Global Politics After 9/11
The Democratiya Interviews

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Acknowledgements

To the memory of my parents, Robert Johnson (1919-2001) and Marjorie Johnson (1923-2002), and my friend, John Williams (1958-2004).

Preface

Michael Walzer

Michael Walzer is co-editor of *Dissent*. He began writing for *Dissent* while a student at Brandeis University where he studied with Irving Howe. Since 1980 he has been a member of the faculty at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. His books include *Just and Unjust Wars*, *Spheres of Justice*, *Arguing About War* and *Politics and Passion: Towards a More Egalitarian Liberalism*.

Two commitments give shape to the *Democratiya* project. The first is to defend and promote a left politics that is liberal, democratic, egalitarian, and internationalist. Those four adjectives should routinely characterize left politics, but we all know that they don't. The second commitment is to defend and promote a form of political argument that is nuanced, probing, and concrete, principled but open to disagreement: no slogans, no jargon, no unexamined assumptions, no party line. This argumentative style, which is also a moral style, is exemplified in these interviews, where no-one is flattered or set up and where no hard questions go unasked. The men and women interviewed speak plainly, without concealment, and they take importantly different positions on a range of issues.

The focus is on internationalism. What does it mean for leftists today? And what does it require of us? The answers aren't easy – as they were when most people on the left thought that the workers of the world had no country, no local loyalties, so that proletarian internationalism was a kind of collective reflex, and the only problem was 'false consciousness.' Nor is internationalism as easy as it was when many leftists thought that the oppressed peoples of the Third World (as we called it) are actually represented by the authoritarian parties, maximal leaders, terrorist organizations, vanguard militants, and religious zealots who claim to speak in their name. Indeed, some leftists still believe this or act as if they do, but the belief doesn't make, has never made, for anything

that resembles a democratic politics.

The most recent shortcut to internationalist virtue is anti-Americanism. All we have to do to be good internationalists, on this view, is to support the opponents of American power. Since these opponents include Serbian and Iraqi dictators and radical Muslim jihadists, this is internationalism with gritted teeth. But anti-Americanism is nonetheless a popular politics on the European left, and if it doesn't reach to full support for every enemy of the Americans, it still reaches pretty far. It takes the form of apology and excuse or of a simple refusal to oppose America's opponents, however awful their politics is. And in the case of America's ally, Israel, it goes much further. English leftists marching in London in 2006 with banners saying, 'We are all Hezbollah,' probably thought that they were practising a left internationalist politics. That Hezbollah is in no sense a leftist movement made no difference to them so long as it was hostile to Israel and America.

It does make a difference to *Democratiya*, and so it should. For internationalism is not in fact the automatic support of any group of militants who claim to speak for the world's workers or the oppressed peoples of the old empires or the victims of American imperialism. It requires a political and moral choice; it requires what the Italian writer Ignazio Silone called 'the choice of comrades.' But isn't internationalism driven by a necessary sympathy with oppressed people everywhere and anywhere in the world? Yes it is, but figuring out the practical consequences of that sympathy is a complex matter; it requires exactly the kinds of arguments that *Democratiya* promotes. Oppression is no guarantee of political goodness or even of political decency. It can breed its own pathologies, and it can be, it often is, exploited by people who have no leftist commitments at all. This kind of exploitation is as bad as the economic kind, but it is less acknowledged on the left today.

The militants who act in the name of the oppressed are sometimes the agents of a new oppression – ideological or religious zealots with totalizing programs, who have a deep contempt for liberal values. And then they should be met with hostility by leftists the world over: because they don't serve the interests of the people they claim to represent and because they don't advance the cause of democracy or equality. The

comrades we choose, by contrast, are the men and women who resist oppression in the name of leftist values. Left internationalism is a solidarity of leftists.

But this isn't a sectarian politics. It is open to a wide range of participants and arguments. It is meant to include liberals and radicals of many different sorts – trade unionists, human rights activists, feminists, and environmentalists. It includes people who disagree profoundly about the use of force in global politics today; it includes people with very different conceptions of the desirable shape of international society and the role of the UN. Most importantly right now, it includes people who disagreed in 2003 about the war in Iraq and who probably still disagree. How to deal with brutal and tyrannical regimes like Saddam Hussein's, how to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing, how to promote freedom and democracy – these are the hardest questions facing the left today.

Left internationalism does not permit us to do nothing, to stand and watch, or to wait for someone else to act. Doing nothing is, of course, a way to avoid doing something terrible or doing something that turns out terribly, and after the Iraq disaster, it may well look like the better part of wisdom. But it is in fact a kind of complicity in the terrible things that happen. We need to figure out how to act responsibly in the world, when to defend the use of force and when to oppose it, when to press our governments to intervene, when to act only through non-governmental organizations, and when to confine ourselves to ideological struggle.

Ideology is especially important on the left. Whatever our understanding of social and economic forces, the war of ideas has always figured in a big way in our politics. Grownup leftists all grew up with arguments about ends and means, strategy and tactics; fierce disagreements about movement programs; and passionate debates about the rights and wrongs of compromise. We searched for 'the correct ideological position,' our own orthodoxy. Today most of us have given up that search, recognizing the tyrannical politics into which it led many leftists. And this ought to strengthen our hand in criticism of other orthodoxies, old and new, and of every sort of dogmatic certainty, and of every defence, especially high theoretical defences, of tyranny and terror. That critical work

is central to any left project. Sometimes it is done from within – as by communist dissidents only a few decades ago or by Muslim reformers right now (and right here, in this book). And certainly we have our own internal critical work to do, directed at inequality and illiberalism in the contemporary West (and at unilateral recklessness, secrecy, and brutality in my own country). But the critique of communism was also an internationalist task, and so is the critique of Third World authoritarianism, Muslim radicalism, and global inequality today. We have to be local and universal critics of all the forces that set themselves against democracy, even when they pretend to speak for the 'people'.

Read these interviews: they help us understand what that local and universal criticism looks like and what its content should be.

Introduction: Towards a Decent Left

Alan Johnson

Alan Johnson is founder and editor of *Democratiya*, and Professor of Democratic Theory and Practice at Edge Hill University. He is the co-author of the Euston Manifesto, a founder member of Labour Friends of Iraq, and an advisory editor of *Engage Journal*. He is the co-editor of *Leadership and Social Movements* and the co-author (with Abdullah Muhsin) of *Hadi Never Died: Hadi Saleh and the Iraqi Trade Unions*.

When stubbornness is all: an introduction to Democratiya

'When intellectuals can do nothing else they start a magazine,' remarked Irving Howe about his decision to launch *Dissent* in 1954. At the time his words attracted ironic commentary on the futility of the intellectual, but Howe wondered in retrospect if that irony had not been misplaced. 'For starting a magazine,' he pointed out, 'as even right-wing intellectuals would later discover, can also be a way of doing something, at least a way of thinking in common, and from thinking in common who knows what might follow?' He felt *Dissent* was needed because 'socialism in America had to be seen mostly as an intellectual problem before it could even hope to become a viable movement.' Publishing a magazine was not going to be enough, of course, but still, 'there are moments when patience is all – and stubbornness too.'[1]

We started *Democratiya* in late 2005 because, once again, the left had become an intellectual problem. Large parts of the left had lost their way by embracing a series of crude intellectual reductionisms,[2] leaving themselves unable to either see the Islamist threat plain,[3] or to extend solidarity to the democrats

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[1] Howe 1982, pp. 234, 236.
[2] Geras 2005.
[3] Johnson 2006a, 2006b, 2007.

in Iraq (whether or not they supported the decision to invade).[4] We were alarmed by the rise of a Blame America First mentality,[5] and a demented 'anti-Zionism' which bled from the lunatic fringe to the respectable mainstream. We began to take very seriously the question posed by Michael Walzer in *Dissent* in 2002: 'Can there be a Decent Left?'[6] And we were angered by the non-aggression pact that existed between the anti-Western left and the mainstream left. When the heavy lifting of criticism was to be done you could be sure the mainstream was not going to do it.[7] So, believing this to be another moment when stubbornness was called for, we started *Democratiya*. We made our case in a founding statement.

> *Democratiya* believes that in a radically changed world parts of the left have backed themselves into an incoherent and negativist 'anti-imperialist' corner, losing touch with long-held democratic, egalitarian and humane values. In some quarters, the complexity of the post-cold-war world, and of US foreign policy as it has developed since 9/11, has been reduced to another 'Great Contest': 'The Resistance' (or 'The Multitude') versus 'Imperialism' (or 'Empire'). This world-view has ushered back in some of the worst habits of mind that dominated parts of the left in the Stalinist period: manicheanism, reductionism, apologia, denial, cynicism. Grossly simplifying tendencies of thought, not least the disastrous belief that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend,' are again leading to the abandonment of the democrats, workers, women and gays who get on the wrong side of

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[4] See Kent and Muhsin 2005. For a short history of the Iraqi unions see Muhsin and Johnson 2006.

[5] Markovits 2007.

[6] Walzer 2002.

[7] To understand why some struggle to find their voice when faced with totalitarianism, listen to the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. In conversation with Adam Michnik in 1993, Habermas admitted that 'he had avoided any fundamental confrontation with Stalinism because he did not want "applause from the wrong side."' (quoted in Rabinbach 2006, p. 82). The depressing truth is that parts of the left did not so much lose their way after 9/11 as find their old groove.

the 'anti-imperialists' (who are considered 'progressive' simply because they're anti-American).

This attitude is especially unfortunate at a time when there is 'reform ferment in the Arab world, an emerging democracy in Iraq, and the colour-coded democratic revolutions in post-communist societies', as Michael Allen notes in our inaugural issue. As an editorial in [the American magazine] *The New Republic* put it, '[L]iberals must realize their own future is at stake. Should democratization succeed with Democrats deeply involved, they will be able to claim a share of the credit. But, should it succeed despite their puerile detachment – or worse, their objections – Democrats could well be branded as the party that opposes bringing human rights and responsible governance to people who don't yet benefit from them.' To which [*Democratiya* advisory editor] Norman Geras has added, 'For "Democrats" in the US, read "the left" in Europe.'

When over 8 million Iraqis voted in democratic elections in January 2005, at polling stations guarded by American and other foreign troops, emerging to dance for joy, their purple fingers held aloft, only for Britain's leading liberal newspaper to sneer that the election was 'at best irrelevant', it was clear that something had gone terribly awry. When Iraq's heroic free trade unionists were called 'collaborators' and 'quislings', while their torturers and murderers were hailed as a 'liberation movement', one could hear the rattling of loose political and moral bearings.

Of course our task is not to sing 'America! America!' As Irving Howe said, 'The banner of critical independence, ragged and torn though it may be, is still the best we have.' But this is 2005 not 1965. It is no longer enough to say 'no' where the US says 'yes'. A more self-confident and constructively critical stance is needed.

We democrats will fare better if we are guided by a positive animating ethic and seek modes of realization through serious discussion and practical reform efforts. *Democratiya* will stand for the human rights of victims

> of genocide and crimes against humanity. We will everywhere be pro-democracy, labour rights, women's rights, gay rights, liberty, reason and social justice. Against anti-modernism, irrationalism, fear of freedom, loathing of the woman, and the cult of master-slave human relations we stand for the great rallying calls of the democratic revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Democracy, even for the 'poorest he,' liberté, égalité, fraternité, the rights of man, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Those precious ideas were rendered the inheritance of all by the social democratic, feminist and egalitarian revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We are partisans and artisans of this fighting faith and we pit it against what Paul Berman has called 'the paranoid and apocalyptic nature of the totalitarian mindset.'

Democratiya was part of a loose network of broadly social democratic campaigns (including Engage, Labour Friends of Iraq, and Unite Against Terror), blogs (Normblog, Harry's Place, Little Atoms and a few hundred others), academics (including Eve Garrard, Brian Brivati and Shalom Lappin) and journalists (such as John Lloyd and Nick Cohen) who came together to produce *The Euston Manifesto* in 2006 (and were astounded by the global interest it attracted). Our views reached a popular audience in the UK through Nick Cohen's brilliant 2007 best-seller, *What's Left? How the Left Lost its Way*.

A willingness to dialogue: an introduction to the interviews

This book collects together ten interviews from *Democratiya* about the dilemmas of progressive foreign policy after 9/11. Jean Bethke Elshtain, Martin Shaw, Kanan Makiya, Paul Berman, David Held, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Ladan Boroumand, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Joshua Muravchik and Mary Kaldor hail from different national political cultures, theoretical traditions, and institutional locations, but each is passionate about their ideas while adhering to what the late Italian liberalsocialist Norberto Bobbio called 'the most salutary fruits' of a certain intellectual tradition: 'the value of enquiry, the ferment of doubt, a willingness to dialogue,

a spirit of criticism, moderation of judgment, philological scruple, a sense of the complexity of things.' With the exception of Joshua Muravchik, they are representatives of a left that has been painfully and bitterly divided by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by the wider Global War on Terror. Each addresses some of the most important questions of global politics:

- What are the roots of Islamism? How serious a threat is it? Is it a new form of totalitarianism – 'Islamofascism'?
- How can Islamism be defeated? Is Islam itself compatible with democracy? How can the gates of ijtihad or Islamic reform be opened? Which political strategy should be adopted by democrats within Arab and Muslim societies? And what forms of solidarity do Western progressives owe those democrats?
- Why are many progressives unable to see Islamism plain or to oppose it with vigour? Is there a rationalist naivety built into liberal civilisation? Why are we witnessing the growth of new forms of 'reactionary anti-imperialism' that, once again, views its enemy's enemy as its friend? Can there ever be a decent left?
- Can we map the new and bewildering constellations of organised violence that have emerged since the end of the cold war? Who are the actors and what are the social relations of the 'new wars'?
- What is the meaning of the concepts 'just war,' 'humanitarian intervention,' and 'the responsibility to protect'? And what is the relation of each to the 'war on terror' and 'democracy-promotion'?
- What are the thresholds that should trigger, and the agencies that should prosecute humanitarian interventions? Who should authorise such interventions and how should they be conducted?
- What drives US foreign policy? Who are the neocons, where did they come from, and what do they really stand for? What lessons are to be learned from the tragedy that has unfolded in Iraq?
- What authority should we grant the actually-existing United Nations? Are we always beholden to 'international law'? How should each be reformed? Do we need a new 'concert of democracies'?

- What is at stake in the philosophical arguments between cosmopolitanism, liberal internationalism and social democratic antitotalitarianism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies proposed by each approach?

Jean Bethke Elshtain, author of *Just War Against Terror,* probes the contemporary relevance of just war theory and its relation to humanitarian interventionism, the threat from Islamist terrorism, and the responsibilities of American power in a violent world. She also discusses wider cultural and philosophical questions – the concept of equal moral regard, the role of religion in stimulating democratic dispositions, the importance of judging to politics, the necessity of the category of evil for political discourse, and the vocation of the public intellectual.

Martin Shaw discusses the new sociological terrain of warfare. He argues that a new 'global surveillance mode of warfare' has emerged within which two 'ways of war' – terrorist and Western risk-transfer – co-exist. He examines the media surveillance of war in post-military societies before discussing why the Iraq war has caused a crisis of the Western way of war. The adequacy of just war thinking is assessed and found wanting. Shaw also traces the history of the global democratic revolution and suggests that a global renewal of social democracy is necessary for its fulfilment. He defends a non-violent alternative to war and a democratic alternative to the 'reactionary left'.

Kanan Makiya, author of *Republic of Fear* and *Cruelty and Silence*, is an outstanding representative of those from the '68 generation who turned from revolutionary Marxism to liberal antitotalitarianism. In this frank and wide-ranging discussion he talks of his personal and political odyssey, the vacuum at the moral centre of the left today, and the supreme importance of 'putting cruelty first'. He also assesses the 'civilisational challenge' faced by the Arab and Muslim world and the prospects for the transformation of Islam. In a remarkable conversation, by turns bitterly critical of the US administration, disarmingly self-critical, and defiantly optimistic about Iraq's future, Makiya also draws the lessons of the Iraq experience from his position as a member of

the Iraqi opposition intimately involved in the struggle to overthrow Saddam.

Paul Berman revisits his seminal book *Terror and Liberalism* and responds to criticisms of it. Echoing Léon Blum, he argues that the emergence of a 'Third Force' able to wage the battle of ideas against totalitarianism is a necessary condition for victory, deploring what he sees as the 'unilateral intellectual disarmament' on the part of many on the liberal left. Berman probes the causes and consequences of the 'rationalist naiveté found across modern liberal society,' and examines the shadows of modernity – the limits of the modern liberal idea and the 'materialist error' of the left. He also confronts the lessons of Iraq.

David Held is one of the world's leading experts on the dynamics of globalisation – and one of the most creative thinkers about the retooling of democratic theory and social democratic practice that globalisation demands. He sets out his critique of the Washington consensus and the Washington security agenda, defends the social democratic alternative proposed in his book *The Global Covenant*, and replies to those critics who have challenged his bold attempt to renew the meaning and potency of social democracy for a global age.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim has been called Egypt's Václav Havel. Professor of Political Sociology at the American University in Cairo, he founded the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies and is one of the Arab world's most prominent spokesmen for democracy and human rights. Ibrahim examines the fateful encounter of Islam and the Arab world with modernity and democracy, and assesses the prospects for Islamic reformation and Arab democratisation. He also looks at the symbiotic relationship between the region's autocrats and theocrats, before turning to questions of political strategy for democrats in the Middle East.

Ladan Boroumand, the research director at The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran, discusses her upbringing in a prominent family of the liberal opposition to the Shah, her experiences in Paris as a student where she met and tried to question Khomeini, and of the revolution in Tehran. She

explores the political theory of the French and the Iranian Revolutions, identifying a lineage that runs 'from the guillotine and the Cheka to the suicide bomber.' Prospects for both the Iranian reform movement and for a reformation of Islam are assessed, and the work of Omid, the human rights and memory project of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, is explained.

Anne-Marie Slaughter maps the nature of transnational networks and their implications for global governance, explains the thinking behind the influential Princeton Report on National Security and its proposal for a new strategic compass for foreign policy – the prudential pursuit of 'a world of liberty under law' – before exploring the dilemmas of pursuing a values-based foreign policy in a world of multiple threats ranging from climate change and nuclear proliferation to terrorism and the threatened implosion of the Middle East. She defends her latest book, *The Idea That is America: Preserving Our Values in a Dangerous World*, and its central proposition – democratic values and national security need not stand in contradiction.

