'terrorists').

But 'terrorism' is still very much in the Western propaganda arsenal and is even now employed to justify drone and secret operations murders in the global free-fire zone.

**In *The Politics of Genocide* you describe the history of crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and genocide as showing 'the centrality of racism to the imperial project'.<sup>6</sup> But is there any racial motivation in US state and state sponsored terror where the only discernible pattern seems to be military and economic interests? Is,**

**for example, the anti-Arab Muslim slant in certain state and media discourse any more than the propaganda designed to legitimise terrorism by demonising the Other?**

**EH:** It is perhaps an axiom of human affairs that when one group inflicts great suffering and harm upon another, the perpetrator group automatically regards the victim group as somehow inferior, and less good or less human than the perpetrator. Even if it could be shown that 100 per cent of a state's conquest and subjugation of another territory or group was driven solely by its interests in stealing the oil or rare mineral deposits from that territory's inhabitants, no conquest and subjugation would occur without the perpetrator group convincing itself of the justness and Tightness of its actions. Throughout history, this has meant that the subjugated group must become an incarnation of everything the conqueror is not - that is, the racial, ethnic religious, or 'civilisational' inferior of the conqueror.

Racism was not the main motivation in the long history of colonial conquest and the slave trade, but with the white North technologically more advanced than the non-white South, conquest, exploitation, enslavement, and extermination were practicable and highly profitable, and racial differences were quickly made the basis for contempt, hatred, and mistreatment. It is easier to treat harshly people who have been converted into some equivalent of the US Declaration of Independence's 'merciless Indian savages'. As John Ellis has noted: 'At best, the Europeans regarded those they slaughtered [in Africa] with amused contempt.'<sup>17</sup>

Racism is also not a main motivator in today's anti-Arab Muslim campaigns in the West, as the West has excellent relations with 'well-behaved' Arab Muslims such as the Saudis, Kuwaitis, and Egyptians on the US dole (Mubarak for decades, and the Egyptian military leaders), and even Saddam Hussein in the years before his invasion of Kuwait. It is even a bit awkward to have segments of the media and political leadership engage in general accusations about the terroristic proclivities of Muslims and Koran-bashing with so many friends in the Arab and broader Muslim world. But given the Western warfare against Arabs in the Middle East and Africa, along with Muslims in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, and Arab and Muslim resistance and responsive terrorism, it was inevitable that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim demonisation would take hold in the West and make it easier to slaughter their civilian populations.

One other factor that has been of some importance is that Israel has been striving for years to dispossess Palestinians in the interest of a greater Israel. To provide the moral justifications for this systematic ethnic cleansing, the portrayal of Palestinians and Arabs as terrorists is helpful. Ditto for demonising the Iraqis and Iranians. Israeli influence has caused this to be fed into the Western political media views about Arabs.

**But is it really *inevitable* that racial demonisation takes hold in such circumstances? For example, did it play a part, say, against Latin Americans when US hostilities were centred there? Is it not that a particular racism like that against Arabs and Muslims either has to be already present culturally, or needs to be deliberately incited by the media?**

**EH:** It certainly emerged in the colonial period, but not so much in more recent times because we were always fighting on the side of the local elites, not combating and enslaving the entire population. As I mentioned, the Israeli interest in mobilising Western sentiment toward justifying anti-Arab warfare has probably been important, and the US vested interests in permanent war have also found anti-Muslim and anti-Arab demonisation useful. The politicians and media follow in the wake of these powerful initiators.

**So are we talking about racism as an *effect* of imperial expansionism - an attempt to rationalise it where other rationalisations are absent - rather than a *cause*, with the media playing an important role in this process?**

**EH:** That is putting it too strongly and making it too calculated. There probably was some element of racism in Western imperial expansion and colonialism from the beginning, and it grew along with the imperial process of conquest, so was in a sense continually causing it, or making it more easily justified throughout the entire process of conquest and occupation.

**Your 'Propaganda Model', first published in 1988, explains how media are filtered to make criticism of the established system less likely, through ownership, funding, sourcing, flak and dominant political ideology.<sup>8</sup> Do you think there have been any breakthroughs in media coverage that go against the model in recent years? Do criticism of Iraq, the Abu Ghraib photos, stories about rendition flights, and so on add up to any kind of change in media approach?**

**EH:** *No* - there haven't been any 'breakthroughs in media coverage that go against the model in recent years'. In fact, the extent to which the media collaborated with the Bush administration in the run-up to the Iraq War in 2003, in the face of massive street protests on the part of ordinary citizens, was a media regression from the Vietnam War experience. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* both semi-apologised for their failures of 2002-03, but they had hardly finished these when they were doing the same in preparing the public for a possible war against Iran. As I noted above, some important elements of the media have even taken over the task of protecting the war-makers from exposures like that of Wikileaks by serving as enforcers assailing the authors of such efforts.

It should also be stressed that the Propaganda Model rests on structural facts, and these have, on balance, tended to reinforce the applicability of the model. The media have become more centralised, competition for advertising has intensified, sourcing has become even more focused on power centres that can provide news cheaply and whose claims require less investigative expense, and the flak of those power centres has become more sophisticated and compelling. Flak from within the media has become more important with the rise of Fox and greater importance of right-wing blogs and talk shows. The possible offset in Internet modes of communication has not materialised in practice, much of it dominated by mainstream media, right-wing blogs, diversionary social media, and small, underfunded and fragmented non-right-wing entities. As regards ideology, anticommunism retains some force, free-market ideology has grown greatly in importance with the decline of social democracy and the increase in inequality and consolidation of upper-class power, and permanent warfare under US and NATO auspices has made for quiescence in the West.

**So how does something like, say, Abu Ghraib, go from being ignored to becoming a major news story? What do you see as the conditions and limits on such critical coverage that stops it from contradicting overall support for the war?**

**EH:** The Iraq War was major news, and serious torture by US forces, with dramatic pictures, could not be indefinitely avoided any more than the My Lai Massacre could be kept under the rug in another war that commanded lots of attention. In both cases the evidence was ignored for many months. Even in the Soviet Union nasty things coming out of Afghanistan couldn't be entirely kept out of the media, and the Soviet secretary of defence complained bitterly about the media's unpatriotic behaviour.<sup>9</sup> But the media in both places are 'patriotic' and follow and emphasise a party line that features the positives, the benign intent of the government, and Abu Ghraib as a regrettable deviation, and the evil intent and acts of the enemy.

**So, we might say the limit of criticism is the point at which particular events might be connected as examples of something more universal - that can't be done?**

**EH:** I believe it can't be done. The elements of the propaganda model that make elite opinion prevail and allow elite decisions to fend off challenge are stronger than in 1988. The permanent war economy is more firmly entrenched, money-dominated elections are assured, and connecting critical points into a universal for the majority is not on the cards.

**You mentioned the 'semi-apologies' of certain media organisations for their war support leading up to Iraq. Indeed, there is an interesting narrative that has become popular in the more 'liberal' media, almost using the devastation of 9/11 as an excuse - the idea that the government was given more leeway than usual due to the shock of the events, and more critical journalism was temporarily 'put on hold'. Given what you've said about coverage of wars before and since failing in the same ways, do you see this as a cynical and cowardly excuse, scapegoating the then government to deny responsibility?**

**EH:** These apologies were never complete, and were offered because it was so evident that these media institutions had failed to do their job, that they had to say *something*. I don't think they were blaming the government, but there was a certain cynicism in that they didn't really explain why, they didn't fire the leading editors who had been responsible for swallowing and propagandising lies and who should probably be in jail as collaborators in war crimes, and they didn't put in place reforms that might prevent a repetition of this gross malperformance. And they immediately began to do the same as regards Iran.

**Could we really expect the mass media in a liberal capitalist society *not* to resemble the media described in the propaganda model? Is it a virile right wing or neoliberalism that refuses to name and vilify US state terror, or a fundamental deficiency in the forms or systemic structures of liberal media?**

**EH:** Again, the answer is *no* - both on institutional as well as historical grounds. The model is built on the structural characteristics of a liberal capitalist society and it has evolved in a manner that looks very much built-in. We would not expect such media to name and vilify US terror as that is their own terror, which needs protection by institutions that are part of the corporate establishment and system. We and our clients only retaliate, we do not terrorise. This can involve the media in really serious contortions, applied double standards, and suppressions, but it has operated in this fashion for many years and, as the propaganda model suggests, flows from basic structural characteristics of the media. The right wing helps reduce any deviation from this kind of apologetics for our own terrorism, but the main thrust is independent of the work of these enforcers.

**It seems that even when atrocities are revealed in the media as being directed or supported by the United States this does not lead to delegitimisation of the overall foreign policy project. The state can even admit to something as horrific as what you have referred to as the 'sanctions of mass destruction' in 1990s' Iraq and still not provoke a mass outcry. Why is this? Do you think the media, and the state via the media, define the parameters and language of debate on subjects such as terrorism to the point where it is difficult to conceive anything the US does as terrorism? Is the idea of US righteousness so strong and so enforced culturally that even its terrorism seems as if it's done for the right reasons?**

**EH:** Actually, the phrase - an entirely appropriate one - 'sanctions of mass destruction' was the title of a 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article co-authored by the brothers John and Karl Mueller. They made the reasonable point that the US-UK-engineered sanctions on Iraq, then in their

ninth year, 'may well have been a necessary cause of the deaths of more people in Iraq than have been slain by all so-called weapons of mass destruction throughout history', and added how 'interesting' it was that 'this loss of human life has failed to make a great impression in the United States'.<sup>10</sup> Or, to return to what I said in answer to your earlier question, in this case, the perpetrator group not only didn't care about the monumental loss of Iraqi lives, but, in the then US ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright's notable phrase (1996), this loss of Iraqi lives was 'worth it'.

