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Confronting an Empire: An Analysis for the Global Justice Movement of the U.S.-made World Crisis

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**“Confronting an Empire:  
An Analysis for the Global Justice Movement of the U.S.-made World Crisis”<sup>1</sup>**

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**Presented at the August 2004 meetings of the American Sociological Association**

The word “empire” has been on American – or at least media – lips for the past year or so; and whether among its admirers on the right or those who fear it on the left, it’s a word that manages to have such a monumental feel, such a lasting ring to it. Americans as the new Rome – and those Romans, didn’t they go on forever...

-- Tom Engelhardt, e-mail list, April 3, 2003<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract**

This essay advances an original sociological perspective for understanding U.S. foreign policy, historically and in the present, as a product of economic, political, cultural, and social psychological factors, shaped by race and gender as well as class. It offers an interpretation of the real reasons for both the first U.S.-Iraq war in 1991 and the recent conflict in 2003, assessing the first in terms of a project of international hegemony through roll-back of the negative impact of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and arguing that the 2002-3 Gulf War followed the same lines in a more extreme direction: a project of imperial hegemony through unilateral pre-emptive war abroad and manipulation of public opinion coupled with a climate designed to demonize dissent at home. It closes with suggestions for what roles progressive sociologists might play in the global justice movement and Green Party in light of the analysis offered in the essay.

## Introduction

The world presently faces one of its most acute crises in the memory of anyone now living. This is hardly a controversial statement, but it is a surprising state of affairs from the point of view of September 10, 2001, or November 1, 2000. The coming to power of the Bush administration through a fraudulent electoral victory set the tone for what can now be seen as one of the most dangerous moments for the people of the United States, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Cuba, North and South Korea, or Israel/Palestine – among many others – and the planet’s population as a whole. The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 permitted the imposition of an extremist, aggressive foreign policy (even by U.S. standards) aimed at making and unmaking governments in the Middle East and potentially far beyond. The policy is not only dangerous for the world’s citizens but is also risky for U.S. and other elites, the project of neoliberal globalization that enlightened transnational capitalists are engaged in, and for the Bush administration itself. This is *in addition to* the existing and increasingly acute evils of world poverty and hunger, ecological decline, social and state violence, the erosion of welfare states and democratic rights, and other pressing problems of the age of globalization. The central questions of our time may well be: How did this state of affairs come to pass? Where is it heading? And, most importantly, what can be done about it?

My position in this essay is that we need more ample and supple conceptual tools to make sense of current U.S. policy – its roots, goals, strategies, consequences, and contradictions. With these in hand, we can move on to the all-important question of what to do about all this, as seen through the eyes of the global justice movement and the Green Party of the United States. In other words, this essay is an analysis *of* the present crisis *for* the global justice movement. Further extensions of the essay will assess the perspectives of the global justice movement and

the Green Party of the United States on the crisis, evaluating their analyses against this one.

### **An analysis of the crisis**

The biases and contradictions in U.S. foreign policy today are this essay's first concern. Dazzled by the "revolution in military affairs" (RMA), which might be summed up as "airpower plus the microchip" (my term, with an assist from Eric Selbin), the Bush administration largely eschews the politics of diplomacy to achieve foreign policy goals in favor of unilateral military, technocratic "solutions" to Third World "problems." But this leads to mistakes and failures, due to a faulty diagnosis in turn based on an imperial worldview – itself shaped by U.S. society and history -- that blinkers policy and leads to blunders. U.S. policy-makers' errors in their tellingly titled "global war on terrorism" are rooted in state-centric assumptions that view al-Qaeda as an organization (a solid target, like a state), rather than the transnational network it is, and an analysis of the causes of terrorism as a backlash against globalization, driven primarily by anomie, envy, irrationality, "failed states," or, indeed, "evil," in the eyes of President Bush: "our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil" (George Bush speech at the National Cathedral, September 14, 2001, quoted in Berry 2003: 4). But the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and possible future ones elsewhere, surely have other roots, both known and unknown -- economic, political, and cultural as well as strategic -- let us next consider these.