Mary Kaldor argues that peace and human rights must be embraced as the twin foundations of a progressive foreign policy. Ranging across the biographical, historical and theoretical registers, she maps the terrain of contemporary politics: a global mismatch between the 'militarised unilateralist character of American power' and the new global socio-economic reality ushered in by the shocks of globalisation and the end of the Cold War, the spreading virus of 'new wars,' the crises of humanitarian interventionism, and the disastrous consequences of the 'war on terror' and the Iraq conflict. Kaldor also set out her positive alternative – a cosmopolitan political project based on the rise of a global civil society and the doctrine of human security. She answers criticisms of her work as relativist and pacifist.

Joshua Muravchik talks about his political odyssey from socialism to neoconservatism. Always fiercely anti-Stalinist, Muravchik's disillusionment with the left began with his counter-rebellion against the left's rebellion against anti-Communism, and it grew with his conviction that the seed of totalitarianism lay in socialism's promise of 'heaven on

earth'. We discuss how neoconservatism was reconstituted after the Cold War as 'a mindset distinct from that of traditional conservatives or liberals' and explore why that mindset, rather than the machinations of a cabal, gave the neocons great influence after 9/11. Self-critical about the neocons' role in the Iraq war – 'I am prepared to concede error on Iraq, certainly in the execution and perhaps even in the decision to do it' – Muravchik explains why, nonetheless, 'those expecting the imminent demise of "neoconservatism" are in for a disappointment.' Three common criticisms – that neoconservatives are warmongers, lying Straussians and a Jewish cabal – are considered.

In November 2007 Jean Bethke Elshtain, Martin Shaw, Kanan Makiya and Paul Berman were asked, 'A couple of years on, in what ways would you update your views about the Iraq intervention?' Their answers are included as postscripts to the interviews.

A word on neoconitis

Democratiya does not push a narrow party line. (My hopes as editor were similar to Irving Howe's in that regard – to escape the easy certainties of the sect and 'to breathe the air of common life and share its quandaries.') Still, perhaps a word of explanation is warranted for my inclusion in this collection of a neoconservative. There is the good reason – the intrinsic value in having an erudite and serious neoconservative critically review the origins, development and current state of his own tendency. But there is also, to complete Thomas Carlyle's couplet, the real reason. Our intellectual culture suffers from 'neoconitis' and we badly need a cure. The disease was diagnosed by Roger Cohen writing in *The New York Times*:

> [N]eocon has morphed into an all-purpose insult for anyone who still believes that American power is inextricable from global stability and still thinks the muscular anti-totalitarian U.S. interventionism that brought down Slobodan Milošević□ has a place. (…) [N]eoconitis, a condition as rampant as liberal-lampooning a few years back, has left scant room for liberal hawks. 'Neocon is an insult used to obliterate the existence of

> [the] liberal position,' says Paul Berman, a writer often
> so insulted. (…) That makes Václav Havel and Adam
> Michnik and Kanan Makiya and Bernard Kouchner
> neocons, among others who don't think like Norman
> Podhoretz but have more firsthand knowledge of
> totalitarian hell than countless slick purveyors of the
> neocon insult.[8]

Neoconitis is now an obstacle to grown-up political debate *on the decent left*.[9] It renders invisible the liberal / social democratic antitotalitarian position. It keeps many stuck inside the Pilger-Chomsky-Moore-Moveon bubble. It stops others being as bold as they need to be in promoting democracy, opposing tyranny, projecting force – of ideas or arms – against Islamist terrorism, and making urgent solidarity with democrats in the Middle East.[10] It makes us intellectually lazy, reducing the debate about Iran, for example, to one more exercise in knee-jerk anti-Westernism.[11] And it takes the complexities

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[8] Cohen (Roger) 2007.

[9] Kirchick 2007.

[10] Examples of neoconitis abound. Consider Seumas Milne, the former editor of The Guardian Comment pages (which he turned into the fons et origo of many of the ideas that have led the left astray, prompting one blogger to establish The Seumas Milne Trophy for Relativist Crap). Milne dismissed Ed Husain's 2007 book The Islamist – a penetrating account of extremism in UK Islamist networks – by attacking its author as a 'poster-boy for the neocons'. Another example of neoconitis was the reaction of the Muslim Council of Britain in October 2007 to the finding by a think tank, Policy Exchange, that antisemitic and anti-western hate literature was on sale at a quarter of UK Mosques. The MCB dismissed the research as just another one of those 'transparent attempts to try and delegitimise popular mainstream Islamic institutions in the UK and replace them with those who are subservient to neo-conservative aims.'

[11] As in this exchange (cited in the new postscript to Nick Cohen's *What's Left?*) between Tony Blair and John Humphrys, a BBC presenter, in February 2007.

Tony Blair: There is global struggle in which we need a policy based on democracy, on freedom and on justice . . .

of the unresolved national question between the Israelis and the Palestinians and makes of them a cartoon drawn by a conspiracy nut, opening the door to the dead-end politics of demonisation and boycott rather than mutual recognition and peace.

Too long have those who spread neoconitis enjoyed the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. Neoconservatism is not a conspiracy. As an influential school of foreign policy it has roots in that part of the Democratic Party which refused to follow George McGovern and Jimmy Carter in their embrace of détente and their abandonment of antitotalitarianism in the 1970s. Our differences with neoconservatism may be many, but neoconservatism can only be excised from the history of the eclipse of cynical Kissengerian realism and the rise of democracy-promotion – two preconditions for any 'progressive foreign policy' – by doing violence to the historical record. In that sense there is an overlap of sorts with the liberal and social-democratic antitotalitarian traditions, and we should have the self-confidence to establish *for ourselves* our points of contact with, and our critical distance from, neoconservatism.

Finally, a word of thanks is owed to the interviewees. Irving Howe complained that getting out *Dissent* every quarter meant

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John Humphrys: Our idea of democracy. . .

Blair: I didn't know that there was another idea of democracy. . .

Humphrys: If I may say so, that's naïve . . .

Blair: The one basic fact about democracy, surely, is that you can get rid of your government if you don't like them.

Humphrys: The Iranians elected their own government, and we're now telling them. . .

Blair: Hold on John, something like 60 per cent of the candidates were excluded.

'putting up with all the drudgery.' (And don't even mention the fundraising: 'You have to smile when you want to sulk ... But [you] can never be self-supporting, [so] it's stick in one hand, cup in the other, and off you go.') In recompense the editor will sometimes experience, as Howe put it, a 'charge of pleasure.' Each of these interviews brought a charge of pleasure for sure – the long days of preparatory reading no less than the long afternoons spent in conversation. I hope they will bring pleasure to the reader too.

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Chapter 1

Just War, Humanitarian Intervention and Equal Regard: An Interview with Jean Bethke Elshtain

Jean Bethke Elshtain is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago. Among her books are *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (2003), *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (2001), *Women and War* (1987) and *Democracy on Trial* (1995). Michael Walzer praised the latter as 'the work of a truly independent, deeply serious, politically engaged, and wonderfully provocative political theorist.' The interview took place on September 1, 2005.

Personal and Intellectual Influences

Alan Johnson: Unusually, for a political philosopher, you have been willing to discuss the personal and familial background to your work. You have sought a voice 'through which to traverse … particular loves and loyalties and public duties.' Can you say something about your upbringing, as my mother would have called it, and your influences, and how these have helped to form the characteristic concerns of your political philosophy?

Jean Bethke Elshtain: Well, my mother would have called it the same thing, so our mothers probably shared a good deal. There is always a confluence of forces at work in the ideas that animate us but upbringing is critical. In my own case this involved a very hard-working, down to earth, religious, Lutheran family background. I grew up in a little village of about 180 people where everybody pretty much knew everybody else. You learn to appreciate the good and bad aspects of that. There is a tremendous sense of security but you realise that sometimes people are too nosy and poke into your business. Very early on I got the sense that one has to negotiate certain things, such as what you want to be public and what you don't. I had to work out the complexities of

what I was being taught as part of Christian morality, which has a very strong ethic of self-giving, while at the same time recognising that there are all kinds of shortcomings, tragedies, and evils in the world that can't be avoided. I suspect what taught me that lesson in a big way was when I got polio at the age of 10. I was part of the last batch of polio kids, the last big epidemic before the Salk vaccine came in. And if you are a very active athletic child, as I was, and a tomboy, and all of a sudden you are flat on your back and you can't walk, well, it does something to you. In my case I had to reflect on the fact that things can suddenly go awry and that there are events that are outside your control and always will be. The questions become how we meet those challenges and how human beings endure.

All this is working in the background when I think about issues. For instance, when I have been involved in debates about the family it is very hard for me to think of an abstract family. I think of my sisters and my brothers and my immigrant grandparents and my Aunt Martha and Aunt Mary. These are real people with their own personalities and you don't get to pick them. You are born into this world and the question is how you negotiate this and remain in relationship even if you might have some profound disagreements at points in time. I have long appreciated the 'givenness' of a lot of what life is all about. We can't manoeuvre things just the way we want, and nor can we achieve perfection. We can make things less bad. The dictum 'Do no harm and help whenever you can' sums up the Augustinian ethic.

I had a book in my hand all the time. My mother thought some of my reading habits were very peculiar. She was not happy about some of them. I'd be walking around as a seven year old with all these books about war and sports heroes, not the kind of reading that you normally associate with little girls, at least not in that time and place.

As you get older you begin questioning your upbringing and religious background. I believed at one point that I had removed myself from it but then I realised that I had not. Then the question becomes how one reappropriates that which one has been given in an adult way, to see what can be redeemed (I think this is the way we avoid a certain bitterness

and a recriminatory attitude towards our own past). I came to realise that I was very fortunate in having this very strong cast of characters in my family background. There was a lot of friction. It's the sort of thing that either helps to chisel out your own form or you get submerged. In the case of my family what seems to have happened is that a whole lot of strong characters have emerged out of this background. It worked out in a way that I know my mother self-consciously thought about. She was a person without an education. She had to quit school after the eighth grade to try to save this little bit of land that they had acquired during the great depression. And she felt the sting of that lack of education. But she certainly saw herself as someone who knowingly created a strong family heritage for her children and grandchildren. I would say all this was part of a 'deal' and has geared me in a certain way towards the topics I take up.

Part 1: The Just War Tradition

Johnson: Your work has recommended the just war tradition as a form of reflection on questions of war and violence that can guide us today – an alternative to realism and pacifism. Can you say why you find this tradition so useful?

Elshtain: In a way, the question contains my response. I value the just war tradition precisely because it is an alternative to 'realism,' as it has come to be called, and pacifism.

Just war is a form of reflection on political life that acknowledges the realities of coercive force and, at certain times, the ethical need to deploy it to certain ends and purposes. The tradition understands, with realists of the classical sort, that the world is not simply going to yield to our good intentions. At times statesmen and stateswomen will have to reflect long and hard on bringing force to bear. The just war tradition is flexible. It emerged out of a great moral tradition that Pascal helped to give a bad name to. In casuistry you have some strong norms and principles and these are brought to bear in concrete cases. For example, just war theory will strive to determine whether or not, in a particular instance, a particular norm might, given certain necessities, be temporarily overridden. Just war forces one

to think through dilemmas. Do you, for example, in fighting an utterly ruthless foe like Nazi Germany, temporarily suspend that part of the just war tradition that involves the means deployed in pursuit of a war, in order to defeat the foe? It does not mean you abandon the norm, but you may knowingly and temporarily violate it. And those occasions do occur. Just war, as a tradition, is very aware of the terrible conflicts and tragedies – and they are tragic – that can face people in concrete situations. But, at the same time, just war offers an alternative to modern realism in so far as it forces us to think not just about interests but also about justice, and the rights and dignity of persons. The ethical focus is held constant.

With pacifism the differences are clear. For the pacifist there is no occasion that justifies the use of coercive force. That is a good reason (there may also be some bad ones) why pacifists do not tend to rise to the level of heads of state. Augustine would argue that to be a pacifist and to permit one's own people to be overrun and sold into slavery is actually a terrible dereliction of the duty and vocation of the statesperson. For Augustine, there are two levels. I am not permitted to use violent force against you in the case of a conflict between us. There is a very strong 'thou shalt not' when you are dealing with individual persons. But on the level of states there is a reversal. What's forbidden to the individual is reluctantly made available to the statesperson given the nature of his or her responsibilities.

The just war tradition makes available these two big categories of *jus ad bellum* [justice of going to war] and *jus in bello* [law during war]. One assesses not only the occasion for the use of force and whether it is justified - you have the ethical and analytical means to ongoingly evaluate what is being done in pursuit of a just war. It's really that complexity that is so useful in the just war tradition. It permits you to think about what we might call universal goods, but always within the context of concrete, real-world dilemmas. There is never a presupposition that you can simply abstract from a concrete situation and set up a deontological world of Kantian norms that pertain no matter what. That is just not the world we live in.

Johnson*: You have argued for a form of just-war thinking that is 'tethered to Augustinian realism', and emphasizes not only moral considerations but pragmatic, prudential, 'real-world' considerations. Stressing 'human finitude, tragic contingency, the ironies of political action generally and the need for humility and patience in all – or nearly all – things,' you remain wary of 'a kind of generic internationalist sentimentalism' and associated efforts to assimilate the just war tradition to cosmopolitanism and 'sentimental humanitarianism'.[1] In your eyes the just war tradition should not be turned into a set of Kantian categorical imperatives. Can I ask some questions related to these ideas? First, what does it mean to tether just war thinking to Augustinian realism?*

Elshtain: It simply means that one keeps before oneself not an ideal of perfection as regards what one can attempt to achieve in this world, but an ideal of minimally decent institutional arrangements, minimally decent states, knowing that this will never be a world of perpetual peace. But nor is it a world of perpetual war. The way Kant set it up, it's one or the other. What the just war tradition, tethered to Augustinian realism, helps one to understand is that all institutional arrangements, whether domestic or international, are provisional. Of course they are not arbitrary. Nor are they are going to change on a whim. There is a lot of sturdiness in the ways people organise their lives. But you can't simply freeze the world and say, 'That's it, now things are never going to change.' We have a tendency to want things to stay the way they are (or to want everything to change, once and for all, in line with an ideal that we have, and then to be frozen). Augustinian realism teaches us is that this is simply not possible.

Also, while a lot of international relations people imagine that everything is determined at a rarified structural level, Augustinianism teaches us that profound consequences flow from whether a state is a liberal constitutional state or a fascist state. And profound consequences also flow from the fact that human beings are creatures of a certain kind who have never created pacific worlds as an enduring achievement. So the just war tradition seeks to bring ethical guidelines to

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[1] Elshtain 2001, pp. 14, 18.

bear in full recognition of just how fragile even our greatest achievements really are.[2]

Johnson: You are clearly sceptical about the possibility of building a universal culture of Kantian republics. Do you worry that the very effort to build such a universal culture is, or can be, dangerous?

Elshtain: Absolutely. This does not make me particularly popular in certain quarters. One effect of endorsing things at a certain terribly abstract level is that one is absolved from the responsibility to spell out the concrete criteria for the kind of world that could sustain those universal goods and norms, or to spell out how to reach that world. What sort of constitutions, institutions and relationships could play the role that the Kantians believe is necessary given that we live in a world characterised by ethnic revisionists, one-party dictatorships, child soldiering, murderous Jihadists, human trafficking, genocide, corruption and exploitation? You have got to confront those things on the ground, and the practical ways that human beings do so are made to look puny and small by these huge meta-aspirations to build universal cultures of Kantian republics. The humanly possible work, the arduous tasks, of diplomatists, statespeople, and civil society groups – who do not accept the view that you can actually achieve this utopian vision of perpetual peace and sustain it, but who do know that there are human beings in desperate need, right now, and we have got to do something – is also minimised. The Kantian aspiration tends to minimise the importance of statecraft and the role of practical reason by human beings in sorting out their relationships. It ignores the fact that much of the dignity and purpose of human beings has been derived from their location in particular communities that have particular histories, traditions, cultures and languages. When one makes the automatic assumption that the abstract trumps the concrete (rather than the ongoing dialectic between them), and when one discusses everything at the abstract level and says, 'That's what we need', well, then the discussion of how one could possibly get there,

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[2] Elshtain 1995.

and how one could sustain things once one got there, is always so thin that it is entirely unpersuasive.

Johnson: I think one of the most interesting and important aspects of your writing is your critical probing of the contemporary meaning, use, and mis-use of the just war tradition. You have identified a series of dangers that can cause us to 'lull our critical faculties to sleep'. In the face of these dangers you have stressed 'the sombre realities of intervention including rueful recognition of unintended consequences and limits to what our power can accomplish.'³ I've given three of these dangers the names 'hauling and shelving,' 'triumphalism,' and 'blundering'. I would like to invite you to say something about each in turn.

You wrote, 'If just war thinkers are serious about justice, this tradition of thought should not be hauled out on various rhetorical or ceremonial occasions and then shelved once the rhetorical or political moment has passed.' Noting the 'health catastrophes faced by the Iraqi public', you have written, 'If just war is evoked, then those evoking it should stay within the framework they have endorsed.' And you noted that during the 1991 Persian Gulf War 'just war considerations fell off the radar screen once hostilities ceased.'⁴ How serious is this problem of hauling and shelving and what can we do about it?

Elshtain: This is an ongoing problem. There are many examples one could give when the just war tradition has either been 'hauled out' or 'shelved.' We really have to hold people to account when they employ just war criteria at the beginning of a conflict but then, during the course of the conflict, allow those criteria to fade into the background.

