

The New Global Peace Movement vs. the Bush Juggernaut

By Jeremy Brecher | May 28, 2003

The Bush administration is presenting itself to the world as a juggernaut—a “massive, inexorable force that advances irresistibly, crushing whatever is in its path.” Bush’s *National Security Strategy* portrays his “war against terrorism” as “a global enterprise of uncertain duration.” It says the U.S. will act against “emerging threats before they are fully formed.” The Bush administration envisions the coming decades as a continuation of recent U.S. demands, threats, and wars. It intends to continue the aggressive behavior already illustrated by war on Afghanistan and Iraq, armed intervention in the Philippines and Colombia, and threats against Syria, Iran, and North Korea. The Bush administration and its successors are likely to continue this juggernaut until they are made to stop.

As the Bush administration sought global support for its attack on Iraq, the *New York Times* wrote, “The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world opinion.” But is that “superpower” with which President Bush appeared “eyeball to eyeball” on the eve of the Iraq war really a “tenacious new adversary” or just flash-in-the-pan protest against the inexorable advance of the Bush juggernaut?

Here are some strategies that can make the new global peace movement tenacious and effective in the post-Iraq war period:

Expanding the focus: The U.S. has been the world’s dominant superpower throughout the 20th century and has frequently used its military might against isolated opponents. But its power always depended on a system of alliances with other powers, worldwide respect for its system of government, and division among those who would challenge it.

At the core of the Bush administration’s new policy is the replacement of such “hegemony” with a world order based on direct U.S. dictation. This shift is enunciated in Bush’s *National Security Strategy* document. In place of self-determination and pluralism, it asserts that there is “a single sustainable model for

national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.” In place of security through international cooperation, it asserts that the U.S. “will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively” and by “convincing or compelling states” to accept their “responsibilities” as the U.S. defines them. This shift can be seen in the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq; the threats against Syria, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and even Belgium and France; the scornful undermining of the UN; and the contemptuous treatment of longtime U.S. allies.

The new global peace movement now has the opportunity to redefine itself as a movement against this policy of dictation and aggression, of which the Iraq war was merely one expression. It can become a movement for international cooperation and for global norms, rules, and institutions that restrict the warmaking of states—including the mightiest of them. In the U.S. that movement can support policies that provide security through international cooperation.

While consideration of the future of the new peace movement is still in its early stages, discussion in the U.S. has focused on expansion from Iraq to broader issues of U.S. foreign policy; outreach to domestic social groups affected by the Bush agenda; defense of



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human rights and civil liberties for dissenters, Arabs, Muslims, immigrants, and other threatened groups; and strengthening the international connectedness of the movement.

The movement has continued demonstrations and other mobilizations against manifestations of U.S. aggression and domination. A substantial part of the movement will undoubtedly focus on the upcoming elections: MoveOn has already declared it will mobilize its 1 ¼ million anti-war contacts for that purpose. Public education on foreign policy issues is also bound to be important: United for Peace and Justice and a coalition of religious groups have already launched teach-ins and educational forums on issues of war and peace.

Utilizing emerging targets: The Bush administration program is generating an endless stream of outrages that can provide targets for movement action. Just to take a few recent examples, global campaigns might demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq or their placement under UN command; defense of France against U.S. threats of economic reprisals; and the elimination of U.S. foreign military bases. A number of positive global initiatives could be supported as well, such as the return of UN inspectors to Iraq and the Syrian proposal for a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free Middle East.

Global coordination: Such campaigns require the ability to act quickly and proactively. For many purposes the movement's present decentralized structure is excellent, but it has revealed gaps that need to be filled. Many opportunities for globally coordinated action have occurred just since the end of the Iraq war that have not been utilized because there is no infrastructure through which movements in different countries and sectors can learn of them, focus on them, and decide to act on them in concert.

To accomplish its tasks, the movement does not require a centralized decisionmaking authority, but it could benefit from "linking organizations" that help with certain key tasks. These include monitoring and rapidly disseminating information about aggressive U.S. activities—some sort of "USA Watch"; coordinating rapid global responses to both outrages and opportunities; and maintaining a proactive

dialogue on strategy and objectives to guide day-to-day activities.

