A Non-Violent Moment -Response to
"Terrorism in America"
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This article, like so many others, demonstrates that the "War onTerrorism", the "War in Iraq" and United States tacit support for   Israeli violation of Palestinian human rights are having exactly the opposite effects to those intended. Far from generating more security against terrorist politics and   attack these policies are delivering more insecurity for the West, (particularly the members of the coalition of the willing). Instead of "draining the pools within which terrorists swim" these pools have become very large lakes for the politically desperate. Far from delivering democracy , human rights and a bright economic future to a Post Saddam Iraq, the Interim Authority in Iraq has delivered higher levels of discontent, given cover to profound Western violations of Moslem human rights, and opened up some extremely deep and bitter internal fissures and divisions.

In all of   these wars there is absolutely no basis for Western self righteousness and the assertion of Western moral or humanitarian superiority. Whatever moral justification September 11th gave to the United States in relation to Afghanistan has well and truly evaporated in Iraq over the past year.   Of course the rot started well before then. The goodwill that flowed to the United States from the rest of the world between September and December 2001 was subverted by deliberate United States suspension of the Geneva Conventions at Guantanamo Bay and by very public signs that inmates at that camp were being tortured and maltreated. When 67% of the United States population around that time expressed a willingness to abandon First Amendment rights for security this also gave a green light to the Administration's assault on civil liberty and the rule of law in the name of national security. The Secretary of Defence gave some of the game away in 2001 in response to a bloody assault on an Afghanistan prison. When asked at a Press Conference about whether the violent suppression of the prison revolt at Mazar-e-Sharif had been proportionate, Rumsfield indicated bafflement.

> "Now, the word 'proportion'-'proportionate'is interesting. And I don't know that its appropriate. And I don't know that I could define it. But it might be said—and I wouldn't say it—(laughter)—but it might be said by some that to quickly and aggressively repress a prison riot in one location may help dissuade people in other locations from engaging in prison riots and breaking out of prison and killing more people. I don't know that that's true. It might also persuade the people who are still in there with weapons, killing   each other and killing other people, to stop doing it….Your question's too tough for me. I don't know what 'proportionate' would be".[1]

In this comment the Secretary of Defence removed a principle   criteria for determining whether or not the military action being taken in Afghanistan was justifiable   in terms of   just war theory. Once proportionality is abandoned there are no limits to brutality and all parties to conflict get entrapped in vicious cycles fuelled by revenge rather than logic.

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[1] Rumsfield, Press Briefing with General Pace, 30 November 2001—www. defenselink.mil.news/Nov 2001

All sides to these bloody conflicts are equally culpable. Apart from the shock value, there is little qualitative difference between an American being beheaded in public and an Iraqi prisoner being bludgeoned to death by American military police in the private squalor of Saddam Hussein's former torture center at Abu Ghairib. There is no real difference between Palestinian extremists bombing a Jewish wedding and the US airforce killing 40 Iraqis at a village wedding. In the final analysis all the victims are dead . When individuals, groups and nations declare "war" on others they should not be surprised when their opponents do the same. The results are identical-- grieving families, confusion, and a profound desire for vengeance and the perpetuation of violence.

Whether the terror is bottom up (as it was on September 11th) or top down as it is when state military machines fail to distinguish the innocent from the guilty or the combatants from the non-combatants -- we are rediscovering, slowly and painfully that violence is an appallingly blunt instrument for the solution of difficult political, economic or social problems.

This represents an opportunity for those of us committed to the non violent solution of problems. While it is premature to declare that these "wars" are the last gasp of American Imperialism, they are beginning to prove very chastening for a significant number of the American people. There is a growing recognition of the limits of coercive power, even that of the most powerful military power in world history. United States military might is now greater in terms of scope and lethality than that available to any other military power in world history. The US defence budget is more than $400 billion. It is larger than the combined total of the next nine biggest defence spenders. The US is responsible for about 40% of the world's military spending. Such "absolute military power" generates a very particular kind of arrogance and corruptability. This is manifest in the willingness to suspend basic human rights in the promotion of an idiosyncratic view of national security and in a systematic assault on 60 years of effort to develop effective international norms and global institutions capable of giving expression to them. It is also underlined in the assertion of American exceptionalism to the emerging world order.

