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The Struggle for Democracy in a Changed World

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In the conception of US planners of the modern world order after 1945 the Third World was to function 'as a source of raw materials and a market'. The major threat to this system were nationalistic regimes (not the USSR or communism), which would be best kept in check by pliant but democratic means, but failing that the 'rascal multitude could be taught lessons'. The US role of policing this system has evolved since their defeat in Vietnam. With the end of the Cold War, the Soviet empire can be 'Latin Americanised' while the US is legitimising force, doing so, for instance, through the UN as now in the Gulf. However, with the economic rise of Europe and Japan, the US is now turning to them to pay the bills, while at the same time using its unchallenged military muscle to strengthen its relative economic position.

Versions of 'Democracy'

If we are to address this topic, we must clarify what is meant by 'democracy', and in just what ways the world has changed. Investigating these questions, we find that the guardians of world order have sought to establish democracy in one sense of the term, while blocking it in a different sense. There is every reason to expect these dominant themes of modern history to persist under the changed conditions of the current era.

In one interpretation of the term, a society is democratic insofar as the public can play a meaningful role in managing their own affairs. But from the first modern democratic revolution in mid-17th century England, elite groups have commonly regarded democracy so understood as a threat to be overcome, not a prospect to be encouraged. The reasoning is straightforward: the rabble cannot be trusted, as demonstrated 350 years ago by their reluctance to place their affairs in the hands of the gentry and the army, who were 'truly the people', though the people in their foolishness did not agree. The mass of the people were described as a 'rascal multitude, beasts in men's shapes'. The rhetoric may have changed, but the conceptions prevail until the present.

In the preferred version of democracy, the rabble must be barred from interfering with serious matters. The basic thinking was lucidly articulated by Walter

Lippmann, the dean of American journalism and a highly regarded progressive democratic theorist. 'The public must be put in its place', Lippmann wrote, so that we may 'live free of the trampling and the roar of a bewildered herd.'

Lippmann distinguished two political roles in a modern democracy. First there is the role assigned to the 'specialised class', the 'insiders', the 'responsible men' who have access to information and understanding. These 'public men' are responsible for 'the formation of a sound public opinion.' 'They initiate, they administer, they settle', and should be protected from 'ignorant and meddlesome outsiders', the incompetent public, so that they can serve what is called 'the national interest' in the webs of mystification spun by the academic social sciences and political commentary.

The second role is 'the task of the public', which is much more limited. It is not for the public to 'pass judgement', but merely to place 'its force at the disposal' of one or another group of 'responsible men'. The public 'does not reason, investigate, invent, persuade, bargain or settle'. Rather, 'the public acts only by aligning itself as the partisan of someone in a position to act executively', once he has given the matter at hand sober and disinterested thought. The bewildered herd, trampling and roaring, 'has its function': to be 'the interested spectators of action', not participants. Participation is the duty of 'the responsible man'.

These ideas, described as a 'political philosophy for liberal democracy', bear an unmistakeable resemblance to the Leninist concept of a vanguard party that leads the masses to a better life that they cannot conceive or construct on their own.

'The responsible men' are to be the managers of the corporate, state and ideological institutions, all closely linked. For similiar reasons, in a state, capitalist democracy, the range of operative choices is narrowly limited by the concentration of decision-making power in the state-corporate nexus; but for efficiency, values and beliefs should be structured to ensure that few stray from these confines, or even are aware of them. As explained by Reinhold Niebuhr, the highly respected moralist and political thinker, the intelligent minority must devise 'necessary illusion' and 'emotionally potent oversimplifications' to keep the naive simpletons on course. Less discussed, because it strikes closer to home, is that the educated classes themselves must be deeply indoctrinated if they are to carry out their managerial role.

'Democracy' and the Third World

With some modifications, these principles apply to the Third World as well. Its population also has its 'function', but it is not quite that of the bewildered herd at home. And the modalities of control also differ; terror and violence are available to an extent not possible on the home front.