The war that removed Saddam Hussain from power in March 2003 was a triumph for RDO ("rapid, decisive operations"), underscoring the seemingly unassailable strength of the U.S. military machine.<sup>3</sup> But it ignores Clausewitz's dictum that war is an extension of politics. The Bush administration has thus proven itself exceedingly weak in the aftermath phase, which is clearly not well suited to the same approach that won the war. The problem for U.S. policy, and

for the world, is: How will a durable peace be achieved in Iraq, and beyond?

Leaving aside the risks inherent in the war itself (discussed in Foran 2004: 218), let us begin immediately after the main fighting ended in early April with the costly gap in planning for, and lag in implementing, humanitarian relief and state reconstruction. Thus looting (Donald Rumsfeld's "untidiness," perfectly foreseeable and thus the *direct* responsibility of the victors), various forms of resistance, and the rise of rival contenders for power soon emerged to fill this vacuum. The U.S. allowed a period of chaos to open up because they miscalculated the desires of the Iraqi people, showing little awareness of internal divisions and political cultures, and failed to get policing forces on the ground in time to prevent a very bad dynamic from being set into motion. One wonders whether this chaos was foreseen or even *intended*, and one wonders to what degree they are also a product of the racism that has always pervaded U.S. foreign policy.

Ian Roxborough draws an interesting and counterintuitive lesson from these errors, omissions, and blindspots: "Underlying most of the American planning failures was a systematic failure of sociological analysis of the Iraqi regime and of the social preconditions for the establishment of democracy in Iraq. Nothing had been learnt since Vietnam" (2004: 196).

The consequences of this are serious, according to Anthony Cordesman:

War plans that do not include peace plans have always been signs of gross military incompetence.... The Gulf War, Lebanon, Somalia, Kosovo, and Bosnia have shown that even the most impressive ... military victory can lose much or all of its meaning if it is followed by a diplomatic and political power vacuum or failure to achieve grand strategic goals (2002: 55, 49).

In this connection, one missing element in policy-makers' analyses was any appreciation for the degree and complex nature of Iraqi nationalisms -- secular and religious, both during and now after the war. The U.S. assumed that a "modern, secular Iraqi people" would opt for democracy,

unable to foresee the possibility of an Islamic state, democratic or otherwise. A related problem of U.S. ignorance in the current period is the error of viewing “terrorism as a backlash against globalization.” Roxborough (2004), in contrast, sees the roots of this backlash as a quite rational and fully engaged product of the dislike of the U.S. presence in the region. Osama bin Laden understood this better than Bush.

Roxborough sees two options for the future: “In early May, 2003, it looked very much as if the United States might have to choose between a Shiite state that wanted the U.S. out of Iraq, and a pro-American regime that would have less than perfect legitimacy” (2004: 201). Neither option has much to do with democracy; unlike Roxborough, I see this as not contrary to the grand strategy, since the U.S. has almost nowhere promoted meaningful democracy in the Third World. The Bush administration is itself at the negative end of the democratic spectrum, rather akin to the limited, elite-managed polyarchies it has sought elsewhere around the globe (Robinson 1996).

The state-centrism of the “global war on terror” (GWOT) approach provides a set of ideological blinders leading to strategic blunders:

Although terrorists are, by and large, non-state actors, the global war on terrorism assumes – quite explicitly – that terrorists cannot be effective without state sponsors. It is far from clear that this is true. As an empirical statement, it is too bold and assertive, too unqualified. Nevertheless, a whole series of policy documents repeat the assertion that terrorists need state sponsors. Bold, simple assertions are, of course, the constituent elements of the kind of cognitive framework that I am seeking to describe. We are not dealing with social scientists and logicians; we are dealing with policy-makers (2004: 204).

Roxborough is superb at characterizing what he terms “the American way of war,” and its “obsession with speed, firepower and decision.... designed to overwhelm” (2004: 206).<sup>4</sup> He goes on to show the inherent contradictions of such an approach to war-making as a “cultural

activity”:

While the [U.S.] focus on battle may be functional for Western conventional warfare, in the wars of the periphery it leads to a divorce of military operations from political goals....