In the case of the 'sanctions of mass destruction' applied to Iraq (1990-2003), and the subsequent case of the actual second war waged by the United States and Britain in the conquest of Iraq, plausible estimates place the combined Iraqi death toll at somewhere between 1 and 2 million persons. With human losses on this scale occurring as the result of deliberately crafted policies, we are not just talking about 'terrorism', but rather more realistically a *genocidal* campaign. Yet, as David Peterson and I showed in *The Politics of Genocide*, the establishment media were extremely reluctant to use the term 'genocide' to describe these Iraqi deaths, whether caused by the sanctions or by the war and occupation.<sup>11</sup> If anything, the notion that if the United States and the United Kingdom (or *our* side) perpetrate great atrocities it never really happens extends far beyond acts of US and UK state terrorism to the gravest atrocities conceivable.

The parameters of discussion do flow from state interest. Officials like Madeleine Albright are treated with great deference, and if she says the consequences of the sanctions of mass destruction are 'worth it', the media do not and will not challenge this; and if the Bush administration says that the invasion-occupation of Iraq is justified, even on grounds that at the time seemed highly questionable, the mainstream media are prepared to ignore the lies, extreme law violations, and violence far beyond 'terrorism'. So the combination of structure, patriotism, self-righteousness, deference to state interest and official claims rules out the use of the plain word terrorism in application to US terrorisation. The United States can only wage a 'war on terror'!

## NOTES

1. See: Edward S. Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism' Industry* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), pp.42-4.

2. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1988, 2002; Bodley Head, 2008), pp.72-4.

3. See Herman and O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism' Industry*, Chs 3 and 8.

4. On entrapment in the so-called 'war on terror', see Amy Goodman, 'Entrapment or Foiling Terror? FBI's Reliance on Paid Informants Raises Questions about Validity of Terrorism Cases', *Democracy NOW!*, 6 October 2010, <<http://tinyurl.com/28yrdwu>>.

5. For one example of this attack-dog function, see John F. Burns and Ravi Somaiya, 'WikiLeaks Founder on the Run, Trailed by Notoriety', *New York Times*, 23 October 2010; and for a criticism of the *Times's* performance of this role, see Glenn Greenwald, 'The Nixonian henchmen of today: at the NYT', *Salon.com*, 24 October 2010, <<http://tinyurl.com/2uvj41e>>.

6. Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), p.22.

7. John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), p.101.

Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, ch.I. Bill Keller, 'Soviet Official Says Press Harms Army', *New York Times*, 21 January 1988.

10. John Mueller and Karl Mueller, 'Sanctions of Mass Destruction', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.78, No.3 (1999).

11. Herman and Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide*, p.35 and p.72.

## Chapter 10

### Ismael Hossein-zadeh: The Guiding Force of US Militarism

**Let's start with some official reasons for US wars, low intensity military operations, and sponsorship of state violence since the Cold War ended: homeland security, international drug trafficking, global terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, human rights and democracy. To what extent have any of these genuinely been primary or secondary aims?**

**Ismael Hossein-zadeh:** Official reasons such as 'global terrorism' or 'Islamic fundamentalism' for US military interventions abroad can easily be dispensed with as flimsy, hare-brained pretexts for war and militarism. US beneficiaries of war dividends have proven quite resourceful in frequently inventing (or manufacturing, if necessary) new 'external threats to our national interests', or 'the interests of our allies', in order to justify their imperial wars of choice. US military adventures since the Second World War, especially since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, are driven not so much by some general or abstract national interests, as they are by the special interests vested in the military-security capital, which need an atmosphere of war and militarism in order to justify their lion's share of the public purse. This helps explain why since the Second World War powerful beneficiaries of war dividends have almost always reacted negatively to discussions of international cooperation and tension reduction, or to detente.

When the collapse of the Soviet system and the subsequent discussions of 'peace dividends' in the United States threatened the interests of the military-industrial conglomerates, their representatives invented 'new external sources of danger to US national interests'. The 'new sources of threat' are said to originate in the 'unpredictable' and 'unreliable' regional powers of the so-called Third World. Instead of the Soviet Union, the 'menace' of China, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, drug lords, global terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and so on would have to do as new enemies. This tendency of the beneficiaries of war dividends to foment international convulsions in order to justify continuous haemorrhaging of the Pentagon budget also helps explain why the United States viewed the 9/11 tragedy as an opportunity for further militarisation. The monstrous attacks of 9/11 were treated not as criminal acts but as war on America. Once it was thus established that the United States was 'at war', military build-up followed accordingly.

The pretexts or tactics for pursuing higher profits for the business of war may change, but the objective or strategy remains the same - continued war and military aggressions and, consequently, further escalation of the Pentagon budget and war dividends. Viewed in this light, militaristic tendencies to wars abroad can be seen largely as reflections of the metaphorical fight over allocation of public finance at home, of a subtle or insidious strategy to redistribute national resources in favour of the wealthy: to cut public spending on socio-economic infrastructure and to reverse the New Deal social safety-net programmes by expanding military spending.

**But what of apparent 'humanitarian intervention', such as in Kosovo, or, more recently, Libya? Even if there are other motives too, do the positive results of such conflicts not make them worthwhile?**

**IH:** In a moment of utter heartlessness, let us use the imperialist term 'collateral damage' to gloss over all the death and destruction wrought by the so-called 'humanitarian intervention', and focus exclusively on the alleged 'positive results' of such interventions. The most widely touted of such results is said to be 'replacement of dictatorship with democracy', as reflected by periodic voting and election rituals. Such elections are, however, often money-driven exercises to legitimise the dictatorship of capital. This is clearly evidenced by the experiences of Afghanistan, Iraq, Honduras, Haiti, former republics of Yugoslavia, and the like. Along with the

artificial presidential or parliamentary elections, the largely orchestrated or scripted voting results are used to justify the privatisation of state enterprises, the outsourcing or auctioning off of the public capital entities such as seaports, airports, bridges, water resources, sewer system facilities, major communication facilities, and more - including wholesale privatisation and outsourcing of health and education services. Thus, the 'positive' consequences of the 'humanitarian regime change' tend to benefit only a small minority of local elites and their foreign patrons and partners, while the overwhelming majority of citizens, who traditionally benefited from the state-sponsored social safety net programmes, lose their sources of livelihood and their means of benefiting from government-subsidised, affordable education and health care services.

The purported US/NATO support for human rights as grounds for 'humanitarian intervention' tends to be narrowly focused on purely cultural issues such as lifestyle and identity politics, that is, the politics of race, gender, and sexual orientation. As such, this concept of human rights is largely devoid of basic economic needs for survival. Even a cursory comparison with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms (UDHRF) reveals some fundamental shortcomings of the US-type human rights standards. Human rights according to UDHRF include basic economic or survival needs:

Everyone has the right to work... to protection against unemployment... to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection ... Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control... Everyone has the right to education.<sup>1</sup>

Human rights a la USA does not include any of these basic human needs - all the nauseating propaganda of championing human rights notwithstanding. By contrast, the Libyan people under Gaddafi, for example, enjoyed many of these crucially important economic rights. Before it was devastated by the imperialist-orchestrated civil war and destruction, Libya had the highest living standard in Africa.<sup>2</sup> With the US-NATO-orchestrated regime change in Libya under the guise of 'humanitarian concerns', which is bound to replace the welfare-state policies of the Gaddafi era with the neoliberal policies of unbridled market mechanism, most of these social safety net programmes are destined to be eliminated, or drastically weakened.

Of course, the inauspicious changes that result from intervention for 'humanitarian' (or other similarly duplicitous) reasons are not limited to Libya; they are, indeed, part of an ominous pattern that includes Allende's Chile, Mossadeq's Iran, Arbenz's Guatemala, Sukarno's Indonesia, Aristide's Haiti, Sandinista's Nicaragua, and Zelaya's Honduras, among many others. This pattern of imperialist-orchestrated change also explains why the United States and other Western powers are now targeting Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Ecuador, Bolivia, Syria, and other 'unfriendly, rogue nations'. The pattern further shows that the alleged defence of human rights as the basis for regime change is patently hypocritical: what is defended is not human rights, but the right to establish the neoliberal model of capitalism worldwide.

### **And what about the Cold War? You say that**

there is strong evidence that the US-USSR hostilities of the Cold War years were provoked not so much by the alleged Soviet plans to attack the United States, or its allies, but by the fact that US guardians of world capitalism simply could not tolerate the presence of a planned economy anywhere in the world.<sup>3</sup>

**In your view, were there *any* points in the Cold War where a Communist attack on the United States was likely, necessitating a huge defensive military build-up? Or, is there validity in the claim that the United States, as superpower, effectively *had to* block the spread of the Soviet Empire (exemplified, say, in their post-war control of Poland or Romania, or the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979), even if it required extreme measures?**

**IH:** There is convincing evidence not only that Joseph Stalin and his successors in the Soviet Union had no plans to wage war against the United States, but that, in fact, they played a restraining role in containing independent revolutionary movements worldwide. There are clear indications that in the aftermath of the Second World War, Stalin

assumed an exceedingly moderate posture ... His nation had lost 25 million people in the war, was desperately in need of aid for rebuilding, and continued for a long time to nurture hopes of coexistence. Far from being revolutionary, Stalin in those years put the damper on revolution wherever he could.<sup>4</sup>

To accommodate the United States and other Western powers in the hope of peaceful coexistence, Stalin often advised, and sometimes ordered, the pro-Moscow communist or leftist parties in Europe and elsewhere in the world to refrain from revolutionary policies that might jeopardise the hoped-for chances of coexistence.