Whether true or not, this 'hauling and shelving' gives the impression that the invocation of the just war criteria was, in the first place, a rhetorical ploy. You have a responsibility to ongoingly evaluate what's going on during the conflict in light of the framework that you used to justify the use of force. So, to take the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the first President Bush talked clearly about issues of justice at the beginning

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³ Elshtain 2001, p. 18.
⁴ Elshtain 2001, p. 13.

of the conflict. I do believe that during the conflict there were moments when just war criteria were applied, such as the stopping altogether of the strafing of fleeing Iraqis at the end of the conflict, when they were not in a position to fight back. Fine, that's good. But then there was an immediate reversion to plain old–fashioned national interest. As soon as the military operation ceased you had the uprising of the Shiites in the South and the terrible plight of the Kurds. Though we did provide some assistance to the Kurds it was under the rubric of our 'national interest'. And it was said that in light of that national interest we could not provide active assistance to the Shiites, a tormented community under Saddam, Well, the price paid by the Iraqi Shiites was horrible. I don't think anyone knows for sure how many were slaughtered by Saddam in the aftermath of the Gulf War (estimates run from 150,000 to 250,000). That's the sort of thing I'm talking about. You incur a very serious responsibility when you intervene. People place their hopes and aspirations in your hands, as the Shiites and the Kurds did. You have a responsibility to at least try to explain to them within the framework you have invoked in the first instance, why it is that you can't do what they would like you to do in that particular circumstance, if you don't believe you can do it.

Now, within the just war tradition, there are certainly provisions for pragmatic considerations. If we decide we are going to do this (provide active military assistance to the Shiite rebellion) we will ask ourselves, 'Is there a probability of success?' There is a hard-line practical dimension. After all, you might blunder into a situation and make it worse rather than better. But, minimally, government officials had a responsibility of saying, 'Look, justice is on their side against this murderous thug, but we don't see how we can move into this situation without doing the following,' and then list the possible dire outcomes or worst case scenarios. And this should be done not as an excuse but as hard-core considerations of the limits to your own ability to transform that situation. 'Hauling and shelving,' as you are putting it, is deeply problematic.

Johnson*: You have written that during the 1991 Gulf War 'the rhetoric of justification veered dangerously close toward a crusade and in the direction of moral triumphalism, with Hussein called a Hitler for our time … this rhetorical upping of*

the ante points to a temptation in, or related to, the just war tradition, namely, the way in which it slides over into crusades at one end of a continuum....[5] *Now, obviously, at that time the word 'crusade' did not carry the meaning...*

Elshtain: ...the word did not have the same valence, no. I meant a moral crusade, not the historic crusades, of course. One really reads that differently now, doesn't one? When General Eisenhower wrote 'Crusade in Europe', he meant a moral crusade against fascism. Clearly, when President Bush let slip 'crusade' in response to a question, very soon after 9/11, he meant a crusade of that sort against fanatical Islamism. But that got taken to mean the Crusades and then all the historic pent-up stuff – after 1000 years! – kicked in. I imagine in *Just War Against Terror* a group of Christians justifying something, whether negative or positive, on the grounds that it is 'just like' something that happened 1000 years ago. We would regard that as a bit off, to put it mildly. But given the context in which we are living, one does have to pay attention, as even the most benign references can be twisted to mean something sinister.

Johnson*: Absolutely. Do you think that sliding over into triumphalism remains a danger?*

Elshtain: I think it always is. I may have overdone some of my own rhetoric in talking about the rhetoric used in 1991 but what worried me about the reference to Saddam as Hitler is that the war against Nazism was a total war and, clearly, in 1991 there was no need to fight anything like a total war. I worried that the analogy invited a totalistic response which was not what was needed, or intended. Rhetoric often gives us an unwarranted sense of our own capacity to manipulate things in the direction we desire, as if our power had such undeniable efficacy that we can do pretty much anything we want. I do believe that is an ongoing danger. Politicians who lead us into a war for, let's assume, good reasons also have to alert us to the fact that lives are going to be lost and that events may not turn out exactly the way we want them to. They should alert us to the very real limits and dangers.

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[5] Elshtain 2001, p. 10.

Johnson: Do you think that when President Bush declared 'mission accomplished' on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003 – even accepting the legitimate joy at the fall of Saddam and the Ba'ath – there was an element of triumphalism about it? And maybe an element of believing in the 'undeniable efficacy' of our power?

Elshtain: Yes. I'm quite sure that the administration, looking back, rather rues the fact that they were premature, at best. Perhaps, as they argued subsequently when this became controversial, the men and women on that particular ship had accomplished their mission. If you listen to that speech, which I did (it was a moving occasion with all those young men and women lined up on that ship to hear the commander-in-chief speak) then 'mission accomplished' meant 'we did the job and the worst is over.' But we now know that the worst was not over. You should not proclaim victory too soon. One reason people were tempted to do that was the ease with which the US and its allies moved through the desert and into Baghdad and sealed the fate of Saddam. That ease gave way to a moment of elation that was unwarranted. Within the just war tradition there is always this warning voice that says, 'Don't assume a fixed achievement.' The aftermath of an intervention is often more difficult than the intervention itself.

Johnson: You have written that 'The just war tradition adds a cautionary note about overreach. Be certain before you intervene, even in a just cause, that you have a reasonable chance of success. Don't barge in and make a bad situation worse.' About Kosovo you wrote, 'We blundered into a strategy without much consideration of the likely reaction to our bombs, namely a deepening of terror and expulsions. Hence there was no preparation for the influx of desperate humanity to neighbouring countries and regions, their plight made doubly desperate by lack of food, water, medicine, and shelter at their points of departure.'[6] And of the intervention in Somalia you wrote, 'the tragedy was that the American commitment was not sufficient to restore minimal civic peace.'[7] Many commentators, including many inside the

[6] Elshtain 2001, pp. 8, 14.

[7] Elshtain 2003a.

State Department, whose Iraq Plan was shelved, have – even while acknowledging the terrible difficulties created by the ex-Saddamists and Islamists – despaired at the pre-invasion planning and post-invasion reconstruction in Iraq. Why does the West do so much 'blundering'?

Elshtain: I suspect that it's not just the West that blunders – human beings blunder. But you have hit on something that we in the West need to spend more time reflecting on. Many – including some of the scholars who are in opposition to the current policy of the Bush administration, but who nevertheless place their hopes along these lines – believe that through the achievement of some kind of constitutional government in places that have not known such, one could achieve a situation in which less of the horrible stuff that I identified earlier goes on. They see that good end, and believe that there is a universal yearning for the dignity that comes with freedom (don't get me wrong, that has been one of our great gifts to humankind, one of our great achievements, and I would never downplay nor be cynical about that). And, well, all this may lead to a tendency to blunder, as I've called it, and you've called it. In this frame of mind one can tend to think that the response of others will be so positive to, for instance, getting rid of a Saddam, that one imagines post-war problems being smoothed out by human beings spontaneously engaging with one another and working out their new and better institutional arrangements. Well, it's a lot more difficult than that. A lot of people have pointed out how long and hard were the occupations in Germany and Japan after the war. Our blundering is related to impatience. We want this Good Thing and believe it Should Happen. And then when it doesn't happen immediately we start to engage in recriminations and become more cynical about what was going on in the first place. There is a Western ethos about good intentions carrying the day that invites an insufficient conjuring with the more mordant possibilities once you have committed yourself to the use of force.

Johnson: Many in Europe look to the Kosovo intervention as the exemplar of humanitarian interventionism. By contrast you have been sharply critical, from a just war perspective, of 'the Clinton doctrine' as it was applied in Kosovo, saying it was 'no

way to run a foreign policy'.[8] Can you say something about why you were so critical of the Clinton policy in Kosovo?

Elshtain: There were really two reasons. One, during the Clinton years there was a tendency to lurch from problem to problem without coherence. Problems were taken up seriatim. Two, with regard to Kosovo, what troubled me was that the Clinton folks seemed to have discovered a new norm of 'combatant immunity' rather than non-combatant immunity. President Clinton made it very clear he wanted a zero casualty war. No US soldiers were to die. And that was why we committed ourselves, through NATO, to a strategy that involved reliance on air power. Talk about naïve good intentions! The view inside the Clinton administration was that Milošević would fold in three days, or five days, a week, tops. They were stunned when that didn't happen. And then they were desperately searching around for new targets for the air campaign.

President Clinton said in advance that we would not put any boots on the ground in Kosovo. That troubled me very much because one of the things that the just war tradition teaches us is that if this is a worthwhile cause, justified because the outcome of this war will be at least a marginally more just world than pertained before the intervention, then you have got to bear costs that are not just monetary. You must be prepared to risk your own blood. We know of course that the bombing campaign was not effective in stopping the Serb paramilitaries on the ground and that the expulsions proceeded apace. To signal in advance that we would not field soldiers was a terrible mistake, politically and ethically. We were more concerned about our combatants than about their non-combatants, and that is a strong violation of one of the most important *jus in bello* requirements. I didn't see too many people expressing this concern, even within the just war camp, and that bothered me too. Many took the view that, as this was an intrinsically worthwhile thing to do, we should just be quiet about any misgivings.

Johnson: *Why were you critical of the rhetoric used by President*

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[8] Elshtain 2001, p. 18.

Clinton in explaining the war and the likely settlement to the American public?

Elshtain: He imagined an instant multinational well-functioning democracy in which problems would be sorted out with relative ease. But, as we know, there are still folks on the ground trying to enforce this very delicate 'peace'. One of the after-effects was that the Kosovans engaged in some of their own ethnic cleansing. Once again, we were not prepared for that either. Assuming that a template (in this case the US, with its really extraordinary pluralism and diversity) could be plunked down there was way too much to expect in the immediate aftermath, especially after the kind of campaign that we conducted. The US has had over 200 years to work on that template.

Part 2: The principle of equal regard

Johnson: You have suggested the principle of caritas, or 'equal regard,' as the basis for international justice – 'one part of a more complex set of reasons to act'.[9] Could you say something about the principle of equal regard: what you mean by it, the ways in which it might form the basis for international justice, and how it might impact on policy?

Elshtain: One of the things that hit me when I was writing *Just War Against Terror* was the inaction in Rwanda. Some horrible situations in which people are being tormented and tortured and killed rise to the level of our attention, while others – one thinks of the ongoing tragedy in Darfur – do not. I was pondering why that was so. In the process I decided that we don't seem to be applying with the moral force that we should the principle of equal regard for persons as such. This sounds very Kantian but the way I seek to work it out is not in a strong deontological way, but in the far more messy way that you and I have been talking about.

Beginning with that principle of equal regard, faced with a terrible situation, an enormity, one is obliged to think about

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[9] Elshtain 2003b.

what is happening, and to conclude that the people dying are human beings and, as such, equal in moral regard to us. So we are then obliged to consider this horrible situation and think about whether there is something we can do to stop it. Would the use of force make a difference in this situation? Minimally, you are obliged to do that. Perhaps the use of force would not make a difference. But one must not just evade the question. Another minimal requirement is that if you have decided that you can't intervene you are obliged to explain why that is, in light of the principle of equal moral regard.

So, think about the Rwandan situation. I've talked to Tony Lake, someone I know rather well, and who was President Clinton's foreign policy advisor. He says the thing he most regrets was what they *didn't* do. Former President Clinton has said the same thing. By refusing to even use the word genocide, even though it was an appropriate word, and by describing what was going on in Rwanda as just one of those tribal conflicts that they have in Africa all the time, the moral issue was never really engaged. We all know the result of that. Now, I am not claiming that, had the principle of equal moral regard been in place, the United States and its allies could have effectively intervened. I am saying that that is something that should have been considered very seriously and explicitly. That was not done.

Johnson: Is there not a danger that the principle of equal moral regard, when it is combined with America's power and responsibility in the world, could produce what David Rieff has called 'endless wars of altruism'?[10]

Elshtain: Well, I don't think there is any doubt that it's a danger. But there are ways to guard against it. If the principle is functioning in the way I am arguing it should, then it would force those who can bring force to bear with some degree of efficacy – like the US – to consider how else (given we are involved in other places and we are stretched thin) to meet their responsibilities. What diplomatic power or 'soft power' can be used? How can we catalyse other forces, agencies, and institutions to be more effective and develop their capacity to

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[10] Rieff 2003.

deal with what's happening? How can we hone their ability to do so? The principle of equal moral regard makes one think about what effective ways are available to prevent the worst from happening.

There are always going to be low-level conflicts in which lives will be lost, and I am not thinking about these when I talk of intervention. I am thinking about catastrophes that violate in the most extreme way the principle of equal moral regard. When the big principles are at stake – the ones we were supposed to have made a universal commitment to in the aftermath of World War Two, such that people are not to be slaughtered simply because of who they are – then in order to maintain some commitment to a world of minimally decent states one is obliged to evaluate what can be done in those circumstances. While we can't do it in this interview, I would say that it would be reasonable to ask me to spell out the criteria for what counts as 'minimally decent' and what threshold conditions obtain such that armed intervention becomes necessary to uphold equal moral regard. That would be a real challenge to my argument and it's one that I hope to take up in the future.

Part 3: Islamism, 9/11, and Us

Johnson: Perhaps the most important claim of Just War Against Terror, *as I read it, was that many responses to 9/11 were simply (this is my term) ignorant. As you put it, the threat is chronically misdescribed. What is the nature of the threat?*

Elshtain: The threat – and this is one reason why it is mis-described – flows from a particularly virulent form of Islam. That is why we call it Islamism. The threat does not come from those who have embraced the religion as faithful practitioners. Islamism is a totalising ideology in the same way that Stalinism and Nazism were totalising ideologies. The Islamists mean it! They are not simply 'using' the language of Jihad. When they say that all Americans and Jews must be slaughtered whenever you find them, they believe this. The ideology is an animating force. One form of misdescription occurs when people say, 'Well, that is what they are saying, but what is really going on is the following...' and then they

go on to ignore completely the self-understanding of the Islamist terrorists. If one is convinced, as I am, that what drives the Islamist terrorists is a virulent fanatical reading of a religious tradition, a turning of that tradition into an instrument that justifies any slaughter, including slaughter of non-combatants, to achieve a particular utopian end (the restoration of the Caliphate), then one has to take that as seriously as, belatedly, we took Nazi ideology.

Paul Berman's book *Terror and Liberalism*,[11] in which he shows the connection between Islamism and its early origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, and the totalitarian European ideologies of the 20th century, is very persuasive. Any characterisation of Islamist terrorism that does not come to terms with that is really a misdescription. But, unfortunately, many on the left have become accustomed to describing the driving force of history as primarily a cluster of economic considerations. Justice and injustice are lodged in that place, rather than in some of the other issues that I have been talking about. Hence, their culpable naivety about these issues. Of course one could agree with my description of the threat but disagree with particular aspects of the war on terrorism. That's clearly the case. But what I have been very vexed by is the widespread and extraordinary insouciance concerning the nature of the threat itself.

Johnson: You were very critical of the responses of some on the left to 9/11, claiming they were akin to the behaviour of the 'humanists of Oran,' who appear in Albert Camus' novel, The Plague. *What were you getting at?*

Elshtain: I have loved Camus since I was 17 or 18 and I think *The Plague* is one of the great novels that came out of Word War Two. What struck me was Camus' far more Augustinian vision (he had written a master's thesis on Augustine, spent a lot of time struggling with Augustine, and I suspect that formed part of the backdrop of his own vision). The 'humanists' of Oran, in the novel, are those who can step on a plague-ridden rat that is dying at their feet and still say, 'There are no rats here.' Today, while a deadly threat comes from a

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[11] Berman 2003.

murderous ideology we hear the same response: 'There are no rats here.' Actually we hear, 'If there is a rat, it's America.' The idea is that our foreign policy is producing blowback and if our foreign policy changed this would stop. For Camus, the 'humanists' of Oran are people who refuse to peer into the heart of darkness.

Johnson: If, in the last question, we dealt with denial, this one concerns retreat. When you urged people to spurn 'the sanctuary of private virtuousness' and embrace the model of Bonhoeffer's 'dirty hands' what were you getting at?

Elshtain: Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the brilliant young German Lutheran theologian who became part of the anti-Nazi resistance and of the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. This was a very difficult thing for him to do because it involved the intentional taking of a human life. But he finally made the determination that one is obliged to ask the question 'what is to come' and act in light of the answer. One can't only focus on one's own goodness, but one is obliged to focus on the concrete situation and ask, 'What is to come?' And he had seen enough evidence of what the Nazi regime represented to know that what was to come was even worse. So he decided one had to get out of the sanctuary of private virtuousness and beyond a [purely] internal resistance in which one wraps oneself in a cocoon of one's own moral purity.

And I fear that kind of response – virtuous people who retreat into a sanctuary where they are morally pure and others are morally impure – can be seen today. Bonhoeffer's recognition of 'dirty hands' is the recognition that one is always going to be stained by the world. And those who retreat into the sanctuary of private virtuousness are, despite what they may believe, culpable. There is a culpability of non-action. It is better for people to try to do something to stop a horrible thing. Perhaps they will blunder at it, and not get the job done. But far better that than personal retreat.

Johnson: To take this further, can I quote something you said before 9/11 (at a symposium organised by Nation *magazine) and ask whether you think that what you discussed there is implicated in some of the left responses to 9/11. I should say this is not the dominant tone in which you have discussed*

responses to 9/11, but I think it is present. You bemoaned, 'The triumph of the therapeutic culture, with its celebration of a self that views the world solely through the prism of the self, and much of the time a pretty "icky" self at that. It's a quivering sentimental self that gets uncomfortable very quickly, because this self has to feel good about itself all the time. Such selves do not make arguments, they validate one another.'[12] Do you think that this self is implicated in some of the left responses to 9/11?

Elshtain: Yes, unfortunately I do. Let me give you an example, one which makes me particularly unhappy. Liberal Protestantism uses a rhetoric that is laced through with this goopy good will. There is a lot of breast beating about 'we are the ones who have done this.' A lot of the talk is of us 'getting right with ourselves'. That therapeutic dimension has crept into our religious discourse. The upshot of that is that you have absolute agreement among all these religious groups – Presbyterian Church USA, Methodists – on pretty much every serious political issue, and it begins from this notion of the all-importance of 'feeling right with ourselves', feeling our own goodness.

There has been an infusion of the therapeutic culture into our political life. There was an example during the Clinton scandal. Whatever one's view of that, the language that came forth from some of the President's defenders concerning, shall we say, his somewhat predatory way with women, was of this kind: 'We need to give him space within which he can become more mature about these things.' I was in a discussion with a very important Protestant ethicist who viewed Clinton's behaviour as a matter of private goodness or badness. The American people, he said, needed to give President Clinton a 'chance to grow up' and, you know, cease to be a 16-year-old boy. I replied that it was not my impression that we elect Presidents in order to watch them get out of adolescence. There is a particular office that they hold. There are responsibilities of that office.