These were among the guiding principles of the planners of the modern world order in the 1940s. In this global system, the Third World was to be 'exploited' for the needs of the industrial capitalist societies, and to 'fulfil its major function as a source of raw materials and a market'; the terms are those of George Kennan's State Department Planning Staff with reference to Africa and Southeast Asia, but the application is far broader. In Latin America, Kennan explained, 'the protection of our resources' must be a major concern, as elsewhere. Since the main threat to our interests is indigenous, Kennan continued, we must accept the need for 'police repression by the local government'. In general, 'it is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by communists.' The term 'communist' is used here in its familiar technical sense, referring to labour leaders, peasant organisers, priests organising self-help groups, and others with the wrong priorities.

By the same token, the legitimate forces in the Third World are elements of the oligarchy, business community, and military who understand and serve US priorities. The function of the population is to be pack horses; the function of the elites is to keep them under control. If these goals can be attained with democratic forms, that is fine, even preferable, if only for propaganda purposes. If not, then other ways must be found, and in the Third World domains, there need be no delicacy about the choice of methods. The rascal multitude can be taught lessons in manners by terror bombing of the kind pioneered by England in Iraq 70 years ago; poison gas, as authorized at that time for use against 'uncivilized tribesmen' by a high official of the War Office, Winston Churchill, who advised that it should cause a 'lively terror' and condemned the 'squeamishness' of those who question 'the application of western science to modern warfare'; death squads, disappearance', and other devices of the neo-Nazi National Security States favoured by the US since the Kennedy years; and so on, in the familiar way.

Of course, a different formulation is required for the home front. First, the guise for intervention must be self-defence, a virtually invariant feature of statecraft. Second, the use of violence must be for noble objectives: freedom, justice, world order and democracy. But like all terms of political discourse, these have their special Orwellian meanings, constructed for the occasion. We are indeed inspired by a 'yearning for democracy', as the *New York Times* tells us, but 'democracy' in the proper sense.

The major threat to US interests is 'nationalistic regimes' that are responsive to popular pressures for 'immediate improvement in the low living standards of the masses' and diversification of the economies. Such initiatives interfere with 'the protection of our resources' and our efforts to encourage 'a climate conducive to private investment', which will allow foreign capital 'to repatriate a reasonable return'. The threat of communism, is the economic transformation of the communist powers 'in ways that reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West.' This is the real basis for the

intense hostility to the Soviet Union and its imperial system from 1917, and the reason why independent nationalism in the Third World, whatever its political cast, has been seen as the 'virus' that must be eradicated.

Towards a 'New World Order'

Since 1917, the use of force has been presented as self-defence against the Soviet threat - including intervention in Russia itself. Before the Bolshevik revolution, similar actions were taken, but in fear of other menaces. When Woodrow Wilson invaded Mexico and Hispaniola - where his warriors murdered and destroyed, re-established virtual slavery, demolished the political system, and placed the countries firmly in the hands of US investors - the actions were in self-defence against the Huns. In earlier years, conquests and interventions were undertaken in defence against Britain and the 'base Canadian fiends' it manipulated, or Spain, or the 'merciless Indian savages' of the Declaration of Independence. With the Cold War a fading memory, intervention continued as before. Last year, in the first act of aggression of the post-Cold War era, the US invaded Panama, killing hundreds (possibly thousands) of civilians, restoring the rule of the 10% white elite and ensuring its grip on the Canal zone. Not even the most fertile imagination could conjure up a Russian threat, so other pretexts were concocted, no less ludicrous but more suited to the occasion. Ambassador Thomas Pickering even informed the United Nations that the US interprets the Charter as entitling it to use force to 'defend our interests' - a momentary lapse into realism, dutifully ignored by the faithful.

After World War I then, the traditional pattern of intervention continued, but with two basic changes. First, the US joined England and France as a major actor in the international arena. Second, its interventions were now in defence of civilization itself against the challenge of the Bolsheviks.