A number of leading political figures and statesmen in the United States also acknowledged Stalin's live-and-let-live policy in the years following the war. Here is a sample:

It was perfectly clear to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the Russia of that day that the Soviet leaders had no intention of attempting to advance their cause by launching military attacks with their own armed forces across frontiers. (George Kennan, May 1965)

[The Soviet government] does not contemplate the use of war as an instrument of its national policy. I do not know any responsible official, military or civilian, in this [US] government, who believes that the Soviet government now plans conquest by open military aggression'. (John Foster Dulles, March 1949)<sup>5</sup>

Evidence thus clearly suggests that the US policy makers built the gigantic military-industrial complex not out of any genuine fear of Soviet military attack but for other motives. Top among those motives was to establish a US-led world capitalist order in which unhindered market forces would flourish, a world no part of which would be excluded from the free flow of trade and investment. Here is how President Truman explained it: 'Regimented economies' were the enemy of free enterprise, and 'unless we act, and act decisively', those regimented economies would become 'the pattern of the next century'. To fend off that danger, Truman urged that 'the whole world should adopt the American system'. The system of free enterprise, he went on, 'could survive in America only if it becomes a world system'.<sup>6</sup>

**You argue that, in the present situation,**

under the sway of military imperialism, instigation of international conflicts and military adventures abroad are often prompted not so much by territorial or economic gains for the empire or the nation as a whole... but by a desire to appropriate the lion's share of the existing wealth and treasure for the military establishment.<sup>7</sup>

**However, is it not the case that recent conflicts have also been a means to open up new markets and expand the wealth of the empire? Surely it is no coincidence that recent**

## **and current US 'enemies' - Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Iran - all offer potentially lucrative trade opportunities, especially in oil?**

**IH:** US military transgressions have in fact become economic burdens because they devour a disproportionately large share of national resources, and because such adventurous operations tend to create instability in international markets, subvert long-term global investment, and increase energy or fuel costs. In addition, the resentment and hostilities that unprovoked aggressions generate in foreign lands are bound to create backlash at the consumer level. A leading Middle East business journal, *AME Info*, reported in its 8 April 2004 issue that

[i]n 2002, a cluster of Arab organisations asked Muslims to shun goods from America, seen as an enemy of Islam and a supporter of Israel. In Bahrain, the Al-Montazah supermarket chain, for example, boosted sales by pulling about 1,000 US products off its shelves, and other grocers followed suit.

The report further pointed out that 'Coca-Cola and Pepsi ... took the brunt of the blow. Coca-Cola admitted that the boycott trimmed some \$40 million off profits in the [Persian] Gulf in 2002.' In addition, the report noted that 'US exports to the Middle East dropped \$31 billion from 1998-2002'.<sup>8</sup>

Concerns of this nature have prompted a broad spectrum of non-military US business interests to form coalitions of trade associations that are designed to lobby foreign-policy makers against unprovoked military aggressions abroad. One such anti-militarist alliance of American businesses is USA\*Engage. It is a coalition of nearly 700 small and large businesses, agriculture groups, and trade associations working to seek alternatives to militaristic US foreign policy actions and to promote the benefits of non-military US engagement abroad. The coalition's statement of principles points out that 'American values are best advanced by engagement of American business and agriculture in the world, not by ceding markets to foreign competition' through unilateral foreign policies and military aggressions.<sup>9</sup>

In regards to oil, it is true that the United States has used military force in the past for energy purposes. But this precedent fails to explain the current US military aggressions abroad. It is also true that once an 'insubordinate' regime like that of Saddam Hussein or Muammar al-Gaddafi is overthrown, oil companies (along with other transnational corporations) will swoop over the vanquished country to divvy up the booty of war and conquest. However, such vulture-like behaviour fails to prove that oil companies instigated, ab ovo, the war against those countries. Indeed, evidence shows that major oil companies, along with many other non-military transnational corporations, lobbied both the Clinton and Bush administrations in support of changing the aggressive, militaristic US policy towards countries like Iran, Iraq, and Libya in favour of establishing normal, non-confrontational business and diplomatic relations.

A large part of the perception that big oil is behind military operations in oil-rich countries stems from the fact that oil companies do benefit from oil price hikes that result from war and political turbulence. Certainly oil companies welcome the spoils of war in the form of oil price hikes. Such benefits are, however, largely incidental. Evidence shows that for the last quarter century or so oil interests have not favoured war and turbulence in the oil-rich Middle East; they have come to prefer stability and predictability to the periodic oil spikes that follow war and political convulsion.

It is true that for a long time, from the beginning of Middle Eastern oil exploration and discovery in the early twentieth century until the mid 1970s, colonial or imperial powers controlled oil either directly, or through control of oil-producing countries - at times, even by military force. But the pattern of imperialist exploitation of global markets and resources has changed now. Today, even militarily occupying a country like Iraq does not guarantee exclusive

benefits or contracting rights to US oil companies. The following report by *TIME* magazine on an important auction of the Iraqi oil contracts clearly supports this point:

Those who claim that the US invaded Iraq in 2003 to get control of the country's giant oil reserves will be left scratching their heads by the results of last weekend's auction of Iraqi oil contracts: Not a single US company secured a deal in the auction of contracts that will shape the Iraqi oil industry for the next couple of decades. Two of the most lucrative of the multi-billion-dollar oil contracts went to two countries which bitterly opposed the US invasion - Russia and China ... The distribution of [Iraqi] oil contracts certainly answers the theory that the war was for the benefit of big US oil interests ... That has not been demonstrated by what has happened this week.<sup>10</sup>

Big oil seems to have known this would happen, and perhaps that's why, as Fareed Mohamedi of PEG Energy, an energy consultancy firm based in Washington, D.C., that advises petroleum firms, pointed out: 'The big oil companies were not enthusiastic about the Iraqi war ... Corporations like Exxon-Mobil and Chevron-Texaco want stability, and this is not what Bush is providing in Iraq and the Gulf region.'<sup>11</sup>

The big oil companies were not enthusiastic about the NATO military strike and regime change in Libya either. It is true that after the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime every major oil company from every major industrialised country is scrambling to carve out a bigger slice of the pie of the Libyan oil. There is no evidence, however, that these companies instigated the civil war and NATO's military strike against Libya: for one thing, they were already enjoying lucrative deals with the Gaddafi regime; for another, they tend to be averse to political turbulence and an unpredictable business atmosphere. Furthermore, the big oil companies are not alone in the imperialist looting of Libya; many non-oil transnational corporations (such as construction, transportation, communication, banking, and armaments firms) are also partaking in the loot.

While the purported evidence of big oil as the driving force behind the wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya is dubious, the evidence of the powerful interests vested in the military-security capital having played such a role is undeniable. It is no secret that most of the post-Cold War US military aggressions have been instigated by the corporate-backed militaristic think tanks, such as Project for the New American Century, the American Enterprise Institute, Center for Security Policy, Middle East Media Research Institute, Middle East Forum, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, and National Institute for Public Policy. Major components of the US foreign policy, especially its military strategy, in the post-Cold War era are designed at the drawing boards of these think tanks, often in collaboration, directly or indirectly, with the Pentagon and the arms lobby.

Even a cursory look at the records of these belligerent think tanks - their memberships, their financial sources, their institutional structures, and the like - shows that they have (since the demise of the Soviet Union) been set up essentially to serve as institutional fronts to camouflage the incestuous relationships between the Pentagon, its major contractors, and the Israeli lobby. There are strong indications that the leading warmongering politicians (whether the blatantly jingoistic neo-conservative figures of the Bush era, or the more subtle but no less militaristic liberal hawks of the Obama era) have been long-time political activists who have worked through a network of militaristic think tanks that are set up to serve either as the armaments lobby or the Israeli lobby or both.

**To follow up on a couple of points there, first, US (and UK) companies were not completely shut out of Iraq oil deals. Exxon and Occidental won bids in the West Qurna 1 and Zubair oil fields, respectively, and UK companies Shell and BP also won bids. It also seems that they would have hoped for more had the conditions been made more favourable by the expected passing of the proposed Iraq Oil Law. Indeed, Antonia Juhasz**

**points out that in the bidding of June 2009, 'only one consortium - BP and the Chinese National Petroleum Corp. - agreed to the terms. The rest of the companies balked, saying the terms just simply were not generous enough.' All this came after the National Energy Policy Development Group, set up by the Bush regime at the beginning of 2001 and chaired by Dick Cheney, had among other things discussed Iraqi oil with major US and UK energy corporations. The problem was that, 'were Saddam to remain in power and the sanctions to be removed, ... contracts [with other countries, especially France, Russia and China] would take effect, and the US and its closest ally would be shut out of Iraq's great oil bonanza'.<sup>12</sup>**

**IH:** The point here is not whether US and UK companies were shut out of Iraq oil deals or not; they certainly were not. It is rather whether they were granted exclusive rights or preferential deals. And the answer is no; they had (and have) to participate in bidding just as did (or do) oil companies from many other countries. Major oil companies insisted in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime that oil contracts be signed only after the passage of the Iraq Oil Law, since that law, as initially crafted, would grant more lucrative contracts to these companies. The fact that, due to resistance by Iraqis, seven years after it was initially drafted the law has not yet passed, and US/UK oil companies have not (so far) received any no-bid, preferential deals, is an indication that the role of oil in recent US military aggressions in the Middle East is highly exaggerated.

Antonia Juhasz's argument that 'were Saddam to remain in power and the sanctions to be removed ... the US and its closest ally would be shut out of Iraq's great oil bonanza' borders on speculation; it is based on precedence, not hard evidence. It is true that, as Juhasz points out, from the mid 1990s through the end of Saddam Hussein's rule in 2003 major US and UK oil companies were prevented from doing business with Iraq. But that had to do as much, if not more, with the US-sponsored sanctions against Iraq, which prohibited US companies from doing business with that country, than with Iraq's oil policies. In fact, major US and UK oil companies were not happy with the sanctions, as the sanctions shut them out of oil deals with Iraq.