The inability of the liberal-left Protestant institutions to think

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[12] Elshtain et al. 2001.

of political issues as anything other than as a private saga of internal well-being was overwhelmingly striking to me. This leads to sentimentalism and the over-personalisation of political issues. It also leads to the valorisation of the victim. Rather than thinking concretely about situations on the ground, one is invited to immediately identify one set of people as 'victims' and another set of people as 'victimisers', and to treat this former group as pure. But nobody can claim that kind of purity. Sometimes victims are capable of doing horrible things. This is really not the way the issue needs to be joined. One can try to stop situations of victimisation without locating in the victim some saving principle that will redeem everything. The therapeutic culture can be seen at work in American political discourse at just about every level. It's quite striking.

Johnson: Do you think the invasion of Iraq was justifiable within the terms of just war theory? I am thinking of your 2001 article, 'Just War and Humanitarian Intervention', which argued that while the invasion and brutalisation of Kuwait did justify intervention, 'the injustices of Saddam's reign in and of themselves did not constitute grounds for forceful intervention, not within the just war framework.'[13] Do you think 9/11 changed that, or, more precisely, that the threat of the coming together of al-Qaeda with WMD via failing or rogue states changed that?

Elshtain: Clearly, my view altered about whether the threshold had been reached at which intervention to deal with the injustices of Saddam and the Ba'athist regime would be justifiable. There were two considerations. One, of course, you have very astutely identified. 9/11 changed the context. And in the just war tradition one has to take account of alterations in context. You can't just say, 'I've got my categorical imperative and I'm going to hold to it even if the heavens fall.' Two, I started to pay a lot more attention to what was going on in Saddam's Iraq. It had not been the primary focus of my attention and I started to study it, read a lot, and I had the opportunity to talk to some Iraqi exiles and learn more about what they had suffered and about the extent

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[13] Elshtain 2001, p. 9.

of the horrific treatment of groups of people in Iraq. All of that came together in my thinking about the threat represented by the Saddam Hussein regime.

Also, rogue and failed states are clearly a problem in a world threatened by determined terrorists. First, because of the advantage that these entities can take of failed states. Second, because of the direct aid and comfort they can receive from rogue states. The dynamic is altered. And I believed, as did the CIA and the intelligence agencies of the Western countries, that there really was a problem with WMD. Saddam had not accounted for them. He was stiffing the United Nations. Maybe the full story of WMD has not been told. Maybe it never will be. I now think that Saddam was probably keeping up the pretence – a very dangerous game – that Iraq did have WMD in reserve. This was more for the purpose of internal control than anything else. Finally his bluff was called.

Johnson: What is your view of developments in Iraq since the invasion? St Augustine wrote, 'Peace and war had a competition in cruelty. And peace won the prize.' In the case of Iraq could it be said that 'war won the prize'? Have developments caused you to doubt whether the invasion was justified?
Elshtain: Obviously, along with others who believe the invasion was justified along just war lines, I am saddened and horrified by the nature of the insurgency, and the determination of these people – who include former Ba'athists and Jihadists coming in from outside Iraq – to prevent the emergence of anything like a minimally decent state in post-Saddam Iraq. It makes the story a more difficult one and more poignant. Think of those millions of Iraqis who braved the threat of death to vote and express their desire for the minimally decent state I have been talking about. War has perhaps temporarily won the prize but I don't believe it will over the long run.

Let me say also that I am really struck by the different perceptions one gets depending on whether your exclusive source of information is the mass media – TV and newspapers – or whether you have some independent sources of information available to you. I am fortunate in that, serving on the board of the National Endowment for Democracy, every three months we get briefings from people who are on the ground and are going back and forth to Baghdad. They describe the

labour union effort, the women's groups, the rebuilding of schools, and the rise of a free press. The tragedy is that people continue to work for these good ends in a terrible security environment, especially in the so-called Sunni triangle. I have not changed my mind about whether the invasion was justified. I believe that more good than ill has already come from the invasion and more will certainly come when the dust has settled completely.

I regret that more folks have not signed on to help out in this cause. I thought that perhaps the powerful sight of all those Iraqis lining up to vote would soften some hearts and people would say, 'boy, we've got to give these people a chance'. But the election seems not to have done that. I see a resentment at work among some intellectuals in the US and Europe. It's not just that they are indifferent, or that they feel the invasion was not justified, but that they are really hoping for a calamity. They want the US to fail. They want a catastrophe in order to say 'we told you so', and in order to justify their demonic view of George Bush and Tony Blair. There is a sickly undercurrent there: looking for and revelling in failure. That is grotesque. And it is a denial of the very principle of equal moral regard. If you have some sense of equal moral regard you have got to take seriously what happened on January 30. The Jihadists put out the message that they were going to blow up voters at polling stations. What stories of courage there are! One voter puts on his best clothes and does all his prayers because he figures there is a pretty good chance he will die today. But he was determined to go and vote. The ink-stained finger was a mark of human dignity and for people to be incapable of responding to that – whatever they thought of the invasion – is reprehensible.

Johnson: You have argued that in light of the USA's commitment to moral dignity and political equality – embodied in its founding documents, jurisprudence and political institutions – and in light of the USA's status as the sole superpower, and the nature of the threat we face, the USA 'must become the leading guarantor of a structure of stability and order in a violent world.'[14] You proposed a new paradigm of 'interdiction

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[14] Elshtain 2003a, p. 173.

and intervention.' What is the role of America in the world?

Elshtain: Let me tell you a story. Someone argued that I had embraced the 'Spiderman ethic', meaning that I have cast the US as a Superhero and that this is to take away all moral ambiguity.[15] I wrote back that, with all due respect, he doesn't know anything about Spiderman! Spidey, in fact, is a morally conflicted hero. Does his loyalty to his family and his girlfriend take precedence over his duty to protect the innocent from harm? How can he handle his multiple responsibilities? Spidey is always in danger of stretching himself too thin. He is always a little exhausted. He is always worried about whether he is doing the right thing. I chose Spiderman rather than Superman precisely because I wanted to get at that aspect of difficulty and torment attached to power and responsibility.

The US plays a certain role by default at this point in time. It's not a question of whether we are a superpower or not. It's a question of what kind of superpower we are. And that's just a matter of fact. I am not assuming this will be the shape of the world for ever, but it is right now. The question is, what are the responsibilities of the United States in light of our power, and in light of the fact that we can play a role that others, at this point in time, cannot? What are the criteria that might be brought to bear to guide the use of that power? Do we say 'well, we stand for one thing domestically but internationally it's hard core realpolitik all the way'? Or do we fall into a messianic mode, a strong Wilsonianism, and try to remake the world and create perpetual peace? Or do we try to struggle with some posture that is neither overreach nor withdrawal?

Part 4: Just War Against Terror: replying to critics

Johnson: Edward Witman claimed that Just War Against Terror *did not exhibit enough suspicion of US geopolitical motives and intentions.[16] Douglas M. Brattebo has claimed that you have been distinctly cool about the role the UN or NGOs could play in the war on terror and that this is a rather serious*

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[15] Burke 2005. See also Elshtain 2005.

[16] Witman 2004.

error as a multilateral approach would be much more likely to succeed. [17] Can you comment?

Elshtain: I don't think I have to belabour further my criticisms of the UN and its inefficacy (and, as we are learning more and more, its corruptness). Does representation and transparency pertain in some of these international bodies? How do we hold them accountable? I have nothing against multilateralism – but what kind of multilateralism, under what sort of rubric, to what ends? Tough questions are rarely raised of the UN and NGOs in the same way that they are raised – and rightly so – in reference to states. People really should be more critical of the failures of multilateralism. I mean you have been asking me a lot about the weaknesses of my approach, probing the possible dangers inherent in it, and those questions are entirely appropriate. But somehow there is the view in some circles that when someone says 'the UN' or 'NGOs' then we are supposed to stand up and cheer! Critical acuity stops at that point. That is one reason I am cool, as you put it, about some of the easy evocation of multilateralism and universalism as an alternative to states, and particularly to the action of the United States. The UN has not proved to be effective at all in situations of crimes against humanity. It has failed to prevent them ripening and it has failed to prevent the horrors when they break out into the open.

Johnson: Nicholas Rengger suggests that you have implicitly reversed some of your positions on just war and the limits of politics. In some of your pre 9/11 work you stressed the limits of all politics, pointed out that the use of force risks bringing all kinds of strife in its train, and worried about 'the seductive lure of imperial grandiosity'. Rengger argues that Just War Against Terror *has 'more than a touch of "imperial grandiosity" about it.' He claims all power corrupts, that the US is no different, and so to adopt the self-identity of the 'indispensable nation' charged with looking after global stability and order – 'the permanent agent of the global common good' is how he characterises your view – is virtually to guarantee bad old imperialism. In an arresting image drawn from* Lord of the Rings*, he suggests you are inviting the USA / Gandalf to pick up the ring of power*

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[17] *Brattebo 2005.*

when you should be urging it to give it to Frodo to cast into the fires of Mordor. You are unwittingly helping Sauron, the Dark Lord, seems to be the charge! [18] Can you comment?

Elshtain: I love *Lord of the Rings* but unfortunately the Ring of Power is never going to be cast into the fires of Mordor. It may be at the end-time, at some eschatological point, but not before. And I don't believe anyone can just seize the ring and hold it. Power circulates. No one permanently has superordinate power. It just does not work like that in this world. Look, my approach is very historical. At this point in time the US can't help but be a superpower. The question is how one exercises that power. Do we exercise it with restraint and responsibility? Do we try to hoard it, letting the world go to hell while looking after ourselves? Or do we spread it too thin? And so on. As powerful as the Lord of the Rings image is, it is not apt because it assumes that which can never be, i.e. the getting rid of the Ring of Power permanently, and the arrival at a new Age of the King, as Tolkien has it, with centuries of peace and generosity, and all the rest. Would it were so! But, again, that is just not the world that we live in.

To the extent that I have not been careful enough to bring some of my previous writings into *Just War Against Terror* I could plead guilty. I guess I was assuming that readers had some sense of the deep background arguments. I'll try to be more careful in future to indicate that although I do believe that the United States can be a force for justice, and that to try is part of its responsibility at this point, I also know that there are always dangers in overreach. I am not assuming that one hundred years from now the United States will still be in this position. But for an American citizen, especially, the question has to be 'what kind of superpower are we?' not whether we are.

Part 5: On religion and the 'democratic dispositions'

Johnson: Liberal Europe views religion, in the USA particularly, as a force for, and of, the right. Your work inverts that notion.

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[18] Rengger *2004*.

You find Christianity sustaining certain 'habits of the heart,' certain 'democratic dispositions' that are a basis of 'democratic civil society.' Can you explain?

Elshtain: The reference point for 'habits of the heart' is, of course, Alexis de Tocqueville and his observation in *Democracy in America* that the strong religiosity he found in the United States fed into civic instincts and fuelled an intense engagement in civic life. He offers strong examples of the direct conduit from one to the other. And we continue to see this. Empirical social science has shown us that people in the US who are regular church-goers are more likely to be involved in civic activities of all sorts. This does not surprise me one bit. There is a constant hammering of the principle that you are your brothers' and sisters' keeper and that you are obliged to give of yourself. Not just to write cheques but to get out there and put your shoulders to the wheel in a variety of ways.

Many liberal Europeans – this strikes me every time I am in Europe – have a strange view about what's going on over here with religion. I was at a meeting at which someone had written a paper claiming Timothy McVeigh was a 'Christian Terrorist'. Where on earth did the person get that idea? McVeigh was a lapsed Catholic who spurned Christianity, thinking it fuelled weakness. He had adopted a libertarian militia attitude which has nothing to do with religion. His last will and testament was to repeat a really awful poem, *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley, which I had to read in high school. 'I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul, blah, blah, blah'. It's an anti-Christian poem. McVeigh wrote it out in hand as his last will and testament. He became a 'Christian terrorist' because he was right-wing and because, to some, right-wing equals Christian.

There is an extraordinary level of plain ignorance about the variety of forms of religion in America. The representation of Evangelical Christians as ignorant southern bumpkins, barely out of the Neanderthal stage, is wrong. In fact when you look at studies of Evangelicals they are on average better educated than the average American. And since the last election there have been people calling for the mobilization of left-wingers who identify with religion. Of course if you try to use religion instrumentally it's not going to work very well, but the fact

remains that for all the mainline churches in American their politics are to the left. The story of American religion is pretty darn complicated.

Johnson*: Unfashionably, perhaps, your work stresses the importance of acts of discernment, distinguishing these from acts of prejudice or malice. You have called 'the capacity to make judgements' an 'ethical issue of the gravest sort' and have criticised the 'Oprah Winfreyization of American life' (and of parts of the academy), saying that judging is now 'at a nadir among us'. In fact you have written of 'the wholesale – or nearly so – abandonment of the faculty of judging or discerning at work in late 20th century America'.[19] You claim that an 'authentic moment of judging' lies 'at the heart of what it means to be a self-respecting human subject in a community of other equally self-respecting subjects.'[20] Can you say something about what you take authentic judging to be, what it involves, the differences between it and prejudice, and talk about why you think authentic judging is so important for politics (and perhaps particularly for how we respond to terrorism?)*

Elshtain: First, I relate this abandonment of judging to the therapeutisation that we talked of earlier, for which the main thing is to validate one another and feel good about yourself rather than to engage in certain discernments and articulate them (which, of course, may not make you the most popular person on the block, or in the department, by the way). For me, authentic judging is our capacity to consider alternatives, to analyse what these alternatives involve, to ask whether there is a moral dimension involved, what it is, and then to make a determination. The kinds of determination we are called upon to make will vary depending on the office we hold. If I am a teacher I am surely obliged to make discernments of all sorts in my classroom; similarly, if I am a political leader or a human rights activist. For instance, is this a case of genocide or a 'typical African tribal conflict'? Judging, Arendt argues, is absolutely central to politics because politics involves practical reason and the weighing of alternatives.

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[19] Elshtain 1994.
[20] Elshtain 1999.

In the response to terrorism, clearly what is at stake is our judgment of the threat, what it represents, and how we can best respond to it. In the maudlin, self-flagellating reactions of some Americans to terrorism we see a failure to judge. And this refusal to judge with an appropriate seriousness is a problem in every area of American life. Take American families. There is a vast literature now that talks about the generation of kids raised by parents who thought that there was no way to vindicate and teach certain moral norms. The upshot has not been a pretty one as far as what has happened to the kids. Today's parents are far more willing to insist on articulating certain limits, holding children to them, and to insist on consequences. This not to stifle the kids but precisely in order that they can grow up to be adults with the capacity for decent self-realisation.

Judging becomes most important when it pertains to a way of life in common, with what's happening to a whole people, with what's happening inside the country and with what the country is doing outside its borders.

Johnson: Much modern culture takes pride in expunging shame. But, contrarily, you worry about shamelessness. You have written that 'knowing shame and being capable of judgement are central to, indeed constitutive of, a democratic capacity for self-governance.'[21] Why?

Elshtain: The notion of shame has to do with discernment and limits: what should be displayed in a public way and what should not? Can we really cross every border with impunity? Milan Kundera has a wonderful segment in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* pointing out that we do so at our peril. Some of our best writers have written precisely about what happens to human beings when they decide that everything can be shown, everything can be said, and that all boundaries and borders are part of an old repressive regime to be stripped away. It can lead to terrible cruelties.

Also there was a kind of shamelessness about some of the horrific regimes of the 20th century. What people may have

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[21] Elshtain 1999.

been thinking in private, about, say, the Jews, was done in public. It shows you what happens when that which we feel somewhat ashamed of no longer inspires a certain reticence and caution. The avatars of shamelessness say, 'I'm getting rid of all this old weak stuff. It's all going to be out there and I will parade it for all to see.' In American culture, and perhaps in much of European culture, there is the idea that there is no longer any boundary or border that we need to fret about. This fuels all kinds of terrible developments, such as the spread of violent forms of pornography.

Johnson: Can we talk about evil, limits and hope? In Just War Against Terror *you talk of 'our condition of fallibility and imperfection' and you have agreed with the late Christopher Lasch's insistence on 'limits'. You insist that 'estrangement, conflict and tragedy are constant features of the human condition.'[22] While some see you, accordingly, as a conservative thinker, for myself I (now) see these truths as essential to any future democratic left and as sober acknowledgements of the terrible enormities of which human beings are capable. Norman Geras, writing about the Holocaust, has meditated on those 'common vices and human failings that can become in another setting or combination, suddenly exorbitant.'[23] But how can hope be sustained once we let in the fact of evil and of limits? And how – as we are talking about doing politics – can we inspire, once we have refused to evade the tragic, once we have insisted on limits?*

Elshtain: These are terribly important questions. Geras sounds like a rather wise man to me. It puts me in mind of one person in the audience at Oxford University who, after I had given a talk on C.S. Lewis and his essay *The Abolition of Man*, asked how I kept myself from despair in light of some of these mordant recognitions. I said, 'Well, hope is certainly one of the theological virtues, and a great human virtue, and it is something we can more robustly keep alive if we recognise the realities of evil, the pervasiveness of tragedy as part of the human condition, and limits. There is a big difference between decent hope and unrestrained optimism.

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[22] Elshtain 2001, p. 18
[23] Geras 1998.

Much of the politics of the left, historically, has ushered in an unrestrained optimism. Certainly one finds in Marxism, and more generally in left-wing politics, a race for definitive transformation of this or that. When that turns out not to work what sets in is cynicism or a tendency toward conspiracy theories.'

If one started out with hope rather than unrestrained optimism then it would help to sustain efforts over time. It would be more durable than utopianism. I've heard people argue that we need utopianism even to accomplish small things. I think the opposite is the case. Utopianism undermines our capacity to deal with the smaller things. It undermines our capacity to minimally transform our communities into places that are better for every citizen because it makes those minimal transformations look like not very much in light of the utopian vision.