The analytic framework devised after World War I was extended to broader domains in the 1940s, as the US became history's first truly global power and turned to the task of constructing a world order in its interests. Industrial capitalism was to be reconstructed under the leadership of Germany and Japan, but now under US control. Within the general framework of liberal internationalism, US business was expected to flourish, finding ample investment opportunities and markets for its excess production, expectations that were largely fulfilled. The function of the Third World has already been discussed.

From the 1970s, the post-war system has been moving towards what is now called a 'New World Order', but one that bears little resemblance to the construction of the ideologues, with their lovely phrases about peace, justice, and the sanctity of international law, if only the new Hitler in Baghdad can be stopped before he conquers the world. The basic contours of the actual New World Order were coming into focus 20 years ago, with the emergence of a 'tripolar world' as economic power diffused within US domains. The collapse of Soviet tyranny adds several new dimensions. First, there are now prospects

for the Latin Americanization of much of the former Soviet empire, that is, for its return to its traditional quasi-colonial status, providing resources, cheap labour, markets, investment opportunities, and other standard Third World amenities. This is a development that may have large-scale consequences. The US is distinctly uneasy over the prospect of German-led Europe and Japan taking the lead in exploiting this new Third World.

A second consequence of the Soviet collapse is that the US is more free than before to use force, the Soviet deterrent having disappeared. In any confrontation, each contestant seeks to play its strong cards, to shift the conflict to an arena in which it is likely to prevail. For such reasons, the US has always regarded diplomacy and international law as an annoying encumbrance, a fact familiar to those who follow the affairs of Southeast Asia, Central America and the Middle East, among others. With the current configuration of US strengths and weaknesses, the temptation to transfer problems quickly to the arena of forceful confrontation is likely to be strong. Furthermore, the US intends to maintain its near monopoly of force, with no likely contestant for that role. One consequence will be exacerbation of domestic economic difficulties; another, a renewed temptation to 'go it alone' in relying on the threat of force rather than diplomacy.

The Gulf conflict has brought these issues to the fore. Aside from England, which has its own interests in Kuwait, the major industrial powers showed little interest in military confrontation. The reaction in Washington was ambivalent. War is dangerous; defusing the crisis without a demonstration of the efficacy of force is also an unwanted outcome. As for the costs, plainly it would be advantageous for them to be shared, but not at the price of sacrificing the role of lone enforcer. These conflicting concerns led to a sharp elite split over the tactical choice between preparation for war and reliance on sanctions, with the Administration holding to the former course.

In the 'New World Order', the Third World domains must still be controlled, sometimes by force. This task has been the responsibility of the US, but with its relative economic decline, the burden becomes harder to shoulder. One reaction is that the US must persist in its historic task, while turning to others to pay the bills. Testifying before Congress, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger explained that the emerging New World Order will be based on 'a kind of new invention in the practice of diplomacy': others will pay the costs of US intervention to keep order. In the *Financial Times*, David Hale, a respected commentator on international economic affairs, describes the Gulf crisis as a 'watershed event in US international relations', which will be seen in history as having 'turned the US military into an internationally financed public good', an internationally-financed police force'. While 'some Americans will question the morality of the US military assuming a more explicitly mercenary role than it has played in the past', he adds, 'in the 1990s there is no realistic alternative'. The tacit assumption is that the public welfare is to be identified with the welfare of the Western industrial powers, and particularly their domestic elites.

The financial editor of a leading US conservative daily, William Neikirk of the *Chicago Tribune*, puts the point less delicately:

> *we must exploit our 'virtual monopoly in the security market . . . as a lever to gain funds and economic concessions' from Germany and Japan. The US has 'cornered the West's security market' and others lack the 'political will . . . to challenge the US' in this 'market.' We will therefore be 'the world's rent-a-cops' and will be 'able to charge handsomely' for the service; the term 'rent-a-thug' would be less flattering but more but more appropriate. Some will call us 'Hessians', Neikirk continues, but 'that's a terribly demeaning phrase for a proud, well-trained, well-financed and well-respected military'; and whatever anyone may say, 'we should be able to pound our fists on a few desks' in Japan and Europe, and 'extract a fair price for our considerable services', demanding that our rivals 'buy our bonds at cheap rates, or keep the dollar propped up, or better yet, pay cash directly into our Treasury.' 'We could change this role' of enforcer, he concludes, 'but with it would go much of our control over the world economic system.'*