As I have pointed out,

No matter how crucial oil is to the world economy, the fact remains that it is, after all, a commodity. As such, international trade in oil is as important to its importers as it is to its exporters. There is absolutely no reason that, in a world free of the influence of the powerful beneficiaries of war and militarism, the flow of oil could not be guaranteed by international trade conventions and commercial treaties.<sup>13</sup>

Oil companies are, of course, aware of this. And that's why (for the last three decades or so) they have come to prefer peace and predictably, which are more conducive to long-term investments and contracts, to short-term oil price hikes that follow from war and geopolitical turbulence.

The Iran-Libya Sanction Act (ILSA) of 1996 is a strong testament to the fact that oil companies nowadays view wars, economic sanctions, and international political tensions as harmful to their long-term business interests and, accordingly, strive for peace, not war, in international relations. In May 1997 (and in reaction to ILSA) major US oil companies such as Conoco, Exxon, Atlantic Richfield, and Occidental Petroleum joined other non-military US transnational corporations to create an anti-sanction coalition. Earlier that same year, Conoco's chief executive Archie Dunham publicly took a stance against unilateral US sanctions by stating that 'US companies, not rogue regimes, are the ones that suffer when the United States imposes economic sanctions'.<sup>14</sup> Texaco officials have also argued that the United States can be more effective in bringing about change in other countries by allowing US companies to do

business with those countries instead of imposing economic sanctions that tend to be counterproductive.

**As you say, the Israeli lobby is often deemed an important influence on US policy in the Middle East. How closely tied are the goals of this and the military-industrial complex?**

**IH:** Although the unconditional support for Israel's geopolitical designs in the Middle East is detrimental to the overall national interests of the United States, the interests of the military-industrial complex tend to converge with those of expansionist Zionism over war and military adventures in the region. Just as the military-industrial-security complex views international peace and stability as inimical to its interests, so too the militant Zionist proponents of 'greater Israel' perceive peace between Israel and its Palestinian neighbours as perilous to their goal of gaining control over the 'promised land'. The reason for this fear of peace is that, according to a number of United Nations resolutions, peace would mean Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders. Since this is not acceptable to Israel, it systematically sabotages all efforts at peace negotiations.

Not surprisingly, partisans of 'greater Israel', stretching from Jordan to the Mediterranean, view war and geopolitical convulsion as opportunities that are conducive to the expulsion of Palestinians and the expansion of Israel's territory. But because waging war and applying force in the name of territorial expansion would be politically unpalatable, instigation of diversionary or proxy wars in the region is deemed necessary in order to avail the expansionist Zionist forces of the needed pretext for the projected expulsions. David Ben-Gurion, one of the key founders of the state of Israel, explained the importance of the convulsive or 'revolutionary' social circumstances to the goal of expelling Palestinians and expanding the Jewish territory in these words: 'What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times; and if at this time the opportunity is missed and what is possible in such great hours is not carried out - a whole world is lost.'<sup>15</sup>

While (based on a convergence of interests on war and military aggression in the Middle East) there is an unspoken, de facto alliance between the military-industrial complex and expansionist Zionism, the alliance is primarily tactical, opportunistic, or utilitarian. Each side takes advantage of the needs of the other side for its own nefarious interests. It is necessary to note in this context that, despite its immense political influence, the Zionist lobby in the United States is ultimately a junior, not equal, partner of the military-industrial complex. Without discounting the extremely important role of the Zionist lobby in the configuration of the US foreign policy in the Middle East, I would caution against exaggerations of its power and influence over the US policy in the region.

**Regarding the presidency of George W. Bush, you say that 'the powerful military establishment... manipulated the unseasoned president', and claim that 'the socio-historical role of militarism and/or military imperialism ... is much grander and more powerful than the power or authority of a president'.<sup>16</sup> However, in the 1990s, the Bush senior and Clinton administrations did manage to reduce military spending, suggesting that the elected government still has power to resist Pentagon demands. How much influence does the military-industrial complex have over the democratic process? Has this grown significantly even since the Clinton era?**

**IH:** To say that the military-industrial complex plays a bigger role over issues of war and peace than the president is not to say that all presidents are equally powerless vis-a-vis the military machine. An assertive or less trigger-happy president may minimally or temporarily slowdown the pace or the growth of the war juggernaut, but he will not be able to deter the

military machine from pursuing its long-term strategies. For example, both Presidents Carter and Clinton initially resisted the unbridled demands of the military establishment in an effort to curtail military spending and contain US military operations abroad. Both were decisively defeated.

Jimmy Carter ran for president as a dove and a champion of detente, or tension reduction with the Soviet Union. But partisans of war and militarism turned him into a Cold War hawk by the time he left the White House. Powerful beneficiaries of war and military spending sounded false alarms that the Soviet Union was outspending the United States on armaments and would soon surpass the US in overall military power. Organising around opposition to tension-reducing talks with the Soviet Union, they reconstituted the brazenly militaristic Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), which had been instrumental to President Truman's militarisation policies of the early 1950s.

As a major brain trust of the military-industrial complex, the CPD set out to derail the Carter administration's initial tendencies toward detente, global interdependence, and human rights concerns. Arguing that the CIA's estimate of Soviet arms outlays was too low, the CPD succeeded in presenting the policymakers with an alternative estimate that came to be known as the 'Team B Report'. Not surprisingly, the report validated CPD's 'fears of the Soviet threat'; it discovered a 'significant error' in previous CIA/NIE (National Intelligence Estimate) estimates of Soviet military spending. It reported that the USSR was spending 11-13 per cent of its GNP on arms, not 8 per cent, which 'called for bigger increases in the US military spending in order to catch up with the Soviets'. Effectively outmanoeuvred by the beneficiaries of war dividends, by the late 1977 or early 1978 President Carter had moved 'from his campaign pledge to reduce military spending every year to increasing it'. Furthermore,

[p]ressed by the CPD ... Carter began a [p] sustained buildup in military expenditures in July of 1979. Thus long before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter had moved considerably over to the CPD's position. By December 1979 ... Carter revealed comprehensive long-term plans for a major military buildup to the influential Business Council at the White House.<sup>17</sup>

It is sometimes argued that the fact presidents Bush senior and Bill Clinton managed to slow down the rise in military spending shows that the power of the military-industrial complex is exaggerated. I think this is a false argument. The power and influence of the military establishment should be judged not by the slowdown in the growth of the Pentagon budget following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but by its extraordinary success in averting a major downsizing of the military apparatus in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. In the days and months following the collapse of the Berlin Wall there were widespread expectations and vigorous demands by the American people for a drastic downsizing of the military colossus, and an unprecedented reallocation of a significant portion of the Pentagon budget to 'peace dividends'. Under the presidency of Bush senior and the stewardship of Richard Cheney as secretary of defense, the Pentagon moved swiftly to avert such a widely expected overhaul by successfully inventing all kinds of 'new threats' (rogue states, global terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism) and effectively substituting them for the 'communist threat' of the Cold War era. Most of the post-Cold War strategies to fend off demands for 'peace dividends' following the collapse of the Berlin Wall were crafted by Pentagon officials soon after the demise of the Soviet Union. Here is how James Mann of the Center for Strategic and International Studies explains those strategies:

The Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, effectively ending the Cold War and prompting the Pentagon to undertake a search for a new set of principles, in part to prevent Congress, then controlled by the Democrats, from slashing the defense budget. The key participants were Cheney, Wolfowitz and Colin L. Powell, then chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff [and] the three men worked closely together on forestalling cutbacks. The Soviet Union's collapse added new urgency to their task. 'What we were afraid of was people who would say, 'Let's bring all of the troops home, and let's abandon our position in Europe,' recalled Wolfowitz in an interview.<sup>18</sup>

Most of what the Pentagon team (Richard Cheney, Colin Powell, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, and others) crafted in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union was published as a government document under Cheney's name (defense secretary at the time) as America's 'Defense Strategy for the 1990s', also called the Defense Planning Guidance. Almost all of the Pentagon's post-Cold War aggressive military strategies, such as regime change, humanitarian intervention, pre-emptive strike, and the expansion of NATO, can be traced back to the notorious Defense Planning Guidance.

President Clinton's modest increases of the Pentagon budget are often taken as indications that he was somewhat averse to aggressive military operations. Yet the Federation of American Scientists has recorded a list of US foreign military engagements, which shows that in the first decade after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, that is, under Presidents Bush senior and Bill Clinton, the United States engaged in 134 such operations. Here is a sample: Operation Eagle Eye (Kosovo), Operation Determined Effort (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Operation Quick Lift (Croatia), Operation Nomad Vigil (Albania), Operation Desert Thunder (Iraq), Operation Seva Verde (Colombia), Operation Constant Vigil (Bolivia), Operation Fundamental Response (Venezuela), Operation Infinite Reach (Sudan, Afghanistan), Operation Safe Border (Peru, Ecuador), Operation United Shield (Somalia), Operation Safe Haven/Safe Passage (Cuba), Operation Sea Signal (Haiti), Operation Safe Harbor (Haiti), Operation Desert Storm (south-west Asia), and many more.<sup>19</sup>

As noted earlier, presidents might slightly modify military plans, or offer different justifications for those plans, but they cannot drastically change or put a stop on them. The US military-industrial complex is an amazingly sophisticated institution; it is, indeed, an empire in its own right. Beneficiaries of its expansion are extremely sophisticated, cunning, and calculating. They do not directly confront or challenge a president. Instead, they subtly and artfully invent or manufacture 'external threats to the national interests or security of the United States', or of 'its allies', in order to compel reluctant presidents or other policy makers to go along with their nefarious plans of aggression.