I have a hunch that whether one can respond to this notion of realistic hope, as I have called it, is almost constitutional. Certain human beings have a certain upbringing and they tend to think in a certain way. But, having said that, I don't think this attitude is unavailable to those whose own story might be one of horror or bliss. Again, my work tends to seek ways to steer between certain extremes of cynicism or optimism, despair or utopianism.

Part 6: The Public Intellectual

Johnson*: You have a much wider audience than the academy and you are often called, and call yourself, a 'public intellectual'. What are the tasks of a public intellectual? What are the dangers of being one? And why do we have so very few these days?*

Elshtain: The danger for the public intellectual of course lies in becoming more and more public and less and less intellectual! If you pop up like a jack in the box on every occasion to say something you don't have as much time for critical reflection. One should not become an intellectual for hire, guaranteed to rush to the TV studio at a moment's notice. The role is about having an understanding of one's

work as inherently historical, as having to do with concrete lived situations, and as very dialogic. There should be a lot of back and forth between you and the reactions to what you are saying. It's a pedagogical process. If one loses that dimension it's just you with your views, popping up as a talking head.

As to why we have so few, I have a hunch that it is to do with the capture of our intellectual life by our universities. For various reasons there has been a perimeter put around intellectual and scholarly activities. There are very few independent scholars out there. It's a very hard thing to be. You don't have the institutional arrangements that help to make your life possible. And inside the academy there are other disincentives. The public intellectual can be looked down upon as not a real scholar. Being called 'popular' can be a deadly criticism! We have lots of celebrity, quasi-intellectuals but that's rather different to what you and I are talking about.

I once framed the choice facing public intellectuals as Sartre versus Camus. One model is to see oneself as leading the forward march into some glorious historic transformation, and to have a total plan for overthrowing the old and bringing in the new. This intellectual rarely pays much of a price for their advocacy. This came home to me all those years ago when I read Sartre's introduction to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, in which Sartre says that killing a European kills two birds with one stone. I thought, Monsieur Sartre, it must be a nice job to sit in a café on the west bank surrounded by adoring devotees and call for bloodshed without limits in this way. The more concrete and even anguished engagement with one's world is embodied in Albert Camus' life and work. His struggle with the complexity of Algeria almost killed him. He put himself in physical danger. He sought a more complex view, fair both to the French people who had made Algeria home for a century, and to the Arab Algerians. He hoped that somehow they could live in peace in a pluralistic constitutional order. But there was no way to even talk about that in the polarised context in which Sartre was the leader of the 'kick them out, kill the French' faction.

One faces a choice if one wants to be engaged in public life. To see oneself as having a plan, as knowing a lot more than

other people, and to be ruthless in the advocacy of definitive social change. Or to be more modest and more troubled about what it is you are doing. Obviously I'm on the side of being more modest and more troubled.

Johnson: What did you mean when you said that public intellectuals, much of the time at least, should be party poopers?

Elshtain: If you are doing your job well you are going to find yourself criticised by pretty much every ideological camp. I've been accused of being a Marxist, a religious fanatic and a neoconservative. I am no way comparing myself to Camus but I do take comfort that he went through the same thing. It does not kill you. You can live with it and accept that you don't have much control over it. The bad part about being labelled is that certain outlets are closed to you. It's true for me at the present moment. Some liberal outlets can take the view that 'well, we can't permit her in here, she's not one of us any more'. The gatekeepers start slamming the doors shut. But you just have to put up with that. It's the sort of thing that's going to happen when people can't comfortably place you in one slot because you are no longer entirely predictable. That is the price one pays for a certain independence and that, I should have thought, is what public intellectuals are supposed to be.

Johnson: What are you working on now?

Elshtain: I am working on my Gifford Lectures for delivery in Edinburgh in February 2006. The theme is sovereignties. I will look at the sovereignty of God, the sovereignty of the state, and the sovereignty of man or the human being, and the presuppositions that underscore these sovereignties, or alleged sovereignties. Whether you are a believer or not, I think it is illuminating to look at the different historic understandings of God's sovereignty because they do shift. Is God the apogee of love and reason, a relational Triune God as was true for the medieval theology? Or, with the shift to nominalism, is God instead the terrifying site of sovereign and even capricious will? That leads to all kinds of questions about, for instance, whether God's sovereignty is bound or not bound. It's my hunch that those sorts of theological debates

form the background for the early modern debates about state sovereignty: what one presumes it to be, the ways in which it is bound or unbound. My further suggestion will be that these images of state sovereignty fuel modern conceptions, or pretensions, of self-sovereignty that are, to my mind, deeply problematic. I hope to make this trajectory intelligible and, along the way, to persuade people that thinking about these sovereignties in relation to each other can be illuminating.

Postscript: November 2007

Johnson: A couple of years on, in what ways would you update your views about the Iraq intervention?

Elshtain: I would stress further the question of prudence or the consequentialist criterion that is one part of the just war tradition. I continue to believe that the war was justifiable – that *jus in bello* grounds can, in fact, be met. This has to do in part with my dissatisfaction with many of the 'humanitarian intervention' criteria promoted by various groups, namely, that an intervention is justifiable on humanitarian grounds *only* if the violations are going on at that very moment. But if an oppressive regime has successfully destroyed tens of thousands of people but isn't engaged in that activity at the moment, what then? This does not make much sense to me. It would mean, in effect, that if Hitler hadn't been defeated and Germany had remained intact – World War Two ended in a stalemate, say – then, as the millions had already been murdered, humanitarian grounds could not have been found to overthrow his regime. The brutal thirty-year track record of Saddam Hussein struck me as sufficient to justify an intervention under 'responsibility to protect'. If, to this, one added what seemed at the time entirely credible evidence about WMD – unless one believes the conspiracy types that the intelligence was all 'made up' – then it added up to justifiability on *jus in bello* grounds. (I should note that I found Tony Blair especially compelling on the WMD evidence. I also believe that we do not yet have the full story on this issue.) As to *jus in bello*, that, I believe, is the way the US now fights wars. The rules of engagement of the US military now track quite precisely with the principles of discrimination and proportionality. The overwhelming number of civilian deaths

in Iraq can be laid at the doorstep of the so-called 'insurgents,' not the US military. When command and control has broken down (Abu Ghraib) or soldiers have committed crimes, the military has brought them to trial.

Many people who supported the war are now running for cover. But given what I knew *then* I see no reason why I would come to a different conclusion. What I would say to myself, in self-criticism, is that I should no doubt have spent more time weighing the prudential factor – is there a real opportunity of success. It is important to remember that this consequentialist criterion is not a kind of 'add-on' after one has done all the other discernment but is itself constitutive of the jus ad bellum criteria. (This reminds us that the just war tradition is neither a purely Kantian nor a purely utilitarian matter. The moral tradition out of which just war emerged is casuistry and this venerable tradition doesn't fall into the camps of moral philosophy with which we are currently familiar.)

No doubt as time goes on, I will look back and determine whether I was just too hopeful, too enthusiastic, about the prospects of an anti-fascist war, of the possibility that the world finally really meant it, or at least some powerful countries did, when they talked about responsibility to protect and the importance of no longer tolerating murderous regimes if it was possible to do something about them without doing more damage than a particular regime was itself doing. My worry now, with all the difficulties that have emerged – and it will take years to sort out how these might have been prevented – is that the US will retreat into one of its historically common modes – isolationism. Indeed, this is what some Republicans and some Democrats are frankly advocating, often with some loose talk about 'soft power' and the like. But, primarily, it is about 'caring for your own' and avoiding the rest of the world and its troubles. We shall see.

No one, no matter how twisted he or she may be by 'Bush derangement syndrome', as it is called, should rejoice at what has happened in Iraq. It is not a good thing when an effort to overthrow a cruel 'republic of fear' turns sour as it discourages such efforts in general and, God knows, the world is filled with regimes that make enemies of their own people. Human

beings deserve better. Do we really mean it when we speak of 'human rights'? I'm not certain that we do. It is especially troubling that so many on the left, as Nick Cohen points out in his recent book, have abandoned the ground of universal norms and values for a shallow multiculturalism and wind up, in practice, supporting the creation of monoculturalisms and a thin relativism.

Of course, pro or con the Iraq war is no 'test' of where we stand on these issues, but the war has certainly put much of this into bold relief. I suspect that many of our future debates will take place on this terrain.

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Chapter 2

Globality, War, and Revolution: An Interview with Martin Shaw

Martin Shaw is a sociologist of war and global politics and holds the Chair of International Relations and Politics at the University of Sussex. Martin has been a member of the International Socialists (1965-1976), the Labour Party (1979-) and the European Nuclear Disarmament steering committee (1980-85). A prolific writer, his recent books include *War and Genocide* (2003), *The New Western Way of War: Risk-Transfer War and its Crisis in Iraq* (2005), and *What is Genocide?* (2007). The interview took place on October 20, 2005.

Personal and Intellectual Influences

Alan Johnson: *Can you say something about your family background and the major influences on your intellectual development, and how these have helped to form the characteristic concerns of your sociology of war and global politics?*

Martin Shaw: My father was a conscientious objector in the Second World War. As a Christian he publicly opposed nuclear weapons as immoral during the early 1960s. Although I became a secular humanist around the age of 19, I was always influenced by pacifism. As a student in the 1960s I moved towards Marxism, and became involved in the revolutionary left, but I always felt profoundly uneasy about their ability to embrace violence in a political cause. In the late 1970s I moved away from the far left, partly because of its lack of commitment to democracy as a political principle in the public arena, and within its own organisations. But I was also questioning Marxism intellectually and moving beyond it because of its inability to deal with the problems of violence and war. I formulated a critique of Marxism in light of these problems which paralleled E. P. Thompson's attack on exterminism. His qualified pacifism – nuclear pacifism – was

a position that I could sympathise with, although I worked it through in a rather different way, as 'historical pacifism'. [1] My work in the last couple of decades has been of an intellectual kind and it has centred on the idea of taking the problem of war and the problem of violence seriously.[2]

Part 1: The Reactionary Left

Johnson: You have been very critical of some on the left. In a sharp exchange with John Pilger you attacked his 'contemptible excuse that Serbian atrocities in Kosovo were products of "random brutality" rather than genocidal planning', asking, 'What blighted vision leads [Pilger] to deny that Serbian crimes were of a kind with those of the Indonesians in East Timor?'[3] Do you see Pilger's 'blighted vision' – more recently he urged support for the Iraqi 'resistance' on the grounds that, although it commits terrible atrocities, 'we can't be choosy' – as representative of a trend in left-wing opinion and sensibility, and if so how would you characterise that trend?

Shaw: I think Pilger is, in one sense, a special case, because he takes his stance entirely and consistently on the basis of opposing the West. He will support everybody who opposes the West and he won't support people who appear to be supported by the West. For example, he refused solidarity to the Kosovan Albanians because the West appeared to be taking up their cause. But in another sense, yes, he's a particularly sharp representative of a general trend, which I would call the reactionary left. This kind of left sees human rights and democratisation as expressions of imperialism, is suspicious of any attempt to extend legitimate global institutions and values, and harks back to the old principle of national sovereignty, even to the point of defending nationalisms that have been perverted by genocidal dictators like Milošević, or insurgents

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[1] See Thompson 1980, Shaw 1990.

[2] See Shaw 1990, 1991, 1994, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2007.

[3] Shaw 1999b. For a fuller account of the John Pilger-Martin Shaw exchange in *The New Statesman* see http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/hafa3/pilger.htm

like the so-called Iraqi resistance. There is a cluster of views there which defines a very large section of the left. Pilger has just got his own particular version of that. I would distinguish between that reactionary left and a progressive left which embraces human rights and democratisation, the extension of global institutions and values, and which takes a consistent stance against genocide.

But the issue of war cuts across this division. On the one hand, what I call the reactionary left opposes war, but only on the grounds that the wars in question are imperialist. I don't think that much of it is 'anti-war' in a very deep sense. It's ironical that somebody like George Galloway should be described as an 'anti-war' candidate when he publicly supported Saddam Hussein, 'to victory and to Jerusalem.' Clearly he's quite happy to support those wars which suit him. On the other hand, the progressive left often supports war as a way of overthrowing genocidal regimes, but neglects the damage that war in general, particularly an illegal war like the Iraq war, does to human lives, to society and to global order. People like Michael Ignatieff, David Aaronovitch, Nick Cohen, Christopher Hitchens, who articulate quite progressive positions, don't really address the problematic nature of adopting war as a means of furthering democracy or human rights.

Johnson: You criticised the intellectual conservatism of Perry Anderson's rationale for the creation of the new New Left Review in 2000.[4] Let me quote a long passage from your critique of Anderson, in which you suggest he largely ignores the global democratic revolution.

> *This 'new' NLR … betrays [a] conservatism, a reassertion of intellectual and political boundaries that have had their day. The real faultlines of the new world, which cut across these old certainties, are barely recognized.*
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> *The problem is capitalism. This, in a nutshell, is Anderson's old/new wisdom. And this is also the problem of his wisdom. His is a Marxism largely mesmerized by*

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[4] See Anderson 2000 and Shaw 2000a.

the neo-liberal renewal of capitalism in the global age. Thus he fails to catch the real sources of the global in the universalistic, even revolutionary politics of democracy and human rights. This globality is the true spirit of the age, not a mere property of 'the ruling system' or mode of projection for capitalist elites. Anderson dismisses this as the 'well-meaning cant or self-deception of the Left,' but its sources lie in momentous worldwide movements.

Anderson is realistic enough to recognize that these movements offer an alternative perspective on the last decade to that of neo-liberal hegemony. "In a longer perspective, a more sanguine reading of the time can be made. This, after all, has also been a period in which the Suharto dictatorship has been overthrown in Indonesia, clerical tyranny weakened in Iran, a venal oligarchy ousted in South Africa, assorted generals and their civilian relays brought low in Korea, liberation finally won in East Timor." He might have added, of course, that Stalinist tyranny was overthrown across the Soviet bloc: the alpha and omega of the current wave of democratic revolution.

Having found the new wave of revolution, however, Anderson discards it: "The spread of democracy as a substitute for socialism, as hope or claim, is mocked by the hollowing of democracy in its capitalist homelands, not to speak of its post-communist adjuncts." Yes, there are elements of hollowing and manipulation, but there are many too of renewal, and contestation, in the West as well as the non-West. And the democratic revolution, although it offers no glamorous seizure of power or expropriation of capital, may be all the better for its more modest modes of advance. It is not necessarily a substitute for socialism: it offers the possibility of space for social organization and struggle. Moreover, democratic movements have not generated totalitarianism and mass death, as did the discredited waves of both proletarian revolution and guerrilla warfare. One would think that the enormity of Communism's record, from Stalin to Mao and Pol Pot, might hold Anderson back rather more from his quick dismissal of democratic transformation.

Clearly, Anderson is not unique. Parts of the left have a deeply unsatisfactory relationship to the democratic transformations of our times. Why has that occurred and what have been the consequences for the left?

Shaw: A fundamental part of the problem is the left's Stalinist inheritance. Many of the defining global democratic movements were aimed at Stalinist regimes. Many sections of the left felt very ambivalent, seeing this as the loss of 'actually existing socialism' and the victory of capitalism. These revolutions were seen as being 'in line' with the West's dominance of the global order. In fact, on an objective assessment, the spread of democratic movements throughout the world has challenged the West, as well as the former Soviet bloc. But clearly, yes, the West was much more able to respond to them because it was a question of making Western politics more consistent by supporting democracy throughout the non-Western world instead of shoring up authoritarian regimes. In Indonesia, for example, although the overthrow of Suharto was the overthrow of a dictator long sustained by the West, the Americans, and the Western powers, were able to ally themselves with the movement for change. For large sections of the left this was confusing. The fact of Western, especially American, dominance remains their political touchstone. So they have difficulty in embracing genuine democratic movements in a range of non-Western countries. They see these movements *in terms of* American or Western influence, and as manipulated and sponsored by the West. In fact, for the most part, the roots of these movements are in the authoritarian structures of the countries themselves.

Johnson: *You have called for the left to respond to the 'global democratic revolution' with a 'global renewal of social democracy.'[5] What would be the central components of that renewal?*

Shaw: We need a genuinely *global* renewal of social democracy. Historically, social democracy has always had an internationalist element but it has been largely conceived, and certainly practised, in *national* terms. The big successes of social democracy have been in reforming the nation state

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[5] Shaw 1999a.

in the West in a more welfarist and genuinely democratic direction. To a large extent, social democratic politics is *still* wedded to the national level. Though social democrats tend to pay lip service to globalism and internationalism, democratic politicians find it difficult in practice to take this very far.

New Labour under Blair, unlike some of the continental socialist parties, appeared to have a global orientation. Yet this has taken very problematic forms. When Labour was in opposition I criticised the Labour Party and Blair for not articulating a clear global perspective. I was very much involved in trying to push the Labour party in the direction of a serious international commitment. Once Labour came into office though, it became quite clear that it did have some global ideas, and Blair, especially, had a distinctive interest in, and take on, global issues. A great deal of the agenda which was articulated by Blair was attractive – his commitment to strengthening global institutions, to building up global social reformism in the sense of supporting Africa and tackling the problems of both conflict and debt – but an awful lot remained purely aspirational. The achievements are relatively modest. There needs to be a further cultural and political transformation of the left if we are to take seriously those sorts of ambitions. And this whole project has been very fundamentally compromised by the perception that Blair has not only been for the invasion of Iraq but has allied himself deeply with an American administration which represents what is most reactionary about America in the world today.

Johnson*: What relation has your notion of 'global democratic revolution' to the idea of 'world unification' which you raised in an exchange with Jacques Derrida? In discussion with Derrida you said, 'it seems to me that one could understand what you're talking about in terms of globalisation, the formation of a common social space, a single world-meaning within which all these old structures which try to absolutise and fix differences are changed. But this, it also seems to me, is a ground on which to found a new form of democracy, and that ground has to be found in the concept of globality and in the concept of world unification.'[6] Is world unification one possible outcome of*

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[6] Shaw 1997.

the global democratic revolution? And what relationship does the notion of world unification have to the old idea of world government?