In practice these aspirations are doomed to failure. The smarter thinkers in the U.S. military realize this, and urge U.S. forces to prepare themselves for the messy nature of peace and humanitarian operations. But these thinkers are a minority.... most fundamentally, war IS politics....

the relationship between political purpose and military means [is not] appropriately synchronized.... This means that the U.S. can overthrow a regime but cannot easily create the kind of peace that would make its military accomplishments meaningful (2004: 207-8).

When a government has only the foreign policy option of war – and a distorted, one-sided version of war at that – it gets into trouble. Lest we forget, even for a minute, the economic level, consider Tariq Ali’s (2003: 18) apt aphorism: “Economics, after all, is only a concentrated form of politics, and war a continuation of both by other means.” The Bush administration’s errors are compounded and driven also by an underlying ideological-cultural bias. This temptation to hubris of American policy-making elites has existed since at least the Cold War: Colin Gray points out that “The sustaining myth of American national exceptionalism, the notion that *we* are a truly unique society, fostered a dangerous strategic-cultural arrogance” (1994: 594). Roxborough sees the temptation as very hard to resist, for “With the demise of the Soviet Union, the absence of any serious enemy facilitates the proclivity to technocratic approaches to questions of war and peace” (2004: 209).

### **Toward an alternative framework and hypothesis**

That a similar set of biases led to the U.S.’s militarized foreign policy during the Cold War – what we might call the continuity thesis -- is a plausible hypothesis, but there was far

more to it even then, and the continuities and novelties of its economic, political, cultural, and social psychological dimensions need to be considered alongside the ideological worldview of policy-makers. In other words, we need a more well-rounded framework for understanding the deep roots of U.S. foreign policy. We therefore need to do more analysis of the “defense planners” of the Project for the New American Century, or PNAC (Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, and Douglas Feith; political figures such as Jeb Bush, Dan Quayle, and Newt Gingrich; and such “intellectual adornments” (Ali 2003) as Francis Fukuyama, Henry Kissinger, Zalmay Khalilzad, Kenneth Pollack, William Kristol, and Robert Kagan). We should be scrutinizing their views as well as related strategic documents if we are interested in exploring the worldview of policy-makers.<sup>5</sup> The manifold similarities of PNAC’s position with the ominous September 2002 National Security Strategy published by the White House also bear scrutiny. That document states “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists” (quoted in Berry 2003: 1). An influential precursor can be found in the pre-terrorist days of 1992, when Wolfowitz authored a paper for Secretary of Defense Cheney bearing the title “Project for a New American Century” that drew so much foreign policy establishment criticism that then president George Bush senior had to disavow it (Mailer 2003: 60-61). The implication that current U.S. foreign policies is in a continuity with past versions is worth debating, since it may well represent a break or extreme version of a continuity that is qualitatively different and more dangerous.

So what *was* the war about then? I, along with many other critical analysts of U.S. foreign policy, think it was driven by a plan to assert U.S. control and hegemony on the world scene. Its roots go back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a revolution which deposed the shah



of Iran, the United States' strongest ally ever (besides Israel) in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> The victory of this revolution therefore represented a major setback for U.S. foreign policy. The Carter government lost the 1980 elections to Ronald Reagan in large part because Jimmy Carter was for over a year unable to secure the release of the U.S. diplomats taken hostage in Iran by radical students. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration sought a pretext to undo or "roll-back" the negative consequences of this event, and to reassert U.S. dominance in a situation of economic decline vis-à-vis Europe, led by Germany, and East Asia, led by Japan and increasingly also South Korea, Taiwan, and China. The goal was in effect a return to the past glory of hegemony in the world and in the Middle East before the Iranian Revolution.

As was the case more recently, the first Bush administration gave the public various justifications for its actions during the course of the crisis touched off by Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990: that it was there to defend freedom and democracy (but there was little of either in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia); or to defend the "American way of life," a rather vague but perhaps effective appeal; or to defend the oilfields that were the "rightful" possessions of the Western world. This latter may have been closest to the mark. It is hard to penetrate the secrecy around the foreign policy of U.S. administrations, but a few thoughts and speculations are in order here as to the true causes of that war.