This conception, while rarely put so bluntly, is widely held, and captures an essential element of Washington's reaction to the Gulf crisis. It implies that the US should continue to take on the grim task of imposing order and stability (meaning, proper respect for the masters) with the acquiescence and support of the other industrial powers along with riches funnelled to the US via the dependent oil-producing monarchies.

There has been much curious commentary about the 'wondrous sea change' at the United Nations (*New York Times*), now at last able to undertake its peacekeeping function with the Cold War over, no longer obstructed by the Soviet veto and Third World ranting. The facts, scrupulously avoided in the hundreds of articles on this topic, provide a different message, with no ambiguity. In the early years, the Soviet Union regularly blocked UN action, the organisation being virtually an instrument of US foreign policy. But as the world recovered from the war and UN membership broadened with decolonization, the picture changed radically. For the past 20 years, the US is far in the lead in Security Council vetoes and negative votes in the General Assembly, often alone or with some client state, on every relevant issue: aggression, annexation, international law, terrorism, disarmament, and so on. Great Britain is in second place, France a distant third, and the USSR fourth, with one-seventh as many vetoes as the US. There is no reason to suppose that with the Soviet withdrawal from world affairs, the US and its British client will suddenly end their campaign against international law, diplomacy, and collective security - which had virtually nothing to do with the Cold War, as a look at actual cases will show. Furthermore, the 'anti-Western' Third World rhetoric that is so commonly derided often turns out to be a call for adherence to international law, a weak barrier against the depredations of the powerful. In the case of the Gulf, the UN can act because for once it is not being blocked by the US and its allies, as in many other cases, some much worse than the one at hand - the near-genocidal Indonesian invasion and annexation of Timor, to cite just one atrocity still in progress, as always with the decisive support of the US and Britain.

In the post-Cold War period, the pattern continues without change. Since November 1989, four Security Council resolutions have been vetoed, two condemning Israeli human rights abuses, two condemning the US invasion of Panama. All were vetoed by the US, in one case joined by Britain and France, in another with Britain abstaining. The General Assembly voted two resolutions calling for adherence to international law, one condemning US support for its terrorist forces attacking Nicaragua, the other the illegal US embargo; the US and Israel were alone in opposition. A resolution opposing the acquisition of territory by force passed 151 to 3 (US, Israel and Dominica), another affirmation of the peaceful diplomatic settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that the US has blocked for 20 years. Nothing here has anything to do with the Cold War, the Russian veto, or Third World psychotics. The tales about the UN have sometimes moved from merely misleading to outright deception, citing the cumulative total of vetoes from the 1940s but with the crucial matter of dates and circumstances suppressed so as to lend credence to the theses required by the propaganda system.

In accord with the pragmatic criterion, the use of force and terror is only a last resort. The IMF is to be preferred to the CIA and the Marines, if possible; but it is not always possible. Some of the new devices can be found in the Uruguay Round negotiations for a New World Economic Order, now in disarray because of conflicts among the rich, but sure to be revived in one or another form. Western powers call for 'liberalization' when it is in their interest; and for enhanced protection of domestic economic actors, when *that* is in their interest. The major concern of the US in the GATT negotiations was not so much agricultural policy as the 'new themes', as they were called: guarantees for 'intellectual property rights', removal of constraints on services and investment, and so on; a mixture of liberalization and protectionism, determined by the interests of the powerful. The effect of these measures would be to restrict Third World governments to a police function to control their working classes and superfluous population, while transnational corporations gain free access to their resources and monopolise new technology and global investment and production. The corporations, furthermore, are granted the central planning, allocation, production and distribution functions denied to governments, which suffer from the defect that they might fall under the baleful influence of the rabble. These facts have not been lost on Third World commentators, who have been protesting eloquently and mightily. But their voices are unheard - again, in accord with our traditional values.