Shaw: My starting point would be that the world has become increasingly unified over the last few centuries. In the middle of the last millennium Western society expanded worldwide, coming into direct and systematic contact with the major world civilisations. We can talk about world *history*, in a modern sense, from that period (although there was a world *context* before that). The idea of a *world system*, which has been propounded by various scholars, is only the first part of the story, coming into existence through the expansion of the various European empires over the last few centuries, dominated by the rivalries of different imperial centres. Therefore, it did not even appear to be unified in the sense of a common politics, common values or common principles, let alone common institutions.

What happened in the second half of the century, partly as a result of the Second World War, was *a transformation of the political context of world development*. What I call globality – the sense of a common global consciousness and a single social space – is a reflection of the political unification which began to take place as a result of the over-coming of many of the rival empires which dominated the world until 1945.

Before 1945 we had a world that was divided between the major European empires, America, Japan, and Russia. After 1945 we had essentially a bipolar world of a dominant West under the United States, which itself was not a simple empire, and a subordinate Soviet bloc. At the same time, the common framework of the United Nations and other global political institutions emerged, establishing, at least in principle, the idea of a common global politics. But those institutions were fundamentally compromised by the cold war.

Globality comes into existence under the impact of world events. Throughout the cold war period, a new kind of democratic revolution emerged that challenged both cold war blocs and also, albeit in different ways, challenged regimes in many so-called third world countries. This was no less than

the transformation of revolution itself. The historical capture of revolution by the proletarianism of classical Marxism and by the Maoist-Guerrilla-National Liberation idea, proved to be dead ends. Now we saw the retaking of the idea of revolution as a democratic movement. First, we had the revolts against the Soviet bloc in East Germany in 1953, Hungary and Poland in 1956, Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1968, through to Solidarity in the early 80s. Second, and at the same time, there were democratic movements against authoritarian regimes in the Western-supporting part of the Third World. Third, there was democratic renewal in the West itself. We saw the extension of the welfare state and the extension of economic and social rights, the expansion of women's rights, and the emergence of the idea of a more participatory democracy, initially propounded in the student movements in the late 60s, but which became an informing idea in many social movements in the West thereafter. So we had the expansion of the democratic space in all three arenas of the cold war. This process was taking place in different ways, at different levels, and through different kinds of political struggle, but it was an important social and political trend right across the world.

However, during the cold war period these democratic transformations were constrained by the bloc system and the nation state system. They still appeared – in terms of their meaning – to be transformations within particular countries and within particular parts of the world. What seems to me important, though, is that there was an emerging idea that they were parts of a single global transformation. And this idea really comes through in 1989. What defines our era as opposed to the era of the cold war is the idea of global political change, informed by movements and organisations that are acting across the world and appealing to similar sorts of principles. I talk about a global democratic revolution because the democratic movements after 1989 are much more consciously and directly appealing to global principles and global institutions, in a global context, and are asking for global solidarity.

Johnson: What is the relationship between this global democratic revolution and the older political imaginary of the class struggle and revolution?

Martin Shaw

Shaw: Well, we should look at this historically. I would argue that from the earliest part of the modern period there were democratic revolutions which challenged the feudal and authoritarian regimes of the pre-modern era. The working class movement developed out of those democratic revolutions but became dominant over the general democratic movement during the 19th century. This was because the working class became a much more powerful social force and because it did have unique characteristics as a social class compared to, for example, the peasantry. As the working class movements became the cutting edge of the democratic revolution, the ideas of Marxists and other socialists became dominant. But I would argue that, in the end, this capture of democracy by socialism was a dead end, and helped to spawn something a lot worse: Stalinism.

What has happened in the last fifty years is that the idea of democratic change has re-emerged in its own right, liberated from this capture. And this corresponds to the transformation of the social structure and the broadening of the social base for change. In the first half of the 20th century, in most of the industrial countries, the vast majority of the population, certainly in the urban areas, were workers, often manual workers. In the second half of the 20th Century, and the 21st century, especially in the more advanced countries, the population is much more diverse and the industrial working class constitutes a much smaller proportion of the population. So, any democratic movement obviously has to have a much wider base than was conceived by socialists in the early part of the 20th century.

However, while a broader democratic movement and agenda has emerged, specifically working class issues and interests remain vital. Most people are still workers of one sort or another and their rights at work, their experience and freedom at work, are still crucially important. The issues that affect the lives of people who work in industry are actually more important in the non-Western world, perhaps, than they are in the Western world, because the exploitation of labour (not in the Marxist sense, but in the general social sense) is much sharper. There is a very important role for trade unions and other organisations addressing the interests and needs of the working class, not least in the

global south. These questions are very much a part of the democratic revolution.

Part 2: Theorising War

Johnson: I found your bold mapping of a tectonic shift in the character of contemporary warfare the most exciting aspect of your 2005 book, The New Western Way of War: Risk-Transfer War and Its Crisis in Iraq. *Can we talk about your notions of 'modes of warfare' and 'ways of war' before we turn to the Iraq war, and to your own preferred alternative to war?*

Mary Kaldor developed the notion of modes of warfare, each with an irreducible character, each existing in a relation of tension with the capitalist mode of production. Your theory, as I read it, seeks to take this insight further. You aim to encompass all 'the variety and complexity of the warfare that is being waged or planned in the current era' within an understanding of 'the contemporary mode of warfare'. Ambitiously, you seek to bring strategic studies and development studies together in a 'global integration of war studies'. You hope that this more comprehensive account will enable us to better grasp 'the relations of different actors, ways of war, phases of war, and military environments'.[7] Let's start with a few definitions. What do you mean by 'mode of warfare'?

Shaw: By the 'mode of warfare' I mean the general complex of the social relations, processes, and institutions through which wars are prepared, military powers are organised, and wars are fought, in any given society in any given period. The 'mode of warfare' is the general framework of military power as opposed to the particular ways in which particular peoples and states fight wars.

Johnson: And what is a 'way of war'?

Shaw: A 'way of war' is a type of approach to fighting a war which belongs to, or is developed by, an actor or a group of actors. I talk about 'Western' and 'terrorist' ways of war

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[7] Shaw 2005, p. 52.

as two different ways of war developed and practised within the general framework of the global surveillance mode of warfare.

Johnson: You emphasise the necessity of an historical understanding of the transitions from one 'mode of warfare' to another. Your thesis is that we have moved from the 'industrialised total warfare' mode to the 'global surveillance' mode of warfare ('cold-war nuclear war-preparation' being a transitional mode). What have been the main drivers of the most recent transition?

Shaw: I need to say something first about what I understand by industrialised total warfare. This was a mode of warfare in which war came increasingly to dominate society, economy and politics. There was total mobilisation in the sense of a large scale mobilisation of the population to fight and to sustain warfare. There was also a tendency towards total destruction which followed from the tendency towards total mobilisation. When the population increasingly became a part of the process of supplying and fighting wars, it also became a target.

Now, given that sort of framework, I think that the technological change in weaponry in the second half of the 20th century was very important. It was the newly acquired ability to carry out total destruction *without maintaining total mobilisation* that defined many of the changes in warfare that took place, in the advanced world anyway, in the second half of the 20th century. The superpowers in the cold war were able increasingly to project their power to destroy each other's societies without relying on mass armies, labour-intensive military industries, or direct mass social participation in warfare. With nuclear weapons it was possible to project total destruction without a very high degree of social mobilisation.

This loosening of the domination of warfare over society opened up new social spaces. There was greater space for markets because state control wasn't so essential in many areas of life. More space for mass media opened up – and not just of a propagandist kind but a mass media which became much more diffuse and plural and less easy to control. And more space appeared for a variety of new social movements and political orientations. During the cold war, these social

transformations remained limited by the overall conflict, but when the cold war system imploded then we had a reconfiguration of the conditions for warfare.

So the hi-tech warfare which emerged after the cold war existed in a quite different social and political context. Militarism in the classic sense had been weakened – many arenas had been freed from direct military control; people, on the whole, didn't have military experience and had not been conscripted into armies at a formative age. The whole relationship of society to warfare had changed. Consequently, if warfare was going to continue, if states were going to continue to prepare for and fight wars, they had to reconfigure warfare itself to fit this different context. And that seems to me to be what has happened. We have a new way of fighting wars in the West – which I call *risk-transfer war* – and this change is part of a change in the social conditions of warfare: the emergence of what I call *the global surveillance mode of warfare.*

Johnson: *What are the central features of the global surveillance mode of warfare?*

Shaw: Warfare is now much more constrained by national and international political surveillance, by legal surveillance, and by the surveillance exercised through elections and public opinion. All of those forms of surveillance depend, in turn, on the daily surveillance of political and military events through the mass media. In consequence, warfare is now conditioned by – rather than dominant over – politics, economics, and media. The protagonists in warfare, whether they are states or armed movements, are simultaneously constrained and enabled in new ways by this new context of surveillance.

Johnson: *You disagree with Mary Kaldor about whether this new mode of warfare is post-Clausewitzian.[8] You deny that it is. What's at stake in that disagreement?*

Shaw: What is at stake is whether there is a core meaning to warfare, common to all forms – 'old' and 'new' – and whether that core meaning remains more or less as Clausewitz defined

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[8] See Kaldor 1999.

it. I think there is and it does, while Mary does not. I think that Mary's mistake is to reduce Clausewitz's view to the statist conception of warfare. But while it is true that Clausewitz was writing in an era when wars were coming increasingly to be between major nation states, or major national empires, and true that this continued to be the dominant frame of warfare until at least the second half of the 20th century; and while that does appear to be changing today as the most important wars are not so much between states as between states and armed movements or networks, nonetheless I would argue that the main aim of warfare remains the destruction of the power of the enemy by violent means. And the logic of that process of destruction, as described by Clausewitz, still applies, even if the antagonists are different.

We could explore this by talking about Bosnia. Mary was very involved with Bosnia and wrote a lot about it. And Bosnia was both war in a classic sense, and genocide – it was the two at the same time, a genocidal war. It was war in the sense that there were armed protagonists and increasingly the struggle came to be dominated by the conflict between Serbia and the Serbian nationalists on one side and Croatia and Bosnia – and to some extent, behind them, the United States – on the other. In that sense there was a classic war going on. Mary would say that there weren't actually many important battles, but, actually, I think that the victories of the Bosnian and Croatian armies in 1995 set the seal on the project of complete Serbian dominance and forced Miloševi□ to the negotiating table at Dayton.

But, right from the start, the conflict was an attempt by Serbian nationalists, and to some extent also by Croatian nationalists, to 'ethnically cleanse', that is to wipe out, or to drive out, the non-Serb or non-Croat populations from places in which they had lived for many decades, or even centuries. This process of what's called 'ethnic cleansing' – but which was genocide – was also a defining character of the conflict from the start. That side of the conflict was clearly not classic warfare. I see this as perverted warfare, or warfare directed against civilians with all that that implies, and that is different from the classic idea of warfare as the conflict between two armed forces. So, yes, there was something very different about this conflict from the classic idea of war (although

maybe not from the classic practice: genocide had actually been a part of many other wars in the past). But there was also a core of classic warfare going on at the same time, with the same basic aim as war has generally had.

Johnson: You claim that each mode of warfare has an accompanying ideology. The ideology of industrialised total war was 'democracy vs. communism' while the ideology of global surveillance war is 'democracy vs. terrorism'. But in what sense are you using the word 'ideology'? Is there nothing at all, in your view, to the notion that democracy really was, back then, at war with Stalinism, and really is, now, at war with Jihadi terrorism?

Shaw: I was using the term in the classic sociological sense, which ultimately derives from Marx, for whom ideology wasn't simply myth or fraud. Ideology contains elements of truth. Indeed, ideology is not plausible unless it does fasten on to elements which people can find credible. The ideological frameworks of 'democracy versus fascism or Stalinism', and 'democracy versus terrorism', have elements of plausibility. Certainly there is a sense in which our democratic institutions are under attack from terrorists. But as an ideological framework, the 'war on terror' is also a way of articulating the interests and the world view of ruling elites, and a means to mobilise and shape public opinion and international alliances, and to construct political constituencies and coalitions on a global scale. In this sense, the idea of the war on terror as a war between terrorism and democracy obscures as much as it reveals. The global war on terror is not just about the actions of terrorists. It is also about a political framework of global dominance used to deal with other sorts of problems, such as the problem of authoritarian dictatorship in places like Iraq.

Johnson: You argue that risk-transfer war is the way the West fights wars in the new global surveillance mode of warfare. You claim that risk-transfer war involves the systematic transfer of risk. Which risks do you have in mind and to whom are they being transferred?

Shaw: The core risks are those to the lives of combatants and non-combatants. In risk-transfer war these risks to life are

articulated with political risks by politicians. What the West learnt from Vietnam was that in the era of global surveillance it is essential to limit the risks to Western military personnel. What has happened since Vietnam is a systematic attempt to spare Western lives by finding ways of destroying enemy power without putting Western soldiers and aircrew at risk. And there is an implicit acceptance of the fact that this involves exposing civilians to greater risks than one's own soldiers. So risk is transferred not only to the armed enemy but also to civilians.

One of the most progressive features, on the surface, of the new Western way of war is that the civilians among the attacked population are not seen as part of the enemy. There is a clear distinction made between the armed enemy and the civilians, at least ideologically. In practice, the Western way of war – what I have called risk-transfer war – exposes civilians in war-zones to considerable risks of being harmed, both directly and indirectly by Western military action.

Johnson: You talk of the 'spectator sport militarism' of the 'post military society' – what do you mean?

Shaw: The term 'spectator sport militarism' was invented by Michael Mann.[9] It means that wars are now fought by relatively small specialised forces rather than mass conscript armies; that military industries are increasingly very specialised production processes involving relatively small, sophisticated, highly trained workforces, rather than mass production processes involving semi-skilled labour; that while mass publics are no longer mobilised directly as conscripts or munitions workers, the ideological recruitment of these mass publics is even more crucial. For Western leaders, the trick is to calibrate war-fighting with the running of an economy and a political system in normal 'peace time mode'. In classic total war you are able to suspend a lot of these normal peace-time arrangements and expectations and to introduce more direct, even total, control. In the new Western way of war you don't do that. You pretend that things are more or less normal and try and keep delivering the economic goods to the population.

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[9] Mann 1988.

You try to satisfy them politically so that they will vote you back to office even while the war is going on.

Johnson: Risk-transfer wars, you point out, are 'fought on camera and directed primarily at the opponent's will to fight' while '[t]he global political environment is expressed largely through the common framework of media surveillance.'[10] In what ways does the new ubiquity of media surveillance impact on contemporary warfare and politics?

Shaw: War is no longer something which simply happens 'over there', a long way away, and which the civilian population only reads about or watches via highly controlled and manipulated images. During the Second World War the civilian population only saw the censored news reels and newspaper reports that governments allowed them to see. Today, war is always potentially visible. Journalists are, in principle, able to observe directly, to gather information from a variety of sources, and to film what's going on. This is what most concerned American politicians and generals about Vietnam. They believed the opening up of warfare damaged the image of the war in the eyes of the American electorate. They still argue about this in academic circles. Many people say that the American project in Vietnam was already fundamentally compromised and the media simply reflected this failure. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to control the flow of information and there is now the danger (from the point of view of governments) of civilians and voters seeing the wrong side of war – the failure, the damage, the harm caused to people, both to their own soldiers and also to innocent civilians. This is a fundamental problem, for the West at least, which claims to look after its soldiers and not to harm civilians.

Johnson: And how has this media surveillance played out in Iraq? In your book you argue that 'risk-transfer militarism operates through the media to neutralise electoral and other forms of surveillance that highlight the realities of death and suffering in Western wars.'[11] I take this to mean (to be blunt) that the militarists use the media to spin the war and hide the

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[10] Shaw 2005, p. 61.
[11] Shaw 2005, p. 95.

truth. This strikes me as questionable. As a supporter of Labour Friends of Iraq my experience has been that the media covers every bad news story from Iraq in great detail. As you point out, 'one of the most important general laws of global warfare is that a massacre is the most media-worthy of events.' We could add: the beheading, the car-bomb, the assassination, the kidnapping, the terrorist video, and so on. Other, more positive, developments struggle to get a look in. The media chases after the latest primed press release from the terrorists, creating a gigantic distorting lens. Far from spinning for the government, isn't the media in Britain a permanent opposition to the government?

Shaw: Our exposure to the real harm caused by the American and British military adventure in Iraq has been fairly limited. Because of the context of the global war on terror, because of the very powerful patriotic identification in America, and also because of the practical consideration that journalists could only see things if they were attached to the American or British forces, I don't think we saw – especially in the early phases of the campaign – a lot of the downside. In the period of major combat in 2003 a lot of the damaging things that were happening as a result of the invasion were not portrayed, or only made a very limited appearance in the media. Even in the present phase, there is a sense in which an awful lot doesn't get covered. We don't get to see images of what is going on because it has simply become too dangerous for journalists. There is a conspiracy between al-Qaeda, the so-called resistance, and the Americans. The attacks on journalists have actually inhibited their ability to cover the downsides of the American military action as much as of the terrorist campaign.

Having said all that though, I think what has happened in Iraq is what happened previously in Vietnam. Things have obviously gone badly wrong for the American occupation. We have seen the rise of the resistance war which, despite repeated suggestions that it will go away, seems to only get worse, and we have seen terrible atrocities committed by the insurgents (in attacks aimed at civilians and political opponents, as much as the Americans or the British). These things inevitably gather media attention. Yes, there is nothing as shocking, and therefore as sensational, in warfare as a massacre of civilians.

The repeated massacres of civilians by the insurgents both demand attention and underline this overriding sense of an occupation gone wrong. That has become the dominant narrative of what's happening and therefore it becomes very difficult to get other things into the media. The media like simple stories and dominant themes. I think that's what's happening at the moment.

Part 3: Iraq and the crisis of the 'Western way of war'

Johnson: You argue that Iraq has pushed the Western way of war –i.e. risk-transfer war – into crisis. The 'Global War on Terror' framework has licensed an adventure while also raising the prospect of permanent war, which people won't buy. A hubristic President Bush has 'undermined the viability [of risk-transfer war] that had been developed over the previous two decades,' breaking the rules of how to fight risk-transfer wars. The result has a 'fundamental question mark ... against the idea that, in today's global surveillance conditions, Western governments can use war effectively to achieve political ends.'[12] Why did the US break the 'rules' of risk-transfer war?