Research conducted by the Christic Institute (1991) sheds some light on the hidden plans and motives of the first Bush administration. The Institute argues that the aims of Operation Desert Storm included to re-establish U.S. hegemony in the Gulf and assure access to cheap oil; to assert U.S. leadership in the world; to militarize society and avoid a cut in defense spending; and to divert attention away from the domestic problems of recession and unemployment. And there is a certain amount of evidence that the U.S. contemplated striking Iraq as early as 1985. Saddam was useful to stop Iran, so he was built up; but he got too strong and too independent

and threatened Israel and the Gulf. The Christic Institute report analyzes various documents establishing that Oliver North told the Iranians in the mid-1980s that Saddam Hussain must go and that the U.S. would promote the overthrow of his government – “That the real problem in preventing peace in the region is Saddam Husain [sic], and we’ll have to take care of that.”<sup>7</sup> Pentagon documents from before the crisis in 1990 speak of targeting Iraq as a threat to stability in the Gulf (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 1990: 1, 2). Yet, the Bush administration assured Saddam the week before the invasion that it had no position on his conflict with Kuwait and no defense treaty with Kuwait, thereby giving him a green light to invade.<sup>8</sup> It seems that Saddam misinterpreted this, based on past U.S. support, and went too far, annexing the whole country. This then provided an excellent opportunity for the Bush government to project its vision of U.S. power onto the crisis. This in turn would explain why the U.S. basically rushed into war, giving sanctions little time to take effect, buying the support of key votes in the United Nations to authorize a military attack, refusing to negotiate seriously in the last days before the deadline approached, and launching a massive air attack on Iraq just a few hours after the deadline passed. The 1991 war, then, was the unforeseen result of the ambiguous U.S. policy toward Iraq during the Reagan-Bush years, compounded by mixed signals on both sides that were evidently misunderstood. The U.S. may not have known what Saddam would do, but they both indirectly encouraged the invasion, and were almost immediately prepared to counter it with massive force of their own, with devastating consequences for the people of Iraq in the form of the military and civilian casualties of the war itself, the failure to support the uprising at the war’s end by Kurdish and Shi’ite opponents of the regime, and the sanctions and genocidal health epidemic that followed throughout the 1990s.

The first Bush administration chose to use military force to send everyone – not just Saddam Hussein -- a message that it was the world’s most powerful country in this one --

military -- sense. The hope was that economic and political dominance would follow from this. And the U.S. did accrue some international political capital, since that war was legitimated, however thinly, by the U.N. and a fairly broad coalition of forces participated. Moreover, the economic project of neoliberal transnational globalization took wing throughout the 1990s, virtually unchecked but for the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, until the 1999 demonstrations that shut down the World Trade Organization in Seattle.

But the Gulf War of 1990-91 didn't reverse the economic or political decline of the U.S. vis-à-vis the advanced industrial world. Nor did it have the desired "demonstration effect." Saddam Hussein wasn't intimidated. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda didn't get the message. Kim Jong Il's North Korea concluded that the only deterrent to U.S. designs was a credible nuclear deterrent. Some genuine progressives – such as Lula in Brazil – began trying to articulate alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Historic U.S. allies such as France and Germany disagreed with the Bush administration over the recent war, and much of global capital – the new transnational elite of corporations, banks, and organizations such as the WTO – continues to watch the current situation with immense concern as well.

The current Bush administration stole the elections of 2000 and came to power abetted by what was, in effect, a coup of sorts by the Supreme Court. A small, ultra-conservative group of strategic thinkers then stole the foreign policy of the Republican Party. These are the figures whom we now know as the leaders of the Project for a New American Century (with emphasis on "American") – Perle, Wolfowitz, Cheney, Feith, and PNAC's chairman William Kristol, who was Dan Quayle's chief of staff and is currently editor of the *Weekly Standard*. Their project is to use military force to ensure U.S. power on the world scene.

The Project for the New American Century is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to a few fundamental propositions: that American leadership is good both for America

and for the world; that such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle; and that too few political leaders today are making the case for global leadership ([www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org)).