**Historically, greater military spending in times of recession has helped reinvigorate the US economy. But in the current economic climate, following the banking crisis of 2008 and the Bush presidency, military spending is already at its highest level since the Second World War, and faces minor cuts (excluding interest on defence-related debt). Has the United States always relied on military spending to get out of economic difficulties, and what are the repercussions if this is no longer possible?**

**IH:** Let me make three points regarding the long-standing misperception that war and military spending help stimulate a relatively advanced market economy. First, to the extent that (under certain circumstances) war and military expenditures create jobs and stimulate the economy, it is not war or military spending per se that leads to such positive economic results; it is, rather, government spending as such that brings about such desirable outcomes. Indeed, evidence shows that, dollar for dollar, non-military public spending would lead to a much bigger economic impact than military spending. For example, a 2002 Congressional Budget Office report found that every \$10 billion spent on weapons generates 40,000 fewer jobs than \$10 billion spent on civilian programmes.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the ruling class prefers military to non-military spending as a fiscal stimulus measure because, while the economic benefits of non-military public spending are more widely spread throughout society, the benefits of military

spending are funnelled largely into the deep pockets of the military-industrial-security complex. In addition to directly benefiting from military expenditures, the rich and powerful also prefer military to non-military public spending for yet another, more subtle and insidious reason: to keep the working class in check by systematically cutting social spending while steadily adding to military expenditures.

Second, while military spending may have a positive economic impact in the short term, it is bound to undermine the economy in the long run, for continued allocation of a disproportionately large share of public resources to war and militarism steadily undermines the critically important national objective of building and maintaining public capital or infrastructure. This includes both physical infrastructure (such as roads, bridges, mass transit, dams, levees, and the like) and human capital such as health, education, nutrition, and so on. This explains why not only are the continued escalation of war and military spending in recent years failing to stimulate the dormant US economy, but they are indeed aggravating the recession.

Third, let us assume for a moment that the argument that military spending creates jobs and stimulates economic growth is valid. Still, people of good conscience would find it difficult to support such an argument because it would mean that economic stimulation and job creation would be dependent on permanent war and destruction!

Now, a well-meaning sceptic could reasonably argue: 'OK, granted; war and military spending may be immoral, they may be less efficient in terms of economic stimulation and job creation than non-military public spending, and they may be detrimental to long-term growth and prosperity.' Nonetheless, the sceptic could further reason, 'As things stand, many jobs, businesses and communities in the United States depend on military spending; which means that cutting military spending would lead to loss of jobs, businesses, and sources of livelihood for millions. So, doesn't this mean that we are stuck with continued increases in military spending in order to save the millions of jobs, businesses, and source of livelihood that have become dependent on it?'

This is obviously a fair question. It explains why some policy makers who may be opposed to war and militarism on philosophical grounds, may nonetheless find it difficult to oppose constant increases in military spending. On the face of it, this seems an inexplicable or unsolvable dilemma. But there is, in fact, a reasonable solution to it: to slash the Pentagon budget while protecting jobs and livelihoods that have become dependent on military spending, the overall public spending should not be cut, but a significant portion of it should be redirected from military to non-military spending. As the old cliché goes: *If there is a will, there is a way*. It is all a matter of priorities, of who would benefit most from public spending.

**Some economists predict that China will surpass the United States economically by 2016.<sup>21</sup> Given this scenario, the main remaining advantage of the US as a global power would likely be its massive military might. Does it seem likely that the United States will have to rely even more on military coercion to maintain its dominance in the future?**

**IH:** Further reliance on military might to contain China's economic advances in global markets does seem to be an important element in the geopolitical and economic calculations of US foreign-policy makers. Whether the strategy of trying to use military advantage will succeed in making up for economic disadvantages remains to be seen. While further strengthening of US military power may limit China's access to certain global markets and resources, continued escalation of military spending that this imperial strategy of policing global markets requires may also drain the empire's own financial resources and undermine its long-term economic expansion and competitiveness - that is, the costly means may defeat the desired end. Furthermore, by narrowing China's global markets for sales of manufactured products and purchases of raw materials, especially sources of energy, the US militarists may end up further enhancing that country's economic advantages by forcing it to become even more cost-efficient

and more competitive in the global market - once again, a case of misguided means subverting the end.

The problem is that for the powerful interests that are vested in the military-security capital, the 'end' has a different meaning: continued escalation of military spending, not protection or advancement of broader national interests. To further their nefarious interests at the expense of long-term national interests, and to justify the parasitic role of the military-industrial complex, these powerful militarists have managed successfully to redefine and expand the role of the Pentagon (and its handmaiden accomplice NATO) beyond the traditional 'responsibility to guard against potential military or terrorist attacks', to include all kinds of new 'missions' and responsibilities worldwide. The Pentagon's and/or NATO's new areas of 'global responsibility', as reflected, for example, in both the notorious Project for the New American Century and NATO's latest Strategic Concept, include human rights; sources of energy; vital communication [including the internet], transport and transit routes on which international trade, energy security and prosperity depend; 'threat of extremism, terrorism and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics and people'; and the 'ability to prevent, detect, defend against and recover from cyber-attacks'.<sup>22</sup> The expanded Pentagon/NATO 'responsibilities' are neither theoretical nor by definition. The recent expansion of NATO to include a number of new members in Eastern Europe and the formation of at least ten other global joint military commands (such as CENTCOM, AFRICOM, EUCOM, NORTHCOM, PACOM, SOUTHCOM, and more) are all designed to carry out these 'global responsibilities'.

US preaching of laissez-faire economics on an international level is altogether hypocritical. It self-righteously promotes this sacred principle of capitalism where or when it enjoys an international competitive advantage. As soon as it loses that advantage, however, it does not hesitate to switch from economic to military means (or 'extra-economic' means, as the late Ernest Mandel put it) in pursuit of regaining advantage against its economic rivals. This explains why the United States is methodically using its military machine and other types of geopolitical alliances to contain China's economic activities in places like Africa, Central Asia, South America and the Middle East.

While this is conveniently providing the beneficiaries of war dividends with additional justifications for ever more usurpation of taxpayers' money, it is unlikely to reach its purported goal of restoring US economic competitiveness in global markets. On the contrary, the policy of relying on the colossal military machine in the hope of restoring economic supremacy may turn out to be the wrong medicine for the anaemic US economy: as a disproportionately large allocation of resources to further enlarge the military machine sucks the financial blood out of the US economy, the parasitically growing military-industrial complex may turn out to be the Frankenstein that could destroy the US economy instead of protecting it, as alleged by its creators, the beneficiaries of war and militarism.

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## Chapter 11

### Gilbert Achcar: The United States in the Middle East

#### How did the US intervention in the First World War impact its relationship with the Middle East?

**Gilbert Achcar:** The First World War was the first real projection of US force beyond the Americas and the Pacific area. It was the first time the United States assumed the status of a global power. It became interested in the Middle East for the very same reasons that had led France and Britain to take an interest there. The Sykes-Picot agreement, through which France and Britain carved up the Arab domain of the Ottoman Empire between themselves, was concluded before US involvement. That happened in 1916, and the United States got involved in the war in 1917, the year after. So of course it had no colonial position there, but it wasn't its intention to get one anyway.

The United States took an interest in the oil concessions, especially as it itself was an oil-producing country, and the oil issue was becoming more important. The Second World War would be an even more important turning point with regard to oil, with the generalisation of its use by the transport industry and so on. Therefore the United States, as a latecomer to the Middle East oil race, tried to get concessions, and in fact got the best prize by pure chance. It got involved with the House of Saud in the 1920s when their kingdom was being established. The Saudis conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula, which was not part of the division of spoils between the French and the British, or other interests looking to exploit the oil of the Arab-Iranian Gulf Area. There was no knowledge at that point of the existence of exploitable oil resources in the vast stretch of desert land that fell under Saudi control. American companies got deals with the Saudis to prospect for oil, and they hit the jackpot in 1938, when it was established that there was plenty of commercially exploitable oil there. It turned out that the new kingdom had the most important oil reserves in the whole area and the whole world actually, with one quarter of the global oil reserves beneath its soil. Of course, this oil wealth became the centre of gravity of US interests in the Middle East. Before the end of the Second World War, the United States started building one of its largest US military bases abroad in the heart of the Saudi kingdom's Eastern province.

After the war, of course, the Middle East became a crucial theatre in the Cold War - a major stage for the rivalry between Washington and Moscow. This new conflict superseded the competition between France and Britain as colonial powers. The United States gradually replaced Britain as overlord of the region's monarchies.

**Indeed, Eisenhower went against Britain and France in the Suez Crisis, for example, or didn't support it at least.**

**GA:** Yes indeed, Washington saw this late colonial war as a blunder. It opposed the 'tripartite aggression' of Britain, France, and Israel as politically clumsy. It saw the popular reaction around the Arab world, which was very much in favour of Egypt. That's definitely one of the key reasons why Washington demanded the immediate cessation and withdrawal of the tripartite allies. This is also an important episode in US-Israeli relations, confirming that, contrary to common perception, the United States was not dealing with Israel as an untouchable strategic asset until the 1960s. It had been observing an arms embargo on the whole region, including Israel, for several years after 1948.