Shaw: I think it's important to say that they haven't simply broken all the rules. They are still aware of what makes a successful war in today's conditions. They have tried to minimise American casualties. The Americans have now lost more than 2,000 soldiers, which is more than any previous war over the last quarter century but a very small number compared to the nearly 60,000 American soldiers who were killed in Vietnam. And the Bush administration is still trying to keep this issue under control. This is one of their fixed points which governs the way they run the war and the occupation. That is why there has been the transfer of risk to Iraqi troops and police. The numbers of Iraqi police killed by the insurgents are greater than the numbers of American troops killed in the last year or so. In a sense they are still trying to keep within the Western way of war framework. And they certainly try to manipulate the running of the war to fit the political and electoral demands of their own power in

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[12] Shaw 2005, pp. 129, 130, 140.

the United States. To some extent they got away with that because President Bush was re-elected, despite Iraq.

Having said all that, yes, they have gone further. This is partly because of an ambitious agenda that existed to some extent even before 9/11: the broader neoconservative agenda and, specifically, the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein – a personal and a general political value for the Bush clique before they came to power. And they have gone further because of the experience of 9/11 – the near-humiliation of the Bush presidency which was shown to be incompetent and not to have foreseen the threat, nor to have managed the immediate events particularly well, and which needed to recover ground. The Bush clique saw in a 'war on terrorism' an opportunity to regain the initiative, silence critics, mobilise public opinion and pursue its wider goals; particularly the overthrow of Saddam, for which, up to that point, they lacked a context for realisation. While probably not a major cause, it is still worth mentioning (in parenthesis at least) that Tony Blair's support for Bush over Iraq enabled the Iraq war more than one might think. Although it is true to say that the Bush administration was very driven, without Blair it would have been internationally isolated. Without Blair it's unlikely that any major ally would have jumped on board.

Johnson: *After 9/11, the US felt its national interests were at stake, and pursued those national interests through a grand strategic vision for the Middle East. Are we not looking at a combination of what you call the 'national militarist' way of war-fighting and the 'risk-transfer' way of war-fighting? Is the Iraq war not an almighty act of risk-taking rather than risk-transfer? Isn't it true that infantry battle was engaged not avoided? Is it possible that risk-transfer war describes Clinton but not Bush; pre-9/11, but not post-9/11?*

Shaw: In a sense, this is the question that I'm raising. It's too early to say definitively. The attempt by the Bush administration to extend the model of warfare which had worked for America and Britain and other Western countries in the period before Iraq, has created a backlash. At the end of 2005, it's very difficult to say that Iraq has been a success. There has been an attempt to extend the new Western way of war which, if put into practice in its most ambitious expression – taking on

Iran, overthrowing the regime in North Korea, using war as a way to wipe the global slate clean – would open up a very fundamental extension of the new Western way of war into a permanent war. I have suggested this could even produce an 'Israelization' of American power, in the sense of creating a global super-power constantly involved in local wars of a very serious kind.

The Iraq experience has entered our consciousness in the way that Vietnam entered the consciousness of an earlier generation. Iraq is now the defining experience of war for the generation which is coming of age in the early 21st century in the West, and people can't see anything good about it. In this sense I think that Iraq is more than just an embarrassing failure. It also says something about the limits of war *per se* in our times.

Part 4: Against 'Just War' Theory

Johnson: You have criticised just war theory as an inadequate, even dangerous, framework for thinking about questions of war and war-fighting: 'This tradition has been designed, after all, to enable warfare, by indicating conditions in which killing might exceptionally be allowed.'[13] But do we not need, precisely, a tradition of thought that has been developed to indicate conditions when killing might exceptionally be allowed (and, more commonly, disallowed)? Isn't just war theory, with its jus in bello concerns, geared up to address the very concerns you have expressed about risk-transfer wars and civilian casualties? Isn't the problem not with just war theory but with the cynical 'hauling and shelving' of just war theory by political leaders?

Shaw: I should start by indicating the extent of my agreement with you. I agree that in the limited circumstances in which military action can still be justified we need something like the just war rules. In principle, the just war rules could be made to address a lot of the issues which will arise in any legitimate military action. Having said that, the problem is

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[13] Shaw 2005, p. 137.

not just the way in which just war thinking is abused by political leaders. The problem is also the way in which it has been developed as an intellectual tradition. In my book I criticise the ways in which Michael Walzer, in his famous book *Just and Unjust Wars*,[14] tried to develop this tradition in the aftermath of Vietnam. That book has been one of the defining texts of this trend of thought in recent years and it seems to me that the just war tradition has been exposed to repeated manipulation and has provided cover for the crimes that have been committed against civilians in war. And this is not something which is accidental to the tradition – it comes from the basic assumption of the tradition, which is that war is possibly legitimate. My argument is that this is not the most appropriate starting point for us today. The questions are not just which war is legitimate, and which means are legitimate. The fundamental question is whether war itself is a valid means of resolving political conflicts. In the age of weapons of mass destruction, and an overwhelmingly urbanised and complex global society, it seems to me that war almost always tends towards social catastrophe of some degree or another. Maybe this argument is fairly obvious if we talk about nuclear weapons. The conceit is that 'smart' weapons somehow avoid 'collateral damage'. This is unrealistic in almost all cases.

If we really looked at the experience of the last two years we would go in a different direction. The smart weapons used in Baghdad in 2003 led to an extensive death toll even in a very short attack on that city. The attempt to solve the problems of Iraq by military means has just been an invitation to urban guerrilla warfare. And this all ends up with the July 7 terrorist attacks in London. War comes home.

We shouldn't be starting from the just war premise that war is possibly a valuable means of resolving conflicts because that limits our thinking to the problem of determining under which conditions, and with which methods, we should use war. I think we should start with the premise that war is *a problem in itself*, that war is not something which is any longer really appropriate for our society, and that our aim should be

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[14] Walzer 1977.

to remove it from the political field.

Johnson: You claim that the ways in which the just war tradition treats enemy combatants and civilians lags behind the ugly realities of the new weaponry. Even though enemy combatants (not civilians) have been targeted, these enemy combatants, in your view, have been killed so efficiently that their killing is a form of 'slaughter'. You call it 'industrial killing on a hapless enemy,' and indict it as immoral. You go on: 'certainly as we contemplate these inequalities of means we might recall the slaughter inflicted on helpless office workers by terrorists using civilian airliners.' In your view, as I understand it, the fact that the Taliban and Saddam's soldiers were carrying guns does not make a real difference.[15] Have I correctly understood your argument?

Shaw: I wouldn't put it quite like that. I accept that it always makes a difference that somebody takes up arms. The killing of the unarmed always raises different considerations from the killing of those who are armed to kill, and who themselves are maybe trying to kill. So, in this instance, I think you're right to say there is a difference. However, even in the just war tradition the killing of soldiers has to be proportionate and relevant to a military goal. It shouldn't be carried out in an indiscriminate or purposeless way. So even from a just war point of view one can criticise some actions against enemy soldiers. For example the massacre of retreating Iraqi troops in 1991 during the first Gulf war has been widely criticised.

The issue that I'm raising, though, is a bit broader than that. It is the issue of the fundamental imbalance in military capacity between the most sophisticated Western armies and many of the people that they are fighting against, whether Iraqi conscripts, many of whom were there against their will, or Taliban fighters who were relatively lightly equipped. The inequality of means leads to one-sided killing. The Americans and their allies can destroy the opposition soldiers without really risking their own lives. This doesn't sit easily with the promise of a liberating war. If one is going to try and dismantle the power of regimes like the Taliban or Saddam's Iraq, then

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[15] Shaw 2005, pp. 123, 124.

one should limit the harm which one does in the process to people who may be, in many cases, relatively unwilling or unwitting participants.

Johnson: Even though you have made that point in terms of the just war standard of proportionality you also argue in your book that a quite different standard (than the just war standard) should be applied to war. This different standard takes the form of both a duty ('thou shalt not kill') and a right (to freedom from violence). You write, 'Thou shalt not kill has been tightened as a general norm, with fewer and fewer exceptions allowed … and yet war has remained a huge exception … A serious concern with civilian protection derives, therefore, from ways of thinking that are very different from "just war". In particular it arises from human rights thinking according to which all individual human beings enjoy the same claims to safety and from violence. If we follow this line of thought, we cannot be indifferent to lives lost or damaged, however few they are by gross historical standards.'[16]

As I read your book, you claim that this right to freedom from violence should be extended to 'enemy soldiers too'.[17] This puzzled me. First, I was unsure if you were arguing from proportionality or from first principles. Second, I wondered if you were arguing that al-Qaeda militants in their camps in Afghanistan had a human right to freedom from violence, one which they retained in spite of their own actions and intentions, and in light of which they should not have been attacked?

Shaw: I think we can talk about both proportionality and first principles, although I can recognise that they are different arguments. I don't think we can say that somebody who has arms, especially if they hold them in a relatively willing way, can claim the same rights to immunity from violence as somebody who is unarmed. So in that sense this is a proportionality argument, and the human rights argument is more qualified in this case. However, what I'm trying to get at here is a broader point than the one about the role of combatants in movements like the Taliban. It's the point that

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[16] Shaw 2005, p. 137.
[17] Shaw 2005, p. 138.

warfare has always involved a contradiction with fundamental moral norms. These norms are widely accepted in virtually every society, especially the inhibition on killing. And that inhibition has been tightened so that there are fewer and fewer occasions when it is legitimate for individuals to kill other individuals, and for the state to kill individuals – note the abolition of the death penalty, for example. The *exception* which warfare constitutes in human society has become more and more marked. It is now virtually the only context for legitimate killing. But within this context, killing is legitimate on a very large and awful scale. This incongruity is increasing the pressures on warfare. And the global surveillance to which warfare is subject tends to reinforce this sort of questioning of warfare. Although human rights arguments may be qualified in the context of combatants, they don't completely go away. They are questions which we can ask in every case: why is it that somebody should not be provided with the protection which a general conception of human rights, of freedom from violence, would provide them?

Johnson: You seem to me to deny the very possibility that the West could reform the way it fights its wars so that those wars could be called just. Indeed, you claim that to hope for such a reform 'flies in the face of the core sociological realities of new Western warfare' as no Western government 'would, or even could, try to bring war-fighting into concordance with the serious demands of just warfare.'[18] What are these 'core sociological realities'? And what is it about 'the West' that means it can never act justly?

Shaw: I think that Western publics wouldn't tolerate, or at least Western political leaders wouldn't trust them to tolerate, the kind of risks to Western military personnel which would be consistent with the just practice of warfare. For that reason I think it's unlikely that we will ever see a fully just form of warfare from the West. I think it's a recognition of this that pushes moral philosophers like Walzer towards providing excuses and get-outs for politicians who send Western troops into war today.

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[18] Shaw 2005, pp. 136-7.

Part 5: The Non-Violent Alternative to War

Johnson: You pose this choice: 'we can continue with war as a means, progressively abandoning the pretence that we are using armed force in new ways and becoming ever more mired in brutal struggles that we cannot win. Or we can follow the logic of our commitments to global institutions, democracy and human rights, and renew our determination to avoid war. We cannot have it both ways.'[19] And you end the book with the hope that Iraq is 'the beginning of the end of war.' That is, of war per se. Can you set out the outlines of your alternative to war?

Shaw: I think the alternative is for Western governments and global institutions to act consistently on the assumption that political problems, including problems of armed conflict, should be solved as far as possible without the use of military means. Where military means are used to protect civilians against violence, they should be constrained and limited to what is necessary for that purpose. It is necessary for Western governments and the United Nations to pursue policies based consistently on these norms. That would involve a vastly greater investment in the development of global institutions, in the development of mechanisms and institutions for enforcing conflict-resolution, and in creating a global institutional framework. It's a very ambitious project of global reform aimed at making the resort to war less and less viable or necessary.

I think that immediately after 9/11, when Bush had enormous international and domestic good will, he could have asked the UN to establish an international tribunal like those established for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, to try the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist atrocities. He could have involved the leaders of Muslim countries, and Islamic opinion worldwide, in that project, and so marginalized the terrorists still further, claiming a global legitimacy. There was always going to be a military element to the pursuit of al-Qaeda. But al-Qaeda is an underground network and there is really no alternative to careful policing methods. I don't think the proclamation of a 'global war on terror' has done anything more than to add

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[19] Shaw 2005, p. 3.

glamour, lustre, and legitimacy to the terrorists' cause. It has provided them with a further stream of recruits in Western countries, and elsewhere and generally reinforced their place in world politics.

Johnson: But there is a gap between where we are now and the future realisation of that vision. How we think and act politically in that gap is the most important question for the democratic left. To start with an obvious point, some would say that Afghanistan is better off: the Taliban have been removed, elections have been held, women are in the cabinet and some kind of life has been returned to women and girls who, for instance, are no longer publicly beaten in Kabul soccer stadium, but now play soccer there. It might be argued that these facts must be weighed in the balance alongside the loss of civilian life, but that your framework can not accommodate that kind of balancing because it has an absolutist determination to avoid war. How would you respond to that?

Shaw: I would respond to it by accepting that wars do have positive effects. Just because I think that war, taken as a whole, is a fundamentally problematic option (because it has all sorts of obvious negative effects on society in the zone of war and also for the wider global society) I can still recognise that some of the uses of armed force that Western governments have gone in for in recent years have had some positive achievements both in Afghanistan and Iraq. I don't think this is an easy argument…

Johnson: Either way it's argued, it's not an easy argument…

Shaw: …that's right. I do respect the views for example of those Iraqi exiles who argued before the American invasion that Saddam's regime was so awful that even war, even an American invasion, was worth it. I respect that and I think that despite everything else that's come out, despite all the downsides of the occupation, the war has clearly had some positive results that it would be foolish to deny and it has opened up some opportunities which people who are involved with Iraq, like yourself, should be trying to take and extend. I don't want to make this an easy argument and clearly it's possible that without the war we would still have Saddam, we would still have the Taliban and that shouldn't be lightly

countenanced. It should have been an international duty to help the Iraqi people to find a way to get rid of Saddam and to help the Afghan people to find a way to get rid of the Taliban. Those are important points of principle on which I would agree with Blair and Bush. But it's a question of means. It's a question of whether the adoption of military means, especially the more ambitious military means which were used in these cases, can be justified simply by these benefits. If we take the consequences as a whole we see much more problematic outcomes. So then it becomes a question of looking at alternatives. I don't want to pretend that there is a magic wand one can wave and so do without war. Alternative policies might have meant that Saddam and the Taliban might have stayed in power longer than they did but would have meant less overall cost in human life and less destructive consequences generally for world politics.

Johnson: That alternative, you say, must involve a commitment to global institutions. However, you have criticised the left for its 'pious attitude to the UN.' In your new book, you note the UN's terrible performance in Somalia and Rwanda – where the response to the genocide was to pull out the troops. You note that similar disasters happened in Bosnia in 1995 when UN peacekeepers handed over 7,000 men and boys to Serb fascists, its 'safe areas' revealed as a mere paper commitment unsupported by force; and in East Timor where, in 1999, UN staff 'abandoned civilians to murdering pro-Indonesian militias.'[20] It seems there is not a UN failure that escapes your attention. So how can the democratic left combine a sober acknowledgment of the weakness of actually existing international institutions with our desire to develop multilateral responses to situations of emergency and genocide?

Shaw: I don't think it's a choice between weak global institutions and supporting the resort to war by Western powers. I think that the same Western states that fight wars could also make global institutions much more effective and could undertake the sort of political and legal interventions that would prevent war and which would remove genocidists from power in places like Iraq and Serbia. If one could imagine

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[20] Shaw 2005, p. 19.

the resources that are devoted to the Iraq war being devoted to other sorts of intervention – and I'm not here making the traditional left wing point about economic and social investments, although that is important – such as political and legal institution-building and interventions in conflicts before they get to the stage where it appears that only a war will answer them, then I think we would see shifts in a very positive direction.

How do we begin to do that? At the moment it looks difficult. There is widespread disillusion with any sort of international engagement and this is one of the costs of a venture like Iraq. It reduces the appetite among Western publics for any serious investment of people and resources in international intervention. We need to use the opposition to the war not to fall back on an inward looking, isolated sort of politics but to push the argument forward for a more effective international order, and for our governments, particularly Western social democratic governments, to take the lead in developing that.

Part 6: The Terrorist Threat

Johnson: *The invasion of Iraq, you claim, has given terrorists 'an increased incentive to strike at Western societies.'[21] But is it likely that without the invasion they would not have struck? At stake here seems to be how we characterise the threat.*

Shaw: It's obviously true to say, as Tony Blair has, that Islamic militants of the al-Qaeda type had already attacked Western societies before the Iraq war and that the conflict with this sort of terrorism is not a simple result of the Iraq war. However, the overwhelmingly militarised response signalled by the 'global war on terror' and the Iraq war has played into their hands. It has legitimated their terrorism as war and enabled them to magnify their appeal to the minority of Muslims who are open to this appeal.

We face a threat of terrorist attack which is sufficient to generate serious atrocities, to harm our society by militarising its politics and curtailing our civil liberties. But the threat

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[21] Shaw 2005, p. 127.

is obviously not of a kind which will destroy our society. It's a different sort of threat than the old Soviet Union. In this sense I think it's a threat which is quite well suited to the ideological project of the 'global war on terror' which Bush has proclaimed. It's interesting to observe the way in which al-Qaeda calibrates its attacks with Western political developments. We have seen the intervention just before a Spanish election, the video tape which Osama bin Laden sent just before the American election, which I think helped Bush, and the delaying of the attacks on Britain until after the British election. I think there's a sense which al-Qaeda needs Bush and Bush needs al-Qaeda.