The heart of their strategic vision is a future in which “the U.S. blocks any other competitor nation from challenging its dominance as the world’s single great power.” Wolfowitz is now Deputy Secretary of Defense; Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld bought into PNAC’s vision early on. The same figures dominate the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board, which has also been influential in making the new policy. They want no counter to U.S. power – be it the U.N., the European Union, or world public opinion. They are opposed in the administration by Colin Powell and most of the State Department, who prefer to use international alliances with other political and economic elites to run the world in a less confrontational, more stable way so that the project of neo-liberal capitalist globalization can continue to advantage all First World powers, and the U.S. in particular.

The Bush administration early on determined that the militaristic New American Century model was the best way to assert hegemony over the world. The terrorist attacks of September 11 – like Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait a decade earlier -- provided the administration with an opportunity to project its new but unstated foreign policy agenda onto the crisis. Plans to attack Iraq predated September 11, and came out into public view within hours of the attack (see Lobe 2003 for an illuminating discussion of this). September 11 also conveniently dealt with the end of the Cold War: new enemies could be constantly found or created in the Muslim world and elsewhere; these are wars that can be won (if only on the battlefield); this justifies an ever more massive military budget;<sup>9</sup> and this blocks any moves toward a less militarized society or what activists a decade ago termed a peace dividend: cutting defense spending because the Cold War is over, and using the savings for reactivation of the economy and solving pressing social

problems at home, and perhaps even more significantly -- if we are truly concerned about eliminating the root causes of terrorism -- abroad. In fact, it has allowed the large steps toward an authoritarian police state taken by Attorney General John Ashcroft and the so-called Patriot Act, suggesting that war is also an extension of *domestic* politics.<sup>10</sup>

In this view, the recent war was rooted in the loss of U.S. dominance in the Middle East over the past twenty years and the U.S. decline as an economic power *despite* winning the Cold War, and an attempt to roll back the effects of all this through the assertion of military power, even without international or domestic support. The “Bush doctrine” has three main elements: 1) to achieve the capacity to strike any future threat in a pre-emptive manner, without international support if need be (it has shown that it has the will as well as the capacity to do this); 2) to actively pursue regime change in the same way (also now amply in view), and 3) to open world markets for U.S. exploitation, starting with the Middle East’s oil producers. If the first Gulf War, then, was based on a project of international hegemony through roll-back, the 2002-3 Gulf War followed the same lines in a more extreme direction: a project of imperial hegemony through unilateral pre-emptive war abroad and manipulation of public opinion coupled with a climate designed to demonize dissent at home.

I would like to suggest that rather than the policy of strength it appears to be, this is actually a policy based on a sense of desperation and confusion in the face of a world that is changing, and reflects the underlying crisis and loss of confidence by a portion of the U.S. political elite in its position in that world. It is a risky, madcap strategy by a small gang of very right-wing intellectuals. It endangers the whole world, and requires our utmost attention until it is reversed.

Social psychology, feminist studies, and critical race studies can offer further important insights into the deep fundamentalist roots of U.S. foreign policy and its ingredients of Orwellian

thought, patriarchy, racism, and Orientalism. The Orwellianism is poignantly captured by Wendell Berry's characterization of the *National Security Strategy* paper of 2002: "This document affirms peace; it also affirms peace as the justification of war and war as the means of peace and thus perpetuates a hallowed absurdity.... One cannot reduce terror by holding over the world the threat of what it most fears" (2003: 5-6). Equal measures of a sense of old-fashioned if unstated "civilizing mission" and "white man's burden" mix with a late capitalist triumphalism among U.S. policy-makers.<sup>11</sup> The easy blending of racism and Orientalism is seen in the discourse of Iraq as a "sick society" in the popular press of the U.K and U.S. and the use of this as a justification for the delay of democratization in Iraq. This has its reflection on the ground, as in the telling remarks of a U.S. soldier: "The Iraqis are a sick people and we are the chemotherapy. I am starting to hate this country. Wait till I get hold of a friggin' Iraqi. No I won't get hold of one. I'll just kill him" (from the *Sunday Times*, as quoted in Ali 2003: 14-5).