We might also take note of the broad if tacit understanding that the capitalist model has limited application; business leaders have long recognised that it is not for them. The successful industrial societies depart significantly from this model, as in the past - one reason why they are successful industrial societies. The US became the bread-basket of the world and the greatest industrial power, instead of pursuing its comparative advantage in production of furs, because of state subsidy, investment, and protection - which, incidentally, increased sharply under Reaganite 'conservatism'. The sectors of the economy that re-

main competitive are those that feed from the public trough: high tech industry and capital-intensive agriculture, along with pharmaceuticals and others. Departures are still more radical in most of the other state capitalist systems, where planning is coordinated by state institutions and financial-industrial conglomerates, sometimes with democratic processes and a social contract of varying sorts, sometimes not. Japan and its periphery are a familiar case, along with Germany, where, to mention only one feature, the IMF estimates that industrial incentives amount to a 30 per cent tariff. Some comparative studies of Latin America and East Asia attribute the disparities that developed in the 1980s in large part to the deleterious effects of greater openness to international capital markets in Latin America, which permitted huge capital flight, unlike East Asian economies with more rigid controls by government and central banks - and in the free market miracle of South Korea, by punishment up to the death penalty.

The glories of Free Enterprise provide a useful weapon against government policies that might benefit the general population, and of course, capitalism will do just fine for the former colonies and the Soviet empire. For those who are to 'fulfil their functions' in service to the masters of the world order, the model is highly recommended; it facilitates their exploitation. But the rich and powerful at home have long appreciated the need to protect themselves from the destructive forces of free market capitalism, which may provide suitable themes for rousing oratory, but only so long as the public handout and the regulatory and protectionist apparatus are secure, and state power is on call when needed.

The costs of the emerging world order will be obvious to anyone who surveys the immense catastrophes of capitalism in the past years, particularly the past decade, dramatically evident in the wreckage of the inner cities in the world's richest country and throughout the vast regions that have lone fulfilled their service function - though some sectors, linked to the rich men who rule the world, do very well for themselves. But the wealthy and privileged will not escape unscathed. The physical environment to sustain human existence is severely threatened as policy is driven by greed, and weapons of mass destruction proliferate in large measure because of great power interests. There are also growing conflicts among the three major power blocs: (1) German-led Europe; (2) Japan and its periphery; (3) the US and the trading and resource bloc it is seeking to consolidate in the Western hemisphere and the Middle East. In earlier eras, such conflicts led to global war. That will not happen in the present case, for two major reasons; the interpenetration of capital is far higher, so that state power has broader and more complex interests than in earlier periods; and modern weaponry is so awesome that only wars against weaker opponents can be contemplated.

We can make this prediction with complete confidence; if it is wrong, there will be no one to refute us. Such factors as these will shape the new methods for continuing the war against the Third World, now in a different guise and

with a more varied array of competing actors. Popular forces in the US and Europe have placed certain barriers in the path of state terror, and have offered some help to those targeted for repression, but unless they gain considerably in scale and commitment, the future for the traditional victims looks grim.

Grim, but not hopeless. With amazing courage and persistence, oppressed people continue to struggle for their rights. And in the industrial world, with Bolshevism disintegrating and capitalism long abandoned, there are prospects for the revival of libertarian socialist and radical democratic ideals that had languished, including popular control of the workplace and investment decisions and, correspondingly, the establishment of more meaningful political democracy as constraints imposed by private power are reduced. These and other emerging possibilities are still remote, but no more so that the possibility of parliamentary democracy and elementary rights of citizenship 250 years ago. No one knows enough to predict what human will can achieve.

We are faced with a kind of Pascal's wager: assume the worst, and it will surely arrive; commit oneself to the struggle for freedom and justice, and its cause may be advanced.

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