**Israel was relying more on France, wasn't it?**

**GA:** Israel was definitely relying more on France, as well as Germany, until the shift in the 1960s. Again this was connected to the US relationship with the Saudi kingdom. Until the

1970s, when it was nationalised, there was a state within the state of the Saudi kingdom called Aramco, the Arabian American Oil Company, which was run by American oil majors and was the main focus of US policy in the region, geared towards the interests of the oil lobby. The military base was there to protect the US enclave. Such 'expatriate' enclaves still exist, incidentally, but they are much more under Saudi control than they used to be. Anyway, at that time the United States was facing a rise of Arab nationalism. The year 1956 was an important watershed, with the United States itself acted clumsily in its relations with Egypt, attaching strings to the latter's requests for aid, thus contributing to a radicalisation that accelerated in the early 1960s. With this radicalisation of Arab nationalism, turning to the left, proclaiming socialism, and building closer ties with the Soviet Union, the pressure on the United States became increasingly stronger. They reached a low point in their presence in the area in the 1960s, to the extent that they had to evacuate their base from the Saudi Kingdom in 1962. This was strategically a big problem, because at that time, unlike now, they could not project huge forces to such faraway places in a matter of weeks. That's when Israel became a major asset, and a turning point occurred in the US-Israeli relationship. The United States started exporting tanks, aircraft, and various other sophisticated weaponry to Israel just before the 1967 war. This was the first of Israel's wars which the United States backed; they had condemned the previous one, and had not backed the first one in any form. Indeed, the war was perceived in the Arab world as an Israeli war supported by the United States. And, because of the shift in alliances, France changed its attitude under de Gaulle, from being a pretty close ally of Israel to trying to cosy up to Arab nationalism.

Israel proved in the Six-Day War that it was a fantastic military asset for the United States, which led to the development of a very close strategic relationship. In fact, Israel became the primary recipient of American public aid, not to mention non-public aid. Egypt has become second since the 1970s, when it shifted towards the United States under Sadat, but it gets less than half the amount Israel receives. If we compare the amount of aid to the size of the recipient's population, Israel stands very far above all other countries. The Israeli left used to say that Israel has become a giant aircraft carrier for the United States in the region. Israel is actually much more than an aircraft carrier, because after all there are real US aircraft carriers in the region. It has a 400,000 strong army, and is a politically reliable ally. Of course, Israel's image has been affected in recent years, especially with the Lebanese fiasco, in the same way that US 'credibility' has been affected by the Iraq fiasco.

So, from a low point in the early 1960s, the United States started regaining lost territory in the Middle East because of its influence after 1967, benefiting from the Israeli victory. The most dramatic consequence of that was the political shift of Egypt after the death of Nasser in 1970. Two years later, under Sadat, Egypt expelled Soviet military advisers and shifted to the US camp. That's when the United States really started increasing its influence again. This would peak in 1990-91, when it intervened with massive military force in the region after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and re-established its direct military presence in the Saudi Kingdom for the first time since the 1960s.

**You mention there how crucial oil has been to the US presence in the Middle East. Indeed, in *Eastern Cauldron*, your opening sentence is 'In the beginning was the "open door" to oil', and you end your introductory chapter with the same line.<sup>1</sup> To what extent is oil the main driving force of US policy in the region, and where do you rate other factors, such as the military-industrial complex, or even ideology and culture, in terms of their importance for US military expansionism?**

**GA:** The importance of the military-industrial complex in US politics in general was heavily reduced over the last decades, first after Vietnam and then again at the end of the Cold War, for various reasons, including changes in the business practices of the Pentagon. The state-

monopoly character of the complex faded away, military supplies to the US government becoming more competitive. The relative importance of military expenditure for the US economy as a whole was also greatly reduced. To believe that the United States is waging wars for the sake of wars is certainly wrong. Indeed I don't think that at any point in time the US did wage war purely for the sake of war. It can increase arms production without necessarily using those arms - through the arms race, creating tensions, exporting weapons to their clients, and so on. Of course every now and then the Pentagon likes to have a live test of their weaponry, but they wouldn't just 'invent' an opportunity for no other reason, especially if it is harmful to economic interests. Why would the United States harm its overall economic interests for the sake of the military-industrial complex alone?

**But what if there is an influential elite who profit greatly from war, and don't necessarily concern themselves with wider economic interests?**

**GA:** Well, the interface between civilian and military industry is nowadays much bigger than it used to be. The kind of separation you had between the two doesn't exist any longer in the electronic age. And of course, although the arms industry is an important one, the oil corporations in the United States rank much higher than any of those that specialise in arms. Actually for the largest companies that produce arms, military hardware is but a small piece of their overall production.

Furthermore, one would have to explain how any of the wars in the Middle East could be separated from the oil factor. It is absolutely clear that oil is of greatest importance in that area: this is clearly laid out even in US strategic documents. Of all parts of the global South, the area where the United States has been investing most of its military effort since the end of the Cold War is the Middle East. How can one separate the two wars in Iraq from wider US economic interest? The thesis that the Israel lobby is the reason for these wars, as put forward by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, is unconvincing.<sup>2</sup> They are members of the establishment who, discovering that the 2003 occupation of Iraq turned out to be a disaster for the United States, came to the conclusion that it wasn't waged with US interests in mind from the start (even though the overwhelming majority of the ruling elite in the United States thought it served US interests), and therefore attributed it to the Israel lobby. This is counterfactual. Israel actually tried to convince the United States to strike at Iran rather than Iraq, because, with the 1991 war, followed by a harsh embargo Iraq had been completely crippled. We saw how easily the United States invaded it in 2003. Militarily the invasion was a cakewalk, to use Rumsfeld's expression, even if the aftermath was definitely not a cakewalk.

It is absolutely clear to my mind that the United States invaded Iraq because it believed that it would consolidate, and substantially increase, its control of this most important oil-exporting region. The oil factor is of huge economic and strategic importance. Its economic dimension is obvious and can only increase in the decades to come, unless a renewable and economically competitive alternative energy source is found. Up to now there hasn't been anything suitable. Since oil is a non-renewable resource, with a supply on its way to inevitable depletion, and an ever increasing demand with the rise of new gigantic economies, the structural tendency is towards a rise in its real price. Economically it is becoming increasingly important, until the point when its price will match the cost of alternative energy sources. At the same time, the strategic value of oil will also increase tremendously. By controlling access to oil resources, the US holds a huge strategic leverage over its major rival country, China, as well as its allies in western Europe and Japan, who will be even more dependent on US power. The strategic and economic importance of oil cannot be overstated, and I really can't understand why anyone would feel a need to outsmart everybody and claim it's not about oil. Alan Greenspan himself said in his memoir that he didn't know why people were so reluctant in Washington to say the plain truth: that the Iraq war was about oil.<sup>3</sup>

**But when we look at the increase in the military budget, especially during the second Bush presidency - not just the spending on Iraq and Afghanistan, but the overall increase - does it not become so costly to secure oil that it detracts from other areas of the budget, undermining domestic facilities?**

**GA:** That's a choice at the heart of the neoliberal turn. The truth is that the United States combined warfare and welfare during the 1960s, at a level that proved unsustainable. The neoliberal turn emerged from that, of course, and the choice was made in favour of warfare against welfare. In the Reagan years this became very clear - they cut welfare dramatically and increased arms expenditure tremendously. That represented a peak in the direct use of the arms industry as an economic tool, and a key point in reversing the decline of the United States technologically. Since then the importance of this factor has declined, as I already explained.

As for the Bush administration, the truth is simply that they were not expecting what happened in Iraq. They expected that it would be a cakewalk from beginning to end, that they could control the country with 125,000 troops, and that this would happen at a very limited cost. They couldn't imagine in their wildest nightmares that it would turn out a disaster as it did. The thought that they wanted this to happen is like saying they wanted to lose the war in Vietnam. The Vietnam War cost them a lot. It contributed to the crisis of the American and the global economy. In 1968, the massive expenditure for the Vietnam War led to big problems in the balance of payments of the United States. Here again, in Iraq, they went into gradual escalation which they didn't plan for initially. They got into this vicious circle where they couldn't cut and run because they would have lost everything they had gained, but by staying they sunk even deeper into disaster. So, as I said, claiming that since the war didn't serve their interests, it was therefore a war waged in spite of their interests, doesn't make sense. What is crucial in this regard is how they conceived it at the start. Ruling classes do make errors and blunders, but they make them believing they are acting in what they perceive to be their interest.

**You mentioned how the major threat to the United States during the Cold War became radical Arab nationalism, and in their attempts to destroy it successive US administrations became bedfellows with Islamic fundamentalists. Should they have foreseen that this would then mutate into the chief form of anti-Americanism in the region? You do say in *Eastern Cauldron* that the United States mistakenly perceived that 'violent hostility to the United States among Islamic fundamentalists was a peculiarity of Shiite Islam, and that Sunni and particularly Wahhabi variants ... were inherently inclined to ally with the West'.<sup>4</sup> Does this explain their willingness to collaborate with the Wahhabis, and the Taliban in Afghanistan?**

**GA:** US collaboration with Islamic fundamentalism is as old as US collaboration with the Saudi kingdom, which is by far the main embodiment of Islamic fundamentalism in the world. The kingdom's ruling family governs in alliance with the religious establishment, and uses it as an ideological apparatus to keep control of the country, with the United States as the military protector. Indeed, in the 1960s the Saudi-American alliance became the central aspect of the US fight against radicalising Arab nationalism, and Soviet influence in the Middle East, especially after Washington was compelled to abandon its base in the kingdom under the regional pressure of Arab nationalism led by Gamal Abdel-Nasser's Egypt. The United States closely collaborated with Islamic fundamentalism through the Saudi Kingdom, and built an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, the bitter enemies of Nasser, who had become the United States's public enemy number one in the Middle East. In this period, US collaboration with, or instrumentalisation of, Islamic fundamentalism through the Saudis greatly expanded.