In a February 2003 journal entry that is worth printing at length, writer Wallace Shawn has tried to evoke the social psychology of the administration in terms that capture the patriarchal and racist culture it bathes in, raising the question of whose leaders are sick:

Why are we being so ridiculously polite? It's as if there were some sort of gentleman's agreement that prevents people from stating the obvious truth that Bush and his colleagues are exhilarated and thrilled by the thought of war, by the thought of the incredible power they will have over so many people, by the thought of the immensity of what they will do, by the scale, the massiveness of the bombing they're planning, the killing, the blood, the deaths, the horror....

From the first days after the World Trade Center fell, you could see in their faces that, however scary it might be holding the jobs they held, however heavy the responsibility might be for steering the ship of state in such troubled times, they in fact were loving it. Those faces glowed. You could see that special look that people always have when they've just been seized by that most purposeless of all things, a sense of purpose. This, combined with a lust for blood, makes for particularly dangerous leaders, so

totally driven by their desire for violence that they're almost incapable of hearing anyone else's pleas for compromise or for peace....

In other words, the only thing you can really say about them is that like all of those who for fifty years have sat in offices in Washington and dreamed of killing millions of enemies with nuclear weapons and chemical weapons and biological weapons, these people are sick. They have an illness. And it's getting to the point where there may be no cure (Shawn 2003: 26).

John Berger notes the emotional undercurrent of fear and (self?) deception behind policy-makers' hubris and lack of humanity:

The victors, with their historically unprecedented superiority of weapons – the victors who were bound to be victors – appeared frightened....

Day and night the partners of fear are anxiously preoccupied with telling themselves and their subordinates the right half-truths, half-truths that hope to change the world from what it is into something it is not. *It takes about six half-truths to make a lie.* As a result, these leaders become unfamiliar with reality, while continuing to dream about and, of course, to exercise power (2003: 34-5, emphasis mine).

Berger goes on to suggest the limits of this exercise of power, as well as the stakes: “Married to fear, deserted by the dead, they still wield incomparable power, both economic and military, and are terrifyingly dangerous. But in the long run, can their power survive? Ask the dead and the not-yet-born. I doubt it” (2003: 35).

Is there another approach to responding effectively to the challenges posed by al-Qaeda's transnational social *network* – (for I do not consider it a social movement)?<sup>12</sup> Perhaps by not fighting the wars that Osama bin Laden wants the U.S. and the West to fight – in Iraq, Syria, Iran – and not taking a military approach at all, but rather one of police work to apprehend a criminal network, plus deep social and economic development? Not inculcating an insidious culture of fear, a demonizing of dissent, a racist political culture, a narrowing of civil liberties at home, an imperialist mentality? But this is impossible for the Bush administration (and hard for any

foreseeable U.S. government), and it may be exactly what the real policy is about! As Peter Ustinov has put it: “Terrorism is the war of the poor, and war is the terrorism of the rich” (quoted by Berger 2003: 34). So the “war” will continue.

And what is the administration’s real goal domestically? Let us speculate: militarization of society and economy, a terror state, the erosion of democracy at home and abroad, an ideological and frontal assault on the global justice movement, all in the name of a highly elusive pursuit of global economic, political, and moral paramountcy. The contradictions in this are numerous and some leap readily to mind: alienation of the transnational corporations and elites already mentioned; further loss of global economic advantage as the U.S. runs the risk of economic collapse under the burden of debt, deficits, and the spectre of deflation; the possibility of U.S. and world recession becoming a global depression. In sum, the policy increases the risk of a rather acute crisis of global capitalism.

Hegemony – even the thinly concealed (and hotly denied) imperial version of Bush and team -- of course, requires consent. This is perhaps the major contradiction at the heart of the Bush administration’s goals. In Iraq itself, many parties and groups have called for a broad-based conference to elect a transitional government, only to be rebuffed by chief U.S. administrator Paul Bremer, who formed instead a pliant advisory council in late July 2003 to provide the thinnest veneer of legitimacy for U.S. occupation and rule (Milne 2003). One of the leaders of the Shi’ite community, Abdul Karim al-Enzi, commented succinctly within weeks of the war’s end: “Democracy means choosing what people want, not what the West wants” (quoted in Smith 2003).