It is in these circumstances that we must develop a radical solidarity with those Americans and others who are seeking viable alternatives to the mindless quest for full military dominance in land, sea, air and in space; or the foolish belief that additional security might be gained through the miniaturization of nuclear warheads or the development of national missile defence systems. This is the moment when the poverty of militarism demands the assertion of the richness of non-violence.

To do this effectively, however, requires vision, courage, conviction and dedication. It also requires considerable imagination. How can we envisage an end to violence when the world and the Middle East in particular is so afflicted by it?

In the first place there has to be an acknowledgement by the governments of the United States, the UK, Australia and others that these different wars are generating more real insecurity than security. In relation to Iraq, for example, this means acknowledging that violent regime change was a monumental mistake. Such an admission from the most powerful, difficult though it may be, is a pre-requisite for

the delegitimation of bottom up terrorism. The coalition of the willing cannot call for the abandonment of the politics of terror if they themselves are wedded to the solution of problems by force and terror. There will be no peace in Iraq, for example until the 110,000 US military, the 18,000 US private security operatives and the 8,700 UK troops are withdrawn. Nor will there be any peace as long as the United States plans on keeping 5,000 officials in its Baghdad Embassy. This is not regime change it is Imperialism.

Second,it is clear that current Israeli policies towards Palestinians will never result in lasting peace in the Middle East. There is no fundamental difference between Palestinian and Israeli violence. All barbarous acts are an inducement to more barbarity. An eye for an eye is blinding both Israelis and Palestinians. It is absolutely critical that the global community get the "Road Map" back on track, and that there is a willingness for a ceasefire and phased withdrawal on both sides so that non-violent solutions might be considered in a more conducive environment than the current one.

Third, the battered United Nations has to be given a much more central role in the building of sustainable peace in both Iraq and in Israel/Palestine. There is huge antagonism towards the UN within Iraq because of its association with two Iraq wars. There is, however, a growing, albeit grudging, acknowledgement that there is no other oranisation capable of facilitating a smooth transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. The UN needs the support of all the diverse factions within Iraq if it is to be able to fulfil its mandate. If it gets it, however, then it will be well placed to lead Iraqi reconstruction and development. If it does not get such support then consideration should be given to delegating UN authority to the Organisation of Islamic States and or the Gulf Co-operation Council to assume these roles on behalf of the world community.

Fourth, the world community needs to allow the Iraqi people to determine the shape of their own future. This might mean a federation of constituent parts. It might also mean a willingness to accept some sort of division along Shia, Sunni and Kurdish lines. The important thing is that outsiders must support Iraqis in whatever they consider to be in their best interests rather than the other way around.

Fifth, there is a need to activate a "vocational commitment" towards the quest for non violent solutions to all these problems. The military have manifestly failed to deliver their objectives. The onus is now on civil society groups, political and governmental leaders to both testify to apply non-violent options. This requires huge amounts of courage since those committed to military solutions will not willingly cede to non violent ones. If this does not happen, however, then the world will continue to self destruct. Maybe its appropriate to learn lessons from those small groups who have made a commitment to non-violence through the years. The Quakers , for example, believe that that true human fulfillment comes from attempts to live life in the spirit of love, truth and peace, answering that of God in everyone. It is this belief that gives rise to a profound sense of equality, justice, compassion and seeing the sacred in all life. This is not a bad lesson for those seeking to develop some radical alternatives to those who are living life in the spirit of enmity, hostility , untruth and revenge. Similarly it is important to reiterate the wisdom of Gandhi who said " I object to violence… because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary- the evil it does is permanent."

What is clear from this is that we will not defeat terror with terror, torture with torture, capital punishment with capital punishment. The world demands more creative solutions than these. We need to harness the finest intellects, the most creative imaginations, and the best listening ears so that we understand the needs of others better than our own. We must sow hope instead of fear and replace falsehood and   deceit with truth. We need to   respond to hatred with compassion, so that we can do justice, show mercy and begin to embody and demonstrate that inexhaustible power of love which makes life and living worthwhile. Sundhaussen's paper underlines why the world is in a mess. It is our responsibility to testify to more enlightened alternatives.