

Post 9–11: Optimism of the Will

By John Gershman, Interhemispheric Resource Center

I'd like to offer these comments in the vein of presenting some "optimism of the will" to complement the "pessimism of the intellect" of the previous speakers at this FPIF conference on weapons of mass destruction <http://www.fpif.org/presentations/wmd01/index.html>. This is not to contradict their generally gloomy analysis of the state of affairs since September 11th, but simply to try and identify where I think new opportunities exist, and to address more systematically the issue of how much has actually changed since September 11th.

I'd like to discuss what I think has changed, what hasn't changed, and what needs to change.

What Has Changed

Prior to September 11th, the post-cold war global framework as Michael Klare elaborated in his presentation (online at <http://www.fpif.org/presentations/wmd01/klare.html>) to this conference was that the world was characterized by unipolarity (U.S. as global hegemon); economic globalization appeared to be the dominant strategic trend and process to which states felt a need to respond, and the Bush administration's security policy was oriented toward containing or combating the emergence of a peer competitor (i.e., China) in the near future. The Bush administration's foreign policy was also characterized by a rejection of a range of multilateral initiatives (Kyoto Protocol, Biological Weapons Convention, etc.) and a general interest in reducing international involvement and foreign aid.

What has changed since September 11th?

The nature of security threats: The major security threats, as identified in the recent Quadrennial Defense Review, are transnational

and non-state actors, in contrast to the more traditional peer competitor image.

The character of terrorism: While terrorism had previously been identified as a threat, the profile of the "new terrorism" has become more central. The characteristics of the "new terrorists" and "new terrorist movements" are that they are (often transnational) networks of small cells (as opposed to the terrorism associated with national liberation movements); terrorist attacks are increasingly lethal while being less frequent; and the profile of the September 11th suicide bombers appears to be members of the global middle class—ostensible beneficiaries of globalization rather than its victims.

Greater rhetorical support for the public sector: In the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks in particular, there's been renewed rhetoric in support of the public sector working class heroes (fire, police, rescue, and emergency crews) as well as the postal service in the aftermath of the anthrax attacks. Recognition that the first responders to future tragedies will be public sector personnel creates at least a rhetorical recognition of the importance of the public sector.

Solidarity: The recently bemoaned decline of civic culture in the U.S. (epitomized in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*) has been replaced by a sentiment of solidarity as people were giving blood together.

Renewal of National Security Garrison State: There has been a decisive shift of power within the U.S. state away from Congress to the executive and a reinvigoration of the National Security Garrison State of the cold war both at home and abroad, with severe threats that dissent will be criminalized.

New Openings in Foreign Policy: There were at least initial openings to a reevaluation of the

historical U.S. position with respect to Israel and Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East, as well as a thawing in relations with “rogue” and “competitor” states such as China, Russia, and Iran dictated by the efforts to build a broad anti-Taliban and anti-al Qaeda coalition that would support U.S. military action.

What Didn't Change?

Security threats: The appropriate response to security threats is still understood primarily in military terms, with military supremacy seen as necessarily creating security rather than contributing to insecurity, in the context of U.S. efforts to create missile defenses and undermine multilateral arms control.

Unilateralism Rules!: While the Bush administration's rhetoric acknowledged greater multilateralism, its practice still remained largely as before—posse multilateralism or multilateralism a la carte.

Sacrificing Core Values: As during the cold war, the administration is willing to sacrifice what are ostensibly core values (civil liberties and human rights) at home and abroad for a perceived short-term strategic gain.

Globalization is the answer: Globalization is still viewed as the answer, with the administration opportunistically using the September 11th attacks to justify increased efforts to pass fast track and launch a new trade round at the WTO Ministerial at Doha.

The State as the Executive Committee of the Bourgeoisie: The immediate economic policy reactions of the administration were to bail out corporations and the wealthy, and not to address the needs of working people.

What Needs To Change

Despite this gloomy prognosis, I think our opportunities are greater than we might otherwise think.

Vision of Security: Our vision of security needs to shift away from a militarized vision that emphasizes the maintenance of U.S. military supremacy as the route to security, as opposed to a multilevel network of multilateral institutions and mechanisms that embed the U.S. and other states in institutions that promote collective and cooperative security efforts. The current administration seems committed to undermining multilateral arms control through such actions as pursuing missile defenses and undermining the Biological Weapons Convention. After September 11th we should be able to show that attempting to buy security through technical panaceas like missile defenses are chimerical at best, and destabilizing at worst, and that verifiable multilateral arms control regimes for the entire spectrum of weapons of mass destruction must be a central component to a rational security policy in the 21st century.

We must also engage systematically in the debate over defining and implementing homeland security and not simply cede this to the security establishment.