Of course, at that point they did not expect it to turn against them, and indeed it didn't until many years later. In the 1970s, a combination of factors enhanced the clout of the Saudis and

Islamic fundamentalism. On one hand, there was the defeat of Arab nationalism in the 1967 war and an ideological backlash against it, and on the other there was the oil boycott at the time of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, which led to a sudden increase in oil revenues, making the Saudis much richer. Consequently, Saudi influence in the Middle East became much greater, while movements following their religious ideology expanded. Islamic fundamentalism was on the rise, but at that point it was still in step with the expansion of US hegemony. That lasted until the Iranian Revolution, which was the turning point that saw the emergence of a bitterly anti-Western brand of Islamic fundamentalism. It took the United States by surprise, and for a while Washington tried to reassure itself, counterposing Iran's Shia bad Muslims to Sunni good Muslims. Indeed, Washington continued to bet on Sunni Islamic fundamentalism throughout the 1980s, supporting the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation.

A second turning point, however, would come with the first war on Iraq. There was a powerful popular rejection of the US intervention in Arab countries, and whole sections of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, stood against it. Their relations with the Saudis collapsed consequently as did the relation of the Saudis with other brands of Sunni fundamentalism. Al-Qaeda turned its weapons against the United States and the Saudi monarchy. In the 1990s, the Saudis kept funding the expansion of a specific brand of Sunni fundamentalism, called the Salafi movement, who are the most conservative. But at the same time there was a surge in anti-American discourse among Islamic fundamentalist currents - some violent, some, like the Muslim Brotherhood, mostly non-violent. The emirate of Qatar replaced the Saudis as the main source of funding for the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, the Qatari-Saudi rivalry is also part of the picture in the region. From the 1990s onwards the United States tended to look at Islamic fundamentalism as a threat.

Now, however, we are witnessing a new shift in that regard. With the collapse of several of their allies in the region and the apparently irresistible sweep of democratisation, the United States has realised that it doesn't have any allies enjoying real popular support. It thus needed to establish a new relationship with forces enjoying real popularity, the Muslim Brotherhood being the obvious candidate. The United States is now attempting to co-opt again Islamic fundamentalism into collaboration. However, in this relationship it is no longer in a position of power and suzerainty: it has to negotiate and offer a partnership. It is willing to help the Muslim Brotherhood get a piece of the pie on the understanding that it would respect US interests, and control the most radical fundamentalist fringes. This is what the United States has been doing since the beginning of the Arab uprising in 2011, because the Muslim Brotherhood was by far the strongest organised political force in the opposition everywhere. In the initial stage of democratisation and elections, it's no surprise that the Muslim Brotherhood stood to gain the most. But I don't think it will last very long. Things might change quite rapidly when the Muslim Brothers will be confronted with the experience of trying to rule, because they lack adequate response to the huge social and economic problems of the region's countries. But in the meantime, this is the best possible bet the United States can make.

**You mentioned the Iranian Revolution as the turning point in the US relationship with Islamic fundamentalism. To what extent do you think post-Second World War US policy towards Iran, through Operation Ajax and the overthrow of Mossadegh, and the 25 years of support for the Shah's repressive dictatorship, contributed to the anti-Western and Islamic fundamentalist nature of the Iranian Revolution? Is it reasonable to assume, as Stephen Kinzer says, that 'if the United States had not sent agents to depose Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, Iran would probably have continued along its path toward full democracy'?**<sup>5</sup>

**GA:** Such a conclusion belongs to counterfactual history and is therefore very speculative, to be sure, but one thing that can be clearly stated is that the United States contributed greatly

to making Islamic fundamentalism become the dominant expression of popular discontent in most of the Muslim world. This happened due to Washington's systematic fight against every brand of progressive nationalism, not to mention leftist or communist forces. Indeed, what you mentioned about Iran is part of the story - the way the US toppled Mossadegh, followed by its support for the very harsh repression by the Shah regime against the left in Iran. At the same time, however, the Shah regime did not repress the religious establishment, for the reason that it regarded it as an ally against communism, and even progressive nationalism. This paved the way for what would happen later.

The same story unfolded in Egypt, where the United States fought bitterly against Nasser, supporting the Muslim Brotherhood against him in alliance with the Saudi kingdom, until Nasser died and Sadat came to power. When he shifted to the Western camp, Sadat released the Muslim Brotherhood from jail and gave them a lot of leeway for their activities, especially in the universities. He allowed them to rebuild their social network, and regarded them as allies in his fight against the remnants of Nasserism and the left. As you know, he ended up being killed by a radical fringe of the same Islamic movement that he had unleashed. So this is a repeating pattern in the history of the region. I described some time ago, in my *Clash of Barbarisms*, how allegories like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, or Frankenstein, fit this story well - people unleashing forces that they cannot control afterwards, and which end up turning against them.

**Is Iranian influence growing in the Middle East, perhaps even partly *because of the regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan? Does this really create 'destabilisation' in terms of nuclear threat, danger to Israel, spread of Shiite fundamentalism, and sponsorship of terrorism, or is it merely that it undermines the ability of the United States to shape the region according to its dictates?***

**GA:** Destabilisation is of course the way the United States sees the situation - it is destabilisation of its own interests. Indeed, any challenge to US interests is seen as destabilisation, because stability is synonymous with US hegemony, or the dominance of US interests in Washington's conception of the world. Iran has been confronted with many threats from the United States over the years since 1979, and more recently from Israel. Thus, it has been developing its network of friendly forces in the region, which include Hezbollah, Shia forces in Iraq, and for a long time the Palestinian Hamas, in addition to its alliance with the Syrian regime. Overall, however, if one looks at the situation in terms of stability and destabilisation, Hezbollah has had a rather stabilising effect in Lebanon. They have even contributed to the neoliberal order imposed there. As for Iraq, Iran has actually been cooperating with Washington in supporting the Maliki government, and therefore they are playing the role of a stabilising force there. So stability is not a goal in itself unless it serves US interests. Clearly, Iran is a challenger to these interests: it seeks stability only where it has achieved an important position of force, as is the case in both Iraq and Lebanon, but this is at the expense of US hegemony.

**Regarding Afghanistan, you wrote in 2003 that there was 'a low level of interest in Washington in controlling the Afghan interior or in building the promised "modern" state, to be led by its loyal vassal, Hamid Karzai'; and also that 'the stakes are too small in Afghanistan to justify the enormous financial and military investment that would be needed to try and control this country in reality'.<sup>6</sup> Are you surprised by what happened afterwards -on one hand the continued commitment of American troops in the area, and the military presence they maintained, and on the other the way the country started to develop in some ways, such as health and education, under the Karzai government?**

**GA:** The United States is doing its best to try to give the Afghanistan occupation an air of success, but it is definitely not a success story. Everyone knows that the Karzai government is completely rotten. Afghan elections are rigged and the 'model democracy' there is completely fake. It is actually a disaster. It is obvious that if foreign troops were removed from Afghanistan the Karzai puppet regime wouldn't be able to hold on for long. In the Pashtun area certainly, at the very least, the Taliban would completely overwhelm them. Incidentally, just as a complement to what I said earlier, Afghanistan is one case in which I never claimed that war was motivated by oil. I don't see the oil factor playing everywhere, but was only referring to US wars in the Gulf area. I even dismiss explanations of the Afghan war that attribute it to a gas pipeline project. To explain wars by such small hypotheses is rather unconvincing.

### **But that was a factor, wasn't it?**

GA: I don't think that oil was and is a factor in the Afghan war. That's why I said that the Bush administration were not interested in really controlling the country. They were more interested in setting a military foot in the region, four bases in Afghanistan than other bases in former Soviet Central Asia. The reason for seeking bases in Central Asia is partly for oil and gas, to be sure, because the Caspian Basin and Central Asia are very important gas producing areas, but I would say nevertheless that this is secondary to the more important strategic dimension here. For the United States, building a military presence in the region located between the European heart of Russia and China has enormous strategic value.

But Afghanistan turned into a quagmire, as did Iraq. The Obama administration tried to replicate in Afghanistan the 'surge', which had been used as an exit strategy in Iraq. If you recall, starting in 2006, the United States increased its troops in Iraq, and changed its policies, starting to buy Sunni tribes, and started preparing for an exit. Washington would certainly have not wanted it to be a complete exit; it wished to be able to keep bases and troops in the country, but it couldn't even achieve that. Iraq will remain in the history of the US Empire as a major disaster and in certain ways a more serious one than Vietnam, the previous major disaster. This bodes ill for the replica of the 'surge' in Afghanistan. Whatever they claim in Washington, it's a failure in the same way that Iraq was a failure.

All these setbacks are occurring in a time of global decline for US power. This decline has been forecast many times since the 1970s, but wrongly until now. US power rebounded with Reagan, and even reached a peak in the 1990s in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, but for the last few years, with the combination of major economic crisis at the heart of the US and global capitalist economies, and the disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has become very clear that the United States has entered a period of decline. And right now I can't see how it could redress the situation. Indeed, we can see how much even the image of the United States has been affected. Just think of its image after 2001, or after the first Iraq War in 1991, and compare it to its image today. US hegemony reached such a peak in the early 1990s that the strategic value of Israel decreased, and Washington even allowed itself to exert pressure on Israel to cut deals with the Palestinians and Arabs, although the Israeli-Palestinian 'peace process' reached a stalemate soon after the 1993 Oslo agreement. After 2001, however, the choices made by the Bush administration were so disastrous that by 2011 the United States was actually quite weak in facing the so-called Arab Spring, which marked a very low point in its influence in the region. I'm not burying US power, it's still mighty, but it's definitely not *almighty*, and it's definitely on the decline.