Denied the fruits of democracy, the armed guerrilla resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq will only grow. Yet a full-fledged counter-insurgency war will not likely be sustainable given world and U.S. public opinion. Democracy comes not by replacing an internal tyranny



with an external power, but by internal and external pressure for self-rule by all who have a stake in the country. In El Salvador, where a bitter civil war (1980-92) was prolonged to a stalemate by the U.S., democracy has been steadily built in the aftermath as the left agreed to participate in an electoral struggle in exchange for democratic, social, and civil guarantees by the elite and the military, proving that building a democracy after a war happens when the people affected by the war are the ones doing the building, and not those who inflicted it from the centers of power in the first place. Related to this is the issue of democracy at home in the U.S.: having stolen the 2000 elections, the Bush administration's Patriot Act has eroded civil liberties almost to the breaking point, in the process equating dissent with treason (Vidal 2003): historian Eric Foner aptly asks, "If we surrender freedom of speech in the hope that this will bring swifter victory on current and future battlefields, who then will have won the war?" (2003: 13).

**Implications: what is to be done?**

Sociologists know a lot about revolutions and similar social movements. Could sociologists have suggested to strategists (beforehand) that an uprising was unlikely? Could we have predicted the armed resistance to the invading forces? Although I think we could have predicted these things, I'm not convinced that we did, in fact, predict any of this, and this might give one pause for reflection about the utility of sociology (2004: 197).

I am not looking for a constructive engagement with Bush administration policy-makers, but rather one with social movements, progressive politicians, and ordinary people, at home and abroad (hence the title of this essay). Let us defeat this administration electorally, culturally, and in social movements on a global scale. Let's construct alternative institutions, foreign policies, coalitions, ideas.

Are future preventive wars inevitable? Here I'd like to suggest that we ought to be thinking hard about the ways to counter this possibility, which is surely in the air. Rumsfeld's

special assistant Lawrence Di Rita has promised “We’ll get better as we do it more often” (*Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 2003) – the “it” referring to “preventive” foreign wars and nation-building. One of Bush’s few ways out of his own political crisis is to wage another war – a risky but politically “rational” course that a desperate administration might take. Norman Mailer worries about the even more cynical scenario:

the unhappy likelihood that Bush and Company are ready to be hit by a major terrorist attack. As well as any number of smaller ones. Either way, it will strengthen his hand. America will gather about him again. We can hear his words in advance: “Good Americans died today. Innocent victims of evil had to shed their blood. But we will prevail. We are one with God.” Given such language, every loss is a win (2003: 65).

This certainly suggests the power of discourse in the present crisis.

Working against the inevitability of further pre-emptive wars are the questions already raised by the U.S.’s historic allies, and the worries that the world financial elite must be holding in their silence on this issue. Surely there are people in Washington – in the Pentagon, in the State Department, the CIA, and Congress – who see that the problems of terrorism and regional instability in the Middle East are only going to grow now. The unsolved problem of ruling Iraq after the war, and the fact that no one has a viable plan for doing this, should be giving those making the current policy some pause. The Chinese adage that “You can conquer a country from horseback, but you cannot govern it from horseback” applies to the U.S. on the world scene today. The age of empires is over. Trying to turn the clock back on history could all too easily lead to a global crisis and a collapse of the U.S. position in the world. I would like to think that all of these considerations, taken together, are giving, and will continue to give, *some* in the U.S. government, some pause.

U.S. “state-centrism,” its dream of becoming the world’s sole power in the post-Cold War, is also thwarted by the emergence of “the other superpower” – the global justice movement

for peace, economic justice, and real equality bubbling up from below. The end of the Cold War has an upside for progressive movements that activists are increasingly aware of. Pressing up from below is the peace movement, so extraordinarily impressive world-wide and in the U.S. It showed that it has support all over the world on February 15, 2003 when millions of people came together in public. We – and here I include myself in this movement -- need to be patient and creative, stay together and make allies, and much more. If we do all this, and with the help of many others, then the next war is *not* inevitable.