The pursuit of hegemony and supremacy is a double-edged sword. It most certainly doesn't insure security. The strategic debate for progressives, however, remains: Do we argue that the U.S. should exercise its hegemonic power for beneficent ends, or should we be working to end U.S. hegemony?

Security has ceased to be a concern of only the federal government, as state and local governments have become involved. This provides new opportu-

nities to use the renewed rhetorical respect the public sector has achieved to insure that it receives the funds necessary to meet legitimate security needs, particularly in those areas where these efforts strengthen the civilian sector and have important, positive side-effects on both the economy and social infrastructure. The public health system is the most immediate example, where strengthening surveillance mechanisms and laboratory capabilities of public health systems can aid in combating infectious disease outbreaks as well as bioterrorism.

The opportunity to revisit the U.S. development strategy is evident both by the September 11th attacks and the recession. This involves crucially U.S. energy policy, which has both domestic and international implications, and enables us to go after the president and the administration even though he's gained in popularity because of the war.

Now more than ever we need to go on the offensive with respect to the debate on globalization, illustrating how the contradictions of corporate-led globalization have contributed to the current situation, and re-focusing the “anti-globalization” movement's agenda on controlling capital as opposed to trade issues. The opportunity is there: witness the new expansion of regulations on international capital flows that emerged in the aftermath of September 11th as an effort to combat the flows of terrorist finances. This was an administration opposed to increased international regulation of money laundering and tax havens prior to September 11th, and now it has taken them up with vigor. Such efforts also indicate that regulating capital flows is more a question of political priorities and power and less one of the “irre-

versible, inevitable” globalization of capital. In the process we need to distinguish more clearly between globalization and capitalism, highlighting the class character of the Bush administration and ending forever any association that some in the antiglobalization movement have with rhetoric that is less than internationalist.

Money: While money isn't everything, it is something. As the administration launches on a major spending spree for the Pentagon, we need to be more aggressive in identifying where we think additional spending needs to take place in both domestic and foreign policy. The recession is another opportunity for us to offer a positive vision for the public sector and to contrast an agenda that focuses on broad visions of security with the more narrow and militarized version advocated by the administration. We need to be at least as bold as Jeff Sachs in being willing to call for significant increases in funding for certain types of foreign aid programs while still maintaining our traditional critiques of foreign aid.

Terrorism as a Public Relations Failure: We need to smash the canard that the September 11th attacks and similar attacks occur because “they” don't

know us—as if terrorism were the result of a flawed PR strategy. The real problem is many people in the U.S. don't know the rest of the world, not the reverse (a problem at the national level where some congressional representatives brag about not having passports and our current president is lacking in direct overseas experience). For example, the U.S. hosts more foreign students than any other country at its universities and colleges. Yet, foreign language enrollments as a percentage of total higher education (college, university, or community college) enrollments have fallen from 16% in the 1960s to an average of 8% since the mid-1970s. Less than half of college or university students take any foreign language. Eighty percent of those students who do take a foreign language take French, German, or Spanish. And the number of 4-year colleges and universities that require a foreign language for admission has fallen from 34% in 1965 to 20% in 1995. Finally, the percentage of college or university students who spend more than a semester studying abroad fell from 18% to 10% from 1985-1997. At the same time the U.S. has been preaching globalization, the citizenry has

retreated into parochialism. Who doesn't know whom?

U.S.-sponsored terrorism: We need to recall Jonathan Schell's admonition (online at <http://www.fpif.org/presentations/wmd01/schell.html>) from last night, and work to end U.S. state complicity with, sponsorship of, and direct engagement in terrorist acts in the Middle East, Colombia, and elsewhere. This is a critical element if we are not to enable the Bush administration to swathe itself in the mantle of antiterrorism.

This day in 1895 Alfred P. Nobel wrote the will that dedicated his estate to fund the prizes that bear his name, including the one for peace. We may not all be so wealthy as to dedicate such financial resources to that cause. But may we embrace that spirit and rededicate ourselves to a task of creating the most appropriate memorial to those murdered on September 11th—the active presence of justice that is peace. Thank you.

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Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

Essays Include:

Robert Cutler
Karen Hansen-Kuhn
Chris Hellman
Neil Hicks
Chris Toensing
Tomas Valasek
Carol Welch
Ian Williams

A First Glance at Bush's Policy Toward Russia
Bush's Trade Policy: The NAFTA Express
What Can We Expect from the Penatagon?
The Bush Administration and Human Rights
Bush's Middle East Policy: Look to His Advisors
George W. Bush and the "Other" Europe
Republican Rule and the IFIs
The United Nations: Beating Around the Bush

And Many Others!

Profiles Include:

Richard Lee Armitage
Paul O'Neill
Richard N. Perle
Colin Powell
Condoleezza Rice
Donald Rumsfeld
George Schultz
Paul Wolfowitz
Ann Veneman
Robert B. Zoellick