**As you say, in the Arab Spring, the United States had to follow rather than lead. In Egypt in particular they tried to support Mubarak as long as possible, then welcomed the short-lived idea of regime stalwart Omar Suleiman taking control, and finally were very happy with the interim military regime, run by Mohamed Tantawi, Mubarak's defence**

**minister. They started to talk about democracy eventually, for example when Obama finally said, 'Egyptians have made it clear that nothing less than genuine democracy will carry the day';<sup>7</sup> but doesn't that quote itself imply the acceptance of democracy only as last resort?**

**GA:** Oh definitely, this is pure hypocrisy. Of course, US politicians have to speak like this because democracy has been part of their ideological baggage for so long. The United States claims to be the beacon of democracy, and this has been its main ideological weapon since the Cold War and a major aspect of its imperial legitimation. When there is a popular uprising for democracy and freedom, how could the United States condemn it? They can't, officially at least, so they have to pretend to be happy with what's happening. But it's very hypocritical, because as you mentioned they were actually very much relieved with the outcome that the Egyptian military engineered. In truth, it was a kind of coup. Mubarak was pushed aside, but the military took direct power. Of course, the army had always been the backbone of power in Egypt, but they took over directly. The United States immediately contemplated the scenario seen in Turkey in the 1980s, of transition under military control - what they called 'orderly transition'.

In the same way, if you look at Yemen, the United States hailed the Saudi-sponsored agreement even though it was rejected by the democrats of the mass movement, the young people. If you look at Morocco, the United States hailed the democratic elections there although there was an important boycott of the election due to its undemocratic character. Official figures are that 45 per cent of registered voters, a minority, took part in the election, and this in a very peculiar situation where the number of registered voters has been reduced from what it was previously. This came after a massive campaign for boycott by the left opposition and the protest movement in Morocco. You see therefore where the United States stands, on the side of regimes which are definitely not democratic, whether the Gulf monarchies or other regimes. They may be liberal in some cases like Morocco, but not democratic. The range is one of absolute to liberal autocracies.

In fact, the United States cannot wish for real democracy in this part of the world for two related reasons. The first is that due to its involvement in the region in recent decades, and the connection with Israel, the United States is incredibly unpopular. It's very different from eastern Europe, where it was on the safe side, and could advocate free elections because it was clear that no parties other than those supported by it were poised to win. In the Arab world it's the contrary. The second reason is that there is so much at stake in the region, economically and strategically. This explains why the United States is still following the same policy that it implemented during the Cold War, when it supported authoritarian regimes in the name of anti-communism.

**On the other hand, the Iranian Revolution was an example of the United States allowing one of its favoured dictators to be overthrown by an uprising that did not entirely appeal to Western rhetoric. Certainly, the Carter administration considered continuing to back its long-term ally, the Shah, but eventually did not. According to David Schmitz, this was because Carter, with his commitment to human rights policies, 'refused to be swayed by the old rationales for supporting right-wing dictatorships that had led to the original backing of the Shah, even if his fall from power was the result'.<sup>8</sup> To what extent was Carter's concern for human rights a factor in this case?**

**GA:** I would not want to comment on Carter's intimate thoughts, all the more since his subsequent evolution has been rather better than the average US president's. However, the United States is not an autocratic system, and when a president is not willing to do something that is necessary according to 'the system', it finds ways to compel him to do so. So, the fact is that the US did not intervene militarily at the time of the Iranian Revolution for practical reasons:

not because of any respect for human rights, but simply because the United States did not have the means to intervene. On one hand, in 1979 the United States was still fully affected by the so-called Vietnam syndrome, and was not actually able to send troops anywhere. Even Reagan, who came after Carter, wrote in his autobiography following his presidency that his major regret was his inability to overcome this 'syndrome'. In fact it is only in 1990-91, with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the changing global conditions in which the Soviet Union was on the verge of completely vanishing, that Washington recovered its ability to militarily intervene abroad in a massive way. On the other hand, Iran is a big country and it would have been very difficult for the United States to occupy and control it. For these reasons, it was just out of the question for the United States to intervene. The only attempt Carter made, which again was not motivated by human rights, was the operation to try to rescue the American hostages, and that was a total fiasco. It gives you an idea of how weak the United States was at that point.

**Carter's National Security Adviser at the time, Zbigniew Brzezinski, reportedly recommended that something be done to save the Shah in Iran, but Carter did not listen. Would Brzezinski not have been aware of the Vietnam syndrome?**

**GA:** Well, 'something' is one thing and a major intervention is another thing. And it is not just Brzezinski, or even any American president, that decides such things alone. They have to take into consideration how the Pentagon brass sees things and what they want. I am quite sure that the US military would not have been enthused about any idea of massive military action in the region at that point.

**At the time, Reagan was campaigning for the presidency, and part of his campaign involved criticising Carter for allowing the Shah, as well as Somoza in Nicaragua, to fall, and following the Jeanne Kirkpatrick doctrine that the US should have supported its allies there. Are you saying then that even Reagan could not have done anything in those cases?**

**GA:** As I say, Reagan himself experienced the inability to massively use military means during his own presidency. Throughout his two mandates, over eight years, he couldn't conduct any invasion, except that of the tiny Grenada. Against Nicaragua, or Iran, he had to resort to violations of US law -which led to the Iran-Contra scandal - playing petty politics, and sending weapons to Iran through the Israelis. In fact, this is the best proof that intervention is not a matter of what the president of the United States has in his mind, whether human rights or hawkish views. It's basically down to the objective ability to take action, which is ultimately decided by the Pentagon. If the military are very much opposed or extremely reluctant to do something, it's very hard for a president to impose it on them.

**And do you think short of actual military intervention the Shah could not have been saved?**

**GA:** I don't think he could have been saved in any other manner, and any intervention by the United States would have led to a situation like Vietnam, or at the very least like Iraq. Given that the United States proved unable to control Iraq in these recent years, how could it have controlled Iran, which is much larger with a much bigger population? Again, this is counterfactual history, but in this case it's rather clear that the United States would not have been able to crack such a big and tough nut.

**Is this something they should bear in mind with Iran today?**

**GA:** I think they do. They are not contemplating an invasion of Iran, only military strikes from a distance. This is the new, almost risk-free, kind of intervention - another level of what has been aptly called the post-heroic war. They have already used that tactic in Libya, where anyway the insurgent population did not want them to send ground troops. Operations from thousands of feet away are not a problem for the United States today, and that is what they are contemplating for Iran, under Israeli pressure.

**In your view, what were the motives of the United States and Europe in Libya, in aiding the removal of Gaddafi? Obviously there was quite a lot of debate about whether they should have been involved or not.**

**GA:** The uprising was basically a movement for democracy, rights, and political freedoms, and in that sense I can't see how any progressive person could not support the uprising of the Libyan people against a 42-year old dictatorship. As for why the United States and its allies intervened in the way they did, on the one hand it was because the Gaddafi regime was so isolated that it was not a big problem, politically, to do so. But also, they saw the possibility of regaining what they thought they had lost to a great extent in the events in Egypt and the rest of the area, that is, the credentials of appearing to side with a mass democratic movement. But they did so still with a view to exerting control on the political process. They knew that there weren't any major organised forces that represented a direct threat to the United States in Libya, so they thought there was a chance that through their intervention they could get the political scene in that country to turn pro-West. And, given that it's a rich oil country, it was worth doing that in their view, because it represents important economic and strategic interests.

However, they were delusional in thinking they could control the process there. They thought they would have a major say in what would happen in the post-Gaddafi era, but the truth is no one controls anything in Libya. It is now a country without a state, if we define a state by the monopoly of legitimate armed force. There are militias and various sorts of armed groups, and no one can tell which political forces will ultimately prevail. The United States plays the same game in Libya as it plays in Egypt and elsewhere. It tries to make a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood, and to create some kind of broad coalition of allies, from liberal to Islamic. Of course, in a sense, Western intervention in Libya diminished or defused anti-Western resentment in that country, preventing the development of stridently anti-Western currents in the short term; but the future is unclear. In the short term it doesn't look like there will be an especially anti-Western government, but it doesn't mean either that the Libyan people have become pro-Western, and that's an important distinction. Indeed, the attitude towards Israel can be seen as a kind of touchstone. The Libyans are very anti-Israel, and this is one key reason why they look at the West with suspicion and mistrust. Also, they know that Western countries are coming to Libya to secure contracts. They can see all these visits by Western rulers coming along with businessmen trying to get contracts - to get oil, to sell weapons, to secure reconstruction contracts, and so on. In fact, that's exactly the spirit in which the Libyans dealt with the Western intervention in the first place. They saw the Western powers as mercenaries that they were hiring to help them fight Gaddafi, and which they would reward with contracts. Obviously they had to conclude contracts anyway; they need Western input in rebuilding and developing their country. But they have the money for that and are not dependent on foreign funding.

After the liberation of Tripoli, the Syrian movement saw in the Western intervention in Libya a factor of success in the fight against their own dictatorship, and started requesting the same - disregarding the huge differences between the situations in the two countries. So in that regard you could say that the Western intervention in Libya achieved some success in changing the image of Western powers in the region. But even in Syria, the demands are addressed to the United Nations, as were those of the Libyans, and the Syrian uprising sees that it is the United

Nations and the Arab League, rather than the United States, that have a duty to prevent the regime from perpetrating mass murder against the people. This said, there is no consensus among the opposition in Syria for the request of foreign direct military intervention. Actually, there are probably more people opposed to that idea than in favour of it, contrary to the demand for weapons deliveries, which is popular indeed and a very different matter. The Syrian people are aware that Western countries are more on Israel's side than theirs, and they don't trust them.

## NOTES

1. Gilbert Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p.9 and p.45.
2. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (London: Alien Lane, 2007).
3. See Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
4. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, p.28.
5. Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, 2nd edn (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p.ix.
6. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, p.40.
7. See "'Egypt's transition begins" -Barack Obama', *BBCNews*, 11 February 2011, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12437116>>.
8. David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.181.