Resisting U.S. dictation: In scores of countries around the world, the Iraq war generated a struggle between those willing to be tools of American influence and those resisting it. Important elections in Germany, South Korea, and elsewhere turned on the question of U.S. military aggressiveness. In several cases, notably Turkey and South Korea, street confrontations and political struggles in parliament forced governments to reverse course on support for the war. This struggle has continued in the wake of the war. Most governments are undecided about how much to resist American power and commands. The outcome is in most cases an open question.

The global peace movement can make every government an arena of struggle over resistance to U.S. dictation. People can tell their governments they want them to resist U.S. demands, selectively withdraw from cooperation with the U.S., and actively cooperate with other countries to contain U.S. power.

Democratization: The Bush administration has systematically opposed resistance to its dictation. But U.S. threats can be used to make the issue of peace an issue of democracy and self-determination. In some cases—as happened in Turkey on the eve of the Iraq war—governments can be made more afraid of their own people than they are of the Americans. If they are not, that in itself provides a strong case for regime change to establish democracy and self-government. Democratic pressures can erode Bush's "coalition of the willing."

Nowhere is this more important than in the Middle East. Here, a string of autocratic regimes oppress their own people and deny their human rights with political support, funding, and military assistance from the U.S.; at the same time they cooperate with U.S. policies despite the overwhelming opposition of their own people. In such a setting, the fight for democracy and human rights can go hand in hand with the fight against U.S. domination. A fight for democratization without U.S. domination would be supported by the vast majority of the population of most Middle Eastern countries—including, most

likely, Iraq—while at the same time isolating and providing an alternative to those who wish to replace existing authoritarian regimes with new nationalistic and/or theocratic ones.

Multiple alliances: The global opposition to the U.S. attack on Iraq included global public opinion, grassroots social movements, the governments of many countries, and the tacit alliance of the major non-U.S. powers. Opposition within the U.S. included at one time or another a majority of the public, millions of individual activists, old and new peace organizations, a coalition of religious, labor, women's, African American, and other peoples organizations, and some members of military, intelligence, political, and business elites. Just as the Bush administration is organizing "coalitions of the willing," so those who want to terminate Bush's program of dictation and aggression need to cooperate in a "coalition of the unwilling," notwithstanding their conflicts of interest and opinion.

Nonviolent international sanctions: The Bush juggernaut has many vulnerabilities. It lacks the military manpower, logistical capacity, and colonial administrators to match its ambitions for global rule. It lacks the legitimacy for such a program either at home or in the rest of the world. It must borrow more than \$550 billion a year from abroad to pay for imports—giving those from whom it borrows substantial leverage on its policies.

The rest of the world needs to present the U.S. with a consistent, unified, and principled opposition to the Bush policy of dictation and aggression. This opposition needs to be expressed in nonviolent sanctions that show U.S. elites and people that a policy of global domination comes with an unacceptable cost to them.

Nonviolent sanctions can take economic, diplomatic, legal, and other forms, and can be imposed both by governments and by people acting in civil society. One example already under way: The May 18, 2003 *New York Times* reports, "The American-led war on Iraq was fiercely opposed by Indonesia. Vice President Hamzah Haz, an Islamic leader, has encouraged local investors to switch from dollars to

euros. A similar switch has occurred in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries."¹

Along with such sanctions, the American people should be offered an alternative program of international cooperation to provide security and solve global problems. And people and governments in the rest of the world should launch media and people-to-people campaigns to reach out to Americans with that offer.

As Phyllis Bennis recently pointed out, "We are engaged now in building a global movement for peace and justice." That movement for social transformation will benefit immensely from a successful campaign against the Bush juggernaut. Success in that campaign is unlikely just to restore the status quo ante. Bush administration policies will have undermined the traditional bases of U.S. hegemony while unifying a broad global movement for peace, justice, and democracy. That will open a wide range of new possibilities in which the global movement for peace and justice will have an opportunity to seize the initiative.

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Endnote:

¹ Mark Landler, "Euro Beginning to Flex Its Economic Muscles," *New York Times*, May 18, 2003.

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at www.irc-online.org) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at www.ips-dc.org). ©2003. All rights reserved.

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Recommended citation:

Jeremy Brecher, “The New Global Peace Movement vs. the Bush Juggernaut,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, May 28, 2003).

Web location:

<http://www.presentdanger.org/commentary/2003/0305movement.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Jeremy Brecher
Editor: John Gershman, IRC
Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