Another world is possible, as the global justice movement likes to say. Or as the Zapatistas put it, “We want a world in which many worlds fit.” We should dream the dream of stopping war and starting a real revolution, the democratic revolution that will turn things right-side up in this country and make it possible for the rest of the world to move forward toward solving some *real* problems. Nothing is inevitable if we take action. Let us resolve to decide together the ways to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an extension of an article that is forthcoming (Foran 2004); that essay, in turn, started as a comment on Roxborough 2004, who is cited extensively herein.

I am indebted of course to Arundhati Roy for the idea for my title. See her speech, "Confronting Empire," given at the World Social Forum on January 27, 2003, in Porto

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Alegre, Brazil. It was published the next day in *Z Magazine* on ZNET: <http://www.zmag.org>. It is the concluding essay in Roy 2003.

I would like to thank Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Al Green, Val Moghadam, and Eric Selbin for suggestions on how to improve this essay.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to draw the attention of readers to the remarkable electronic postings of cultural historian and political analyst Tom Engelhardt, accessed at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com), from which this quote is taken. This site is the original source of many of the critical analyses and print media articles cited in this essay. It is indispensable for an understanding of the current crisis.

<sup>3</sup> We find an eerie echo of this in a national security review done for Bush in early 1989 reported in the *New York Times* (February 23, 1991), which concluded:

In cases where the U.S. confronts much weaker enemies, our challenge will be not simply to defeat them, but to defeat them decisively and rapidly. For small countries hostile to us, bleeding our forces in protracted or indecisive conflict or embarrassing us by inflicting damage on some conspicuous element of our forces may be victory enough, and could undercut political support for U.S. efforts against them.

<sup>4</sup> On May 1, 2003, “Vice President Dick Cheney claimed that ‘one of the most successful military campaigns ever waged’ displayed to the world ‘a new American way of war’”: quoted in Jackson (2003).

<sup>5</sup> The policy dates back at least to the 1996 article by William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” whose bases would be “military supremacy and moral confidence” (Kristol and Kagan 1996: 7, page number from a web-based version, some of which can be found at [www.ceip.org](http://www.ceip.org)). I found this reference in Packer (2003), who gives a useful summary of it.

<sup>6</sup> This discussion of the 1991 Gulf War is based on Foran 1993.

<sup>7</sup> North is quoted in U.S. Congress 1987: 1500, as cited in Christic Institute 1992: 11.

<sup>8</sup> For ample documentation of this, see Christic Institute (1991: 5, 6, quoting U.S. State Department transcript of the press conference, July 24, 1990, pp. 4-5); see also the *New York Times* (September 23, 1990 and July 13, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> The military budget for 2003 came in at \$364.1 billion (plus \$62.4 billion more approved in April by Congress). The running costs of occupation appear to be at least \$50 billion a year, not counting any sums spent on “reconstruction.” Estimates for the latter range from \$6 billion over two years (according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies) to \$593 billion over five years (according to the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, another Washington think tank). But

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even if the figure is somewhere in the lower end of this huge range – say, \$100 billion, as estimated by economics professor William Nordhaus of Yale University – it is hard to imagine the Bush administration paying for more than a tiny fraction of it. This, after all, is the government that admitted in July 2003 that the budget surplus of \$334 billion which it forecast for the year back in 2001 had – thanks to a combination of recession, war, and tax cuts – become a deficit of \$455 billion.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Selbin provided me with this insight.

<sup>11</sup> I thank Eric Selbin for these formulations as well.

<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to Val Moghadam and Eric Selbin for the point that al-Qaeda is not so much a social movement as a network, differing in structure and activity from more movement-like organizations such as Hamas and Hizbollah. All three are part of the larger web of Islamist movements of a variety of stripes that is far from uniformly “terrorist.” This underscores one of Roxborough’s main points: that al-Qaeda is not a state-like entity that can be fought in conventional military terms.