Johnson: *You raise a very important point about the level of support for terrorism, noting that while the 'murderous, even genocidal logic of terrorist massacre clearly defied the logic of the basic moral standards of legitimate war, as understood not only in the Western tradition but also in Islam', nonetheless 'this method of warfare was undeniably successful in mobilising Muslims worldwide for Islamist causes.' When British Muslims were interviewed by YouGov after the 7/7 atrocity in London six per cent said the bombings were 'justified'. If the poll is accurate that translates to around 100,000 British Muslims. And one per cent, about 16,000 individuals, declared themselves 'willing, possibly even eager, to embrace violence'.[22] How should we explain these appalling findings?*

Shaw: I think the important thing to realise is that global Islamist terrorism is not a democratic creed. It is an elitist doctrine. It dispenses with all the requirements of mobilising and appeasing a full range of opinion that affect democratic politicians. It needs only to mobilise a sufficient minority of the Muslim population, both globally and in particular countries, to maintain its recruitment, its funding and its political impact. I don't want to suggest that it's unaffected by what the majority of Muslims think – if the majority of Muslims turned radically and actively against it that would make a difference. But I think it can survive, and has survived, as a minority affair. I think it probably appeals to the culturally and maybe economically marginalized section of young men, not just the poor but also the young intellectuals, in the

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[22] King 2005.

broad sense, in the Muslim community. I think its appeal is the same as nationalist and other extremist movements in many parts of the non-Western world, though of course it is mediated through a particularly powerful religious culture.

Johnson: Do you think there is anything to Salman Rushdie's argument that Islam must reconcile itself to modernity?

Shaw: I think there is, yes. This is a broader problem. It may be that, in the short run, that sort of process of reformation of Islam would actually accentuate the divide in Islam and reinforce the recruitment for terrorism. But as a broad statement that has a lot to say for itself, yes.

Johnson: What are you working on now?

Shaw: I'm working on a book on the concept of genocide, looking at the different ways in which genocide has been thought about and to argue for a broad sociological concept of genocide which would return us, in many ways, to the original idea of Raphael Lemkin.[23] I will criticise the narrowing of the concept to simple mass murder. The book will also survey the range of alternative concepts which exist around the idea of genocide, such as the concept of 'ethnic cleansing,' which I try to debunk as a perpetrator concept which doesn't add anything to our enlightenment.

Postscript: November 2007

Johnson: A couple of years on, in what ways would you update your views about the Iraq intervention?

Shaw: As the occupation and the accompanying war head towards their 5th anniversaries, it is clear that the disaster is even more profound than I indicated in 2005, although the reasons are indicated in my original interview. The 2003 war was supposed, for the neocons, to remedy the mistake of 1991 which had allowed the Saddam regime to survive. The mediated semblance of victory and the capture of Saddam seemed to indicate success, but from the perspective of late

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[23] Shaw 2007.

2007 it seems that Bush only repeated his father's error in a new form. Bush Senior let Saddam himself survive to brutally attack the Kurds and Shiites; Bush Junior simply drove the anti-US Iraqi nationalists, based in the Sunni community, underground from where they have launched a brutal sectarian war against the Shiites, to which some of the Shiite militia, like Muqtada al-Sadr's, have responded in kind.

Thus, in the end, the crimes of the USA's own attacks on civilians are dwarfed by the low-level, but very lethal, genocidal civil war that the US invasion provoked. As the Iraqi death toll heads into the hundreds of thousands and the refugee total into the millions (on the basis of the more conservative estimates), there can be no doubt that the invasion was a catastrophic error. It is forlorn to think that Bush and the neocons will learn the lessons, but it would be encouraging to think that the next Democratic president will have done so – and that those on the progressive left who foolishly believed in the transformative power of war will go back to the foundations and rethink their position.

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Chapter 3

Putting Cruelty First: An Interview with Kanan Makiya

Kanan Makiya is the Sylvia K. Hassenfeld Professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis University, and the President of The Iraq Memory Foundation. His books, *The Republic of Fear: Inside Saddam's Iraq* (1989), *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (1991) and *Cruelty and Silence*: *War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (1993) are classic texts on the nature of totalitarianism. In October 1992, he acted as the convenor of the Human Rights Committee of the Iraqi National Congress and was part of the Iraqi Opposition in the run-up to the Iraq War, which he supported as a war of liberation. The interview took place on December 16, 2005.

Personal and Intellectual Influences

Alan Johnson: Can you tell me about your family background in Iraq?

Kanan Makiya: I was born and brought up in a middle-upper class family in Baghdad and I recall a very liberal outlook at home. My mother is of English origin but she cut all her ties with England when her family refused to acknowledge her marriage to my father. I've never known anybody from the English side of my family, the rejection was so great. My father's mother accepted my mother and she integrated in Iraq. So I grew up as an insider with an outsider's perspective, reading English from a very early age, especially fiction that others of my generation might not have read.

Johnson: Such as?

Makiya: One of the most important books I read when I was 17 or 18, just on the edge of becoming political, was Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* I also read Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. And Thomas Hardy, a writer I admired very

greatly, and who was not available in Arabic. I also read Arabic fiction, of course.

My father was Head of the Department of Architecture at Baghdad University, so we had circles of architects and artists in and out of the house all the time. I sort of grew up with them. I drew on that background when I wrote *The Monument*.[1]

Part 1: Radical Politics

The first political event of my life was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Although I had no political background, I started to listen to the BBC during the war. In Baghdad we were getting triumphalist speeches from the Arab Nationalist Regime (that preceded the Ba'athist takeover in '68) telling us the Arabs were winning, and that the Israelis were on the run. It was all lies and bullshit. And I remember knowing that it was bullshit at the time. I had my first political discussion with young men and women of my age in Baghdad, at a public swimming pool where we gathered. I said, 'It's all lies, it's not true.' The Arab world was losing the war, superfast, but there was this denial. And ordinary people only had what the regular news was saying. I remember being infuriated by that obvious lie.

In the summer of 1967 Iraq cut all its relations with the United States and Britain. But I won an acceptance to study architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The old Iraqi 'wasta' came into play, the practice of turning to people of influence to get around bureaucratic procedure. My father called in favours and managed to swing it. People say I must have been the only one who left the summer of '67 to go and study in the United States.

At first, I pushed politics away and threw myself into a whole new world. I had never been in the United States before, and I was alone. But the next formative event was Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. Students started making an

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[1] Makiya 1991b.

exhibition. I did not know much about him, but I remember throwing myself into it heart and soul. That was really the beginning.

Soon I had these two lives. I became very active in the anti-war movement, which was burgeoning in the United States, and I was very active in supporting the emerging Palestinian Resistance Movement. I passed through the Nationalist Palestinian groups and I ended up in the Marxist one. All of this happened very rapidly. Within a span of a year I became a Marxist and was attracted to Trotskyist politics. The great influence on me was Emmanuel Farjoun, a member of the Israeli Socialist Organisation, Matzpen. He was also a student at MIT, much older than I. He had enjoyed a socialist training from day dot having grown up in a left socialist kibbutz. It was a revelation for me to meet an Israeli who was critical of his own society. He explained a) basic socialist principles which, of course, were completely new to me, and b) the nature of Israeli society, which was also a revelation for me. We became very, very close friends, almost brothers, for the next twenty-five years. (We fell out over the Iraq war but that's another story. That's sad, very sad.)

I started to soak up books and I became active in the Socialist Workers' Party, the American section of the (Trotskyist) 4th International. I moved to Britain in 1974 and I became active in the International Marxist Group (IMG). I recall there was a Lebanese Trotskyist organisation, remnants of an Iraqi Trotskyist organisation, and some Egyptian and Tunisian Trotskyists. I spent a lot of time in those countries meeting those people, going backwards and forwards to Lebanon. I was a full time political activist.

The Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975 between the so-called 'progressive' and 'reactionary' forces. That's how we tended to view it. There were those who were on the side of the class struggle and those who were against. But that form of classification was really at odds with the way the war was unfolding. Sectarian and communitarian tensions were at work in the so-called 'left' front of forces, which was really nationalist and radical-nationalist and sometimes capable of the same sorts of atrocities as the Christian forces, or 'reactionary' forces as we insisted on calling them.

The left insisted it was not a sectarian war. That was troubling to me but I had no other set of categories. In fact, the Palestinians were now behaving very badly, like a little Mafia inside Lebanon. I used to write in *Khamsin*, a journal of Middle Eastern socialist revolutionaries, edited by Moshe Machover. And there were Arabs involved, like the Syrian philosopher Sadiq al-Azm, and others. I used to write articles critical of the Palestinians, even though I was basically working with them. I wrote under a pseudonym, Muhammad Ja'far, in those days. A tension was building up between the way the Middle Eastern world *was*, to my eyes, and the way our categories *described* it. The two didn't match.

I stayed in this contradictory position for three or four years, until the Iranian revolution. My wife was an Iranian and a student at Harvard. She had quit and joined revolutionary politics. The line of the 4th International was that the Iranian revolution was a progressive thing. We were all supposed to think that. Everyone was working against the Shah and his secret police. But, as the clerics became stronger and stronger, even before the revolution itself, I started to become deeply critical. Now, my wife had returned to Iran and was fighting the good fight from inside Iran, so was my criticism based on personal impulses? Maybe I thought I had lost this person that I loved? Maybe that was driving me? Or maybe it was just a political assessment of the situation? Probably the biggest lesson you can learn in politics is that you can never completely separate these two things. It's better to be frank and recognise this. Anyway, I launched a big criticism of the Iranian revolution at a time when the left was celebrating it as one in a long line of great historic revolutions.

My wife returned broken. The left had been smashed. The Iran-Iraq war broke out. Our former comrades were being imprisoned or killed in Iran. We both left organised Trotskyist politics around that time on the issue of the Iraq-Iran war. The left was saying it was a war with a good side and a bad side. We were saying a plague on both your houses because this was an ugly, nasty war that was not going to lead to progress for anyone, so victory for either side would be a step backward.

Johnson: Did you find any support for that view among your comrades?

Makiya: There were individuals. Bob Langston, I remember, from the Socialist Workers Party. Jon Rothschild, and others, were very sympathetic. But their sympathy was not shared by the leadership. Afsaneh and I resigned over it. We wrote a huge document that explained the whole thing, in the usual fashion.

I was now totally alienated from my previous world view. I thought it didn't describe the world I was now in. These had been seminal events: the Lebanese civil war, and the behaviour of the Palestinians, when they lost their halo entirely from my point of view, the Iranian revolution and the Iraq-Iran war.

Part 2: Writing *The Republic of Fear*

Johnson: To me, the greatness of your first book, The Republic of Fear,[2] *is three-fold: your description of totalitarian violence and the unveiling of its true role in Saddam's Iraq; your tracing of the genealogy of that totalitarianism across the generations, and its seepage into intellectual, political and military milieus; and the suggestiveness – prescience, maybe – about the legacy of that appalling political and intellectual culture at a psychic as well as institutional level, a legacy that weighs down on the effort to build a new Iraq today. Can you tell me how you came to write* Republic of Fear*?*

Makiya: Stories were coming out of Iraq from family and friends of the horrific things that were going on. I had blocked Iraq out of my mind. A whole generation of Arabs of my age threw themselves into supporting the Palestinians post-1967 at the expense of facing the degradation of politics going on in their own countries. But as these stories started to filter out I had the idea of writing a book about Iraq. I threw myself into it and that was the turning point.

The writing of what became *The Republic of Fear* took six years – probably the six most wonderful years of my life, in some senses. I had returned to England, but nobody knew I was writing this book, except four or five friends. My parents

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[2] Makiya 1989.

didn't know until they discovered by accident, but that's a long story. I discovered writers I'd never read before, above all Hannah Arendt. Also Isaiah Berlin, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hobbes: very basic texts that I'd never read. I had spent weeks and months studying *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value* but I had never read John Stuart Mill! This was the lopsided education that we all had. These basic texts I discovered, as I was writing *Republic of Fear,* became very important to me. They changed my whole way of thinking about politics, though they didn't change certain underlying values. I discovered liberal politics. Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* gave me a model of how to understand, for instance, the Ba'ath front organisations.[3] She analyses the nature of those front organisations, how they work, how power was exercised through them. She had studied how states operate through networks of informers to exercise power. I understood power and political authority in a wholly new way through reading Arendt.[4]

I now understood far better the independence of the political from the economic and the social, which, of course, I had previously refused to accept. My first outlines of *Republic of Fear* always involved a kind of genuflection to the economic level. The first chapter would be on the economy and the forces of production. The second chapter would be social classes and only then would follow the politics. What I really wanted to write about were the horrific stories about how the secret police was behaving. I wanted to write about the experiences reflected in those stories – of the different kinds and levels of violence, of people informing on one another, of the break up and atomisation of Iraqi society that had nothing to do with how the forces of production were going. But, for some time, I couldn't let go of those categories, so the very first outlines always had those perfunctory things. But as I worked and worked on the book, and as it went through many transformations in the six years it took to write, those chapters [on the productive forces, etc] would go down in the outline, while the things I wanted to write about – violence, cruelty, the politics of fear, intimidation etc – came up. Finally

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[3] Arendt 1951.

[4] Makiya 2006.

I realised, 'My God, I don't want to write about this. It's interesting but it's not what is driving this book.' So I dropped them altogether. I remember that was my big sin when the book went to Verso Books to be published.

Johnson: *Verso turned it down?*

Makiya: Yes, Verso turned it down for that very reason. So I went hunting for a publisher. This was 1986. I had over 70 rejections before anybody would take up the book. But I was 'on a roll' as they say. I had been buoyed up by that feeling that I was changing and doing something new, and perhaps important. I started writing another book even before the first one found a publisher!

I was circulating the manuscript under a pseudonym. Nobody knew who I was, so my first wife, Afsaneh Najmabadi, who is now an academic in the States at Harvard, had to vouch that I existed! In the end The University of California Press came to the rescue and the book was finally published in 1989. I will never forget the courage of the editor at the University of California Press, Lynne Withey, who took the book on. She never saw me, met me, or talked to me. University of California Press had never published an anonymous book before, let alone a book written under a pseudonym. It took great courage and a special decision at the level of the board of directors of the press.

Johnson: *What do you remember of the reception of the book?*

Makiya: Until Saddam Hussein went into Kuwait only Iraqi exiles were interested in the book. It sold 300 or 400 copies at most. It was about to die a death as many books do. But when Saddam Hussein entered Kuwait it started selling in great numbers and overnight I found myself in a whole new world. I finally went public about my identity in March 1991, at a public event at the Centre for Middle East Studies at Harvard University to which other Iraqi oppositionists had also been invited – Bahr al-Uloom, who was a cleric, Hoshyar Zebari, who is Iraq's Foreign Minister today, Ahmed Chalabi.

Part 3: Writing *Cruelty and Silence*

The talk I gave at that meeting was expanded into an article that appeared in the *New York Review of Books*.[5] I argued that the war should be finished by going all the way to Baghdad. That was a very controversial position.

Johnson*: Did a storm break at that point?*

Makiya: Yes. The previous good wishes that had been passed in my direction from the left ended. I was viewed as a complete traitor and was called a 'quisling'. But my position [that the uprisings should be supported and Saddam should be deposed] was a logical continuation of the changes that had taken place in my thinking during the course of the writing of *The Republic of Fear*. The be-all and end-all of politics was removing this dictatorship in Iraq. Abstract considerations – such as the categories 'imperialism' and 'Zionism' – became totally secondary in importance to the removal of dictatorship. I had written in *The Republic of Fear* that the legitimation of this dictatorship had taken place on the grounds of 'Zionism' and the threat the 'Zionists' represented to the Arab world. In throwing away that rhetoric and the whole political language associated with Arab Nationalist politics it was the internationalist spirit – present in my early formation in the Trotskyist movement – that was very much present. The fact that I had seen anti-Zionist activists from inside Israel meant that Israel did not exist, in my mind, as the font of all evil. I discarded all that baggage. I have a sort of single-minded and obsessive track of mind and I just went straight for what was crucial and what was essential: getting rid of this evil dictatorship. Everything else was subordinate.

The Arab left had become moribund. It was locked into old categories and all through the 1980s it could go nowhere. There was nothing new coming out of the political culture – we were locked in the dynamic and the language of the Lebanese civil war. Issues of human rights, of building civil society, of dictatorship, of our own responsibility for our own ills, were all constantly being subordinated by the old

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[5] Makiya 1991a.

language of 'anti-Zionism' and 'anti-Imperialism'. I had come along with *Republic of Fear* and said that the most important thing is what we have done to ourselves. I was 'bending the stick,' as we say. And many Arabs, and people on the left who identify as 'pro-Arab,' objected. Why? Well, the moment one passes from analysis and description to political *action* a boundary is crossed.

Johnson: In the preface to Republic of Fear *you noted 'the terrible silence of the intelligentsia', and asked, 'Where are the Arab Václav Havels and Christa Wolfs who will call Saddam to account?' In your next book,* Cruelty and Silence,[6] *you exposed, indicted and explained this silence, showing that when faced with the cruelty of the Iraqi regime towards its people, parts of the Arab intelligentsia, and the Western intelligentsia, had offered up a catalogue of evasions: silence, exculpation, complicity, rationalisation, subject changing, denial, avoidance. How did you come to write* Cruelty and Silence*?*

Makiya: It was born in the tumultuous last moments of the 1991 Gulf war and was filled with the anger and energy of somebody caught up in that moment. It was a cry for elevating cruelty, violence, and abuse over any other consideration.

The first Gulf war had suddenly opened up this enormous reservoir of Iraqis who wanted to tell their horrific stories of the 1988 Anfal, (Saddam's genocide against the Kurds) and of being in prison, of being crushed during the uprising of 1991, and of daily life under Saddam's regime. The people's testimonies were the driving force of *Cruelty and Silence*.

The book is divided into two parts, cruelty and silence. Part one gives a platform to the words of victims. It's almost two thirds of the length of the book. I spent days taping interviews with these individuals. Each individual victim stood for a lot of others with similar experiences. I wove a larger story around these individuals. Around Khalid, the Kuwaiti, I wove the story of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Abu Hayder, the Shiite officer who accompanied Majid al-Khoei when he went to beg for help from the American forces,

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[6] Makiya 1993.

symbolised the uprising that followed the first Gulf War. The story of Umar, the Sunni Arab, stood for all the people who had gone into Ba'athist prisons for no reason at all. (In his case somebody told a joke in a party. He entered hell and came out again to tell the tale.) The story of the Kurds was told through two other individuals, Mustafa and a young boy called Taimour.

In the second part of the book I pit the words of Arab and Western intellectuals of my generation, many of the left, against all these Iraqi words about violence and cruelty. The point was that between the two sets of words there was a chasm. The intellectuals offered rhetoric about 'nationalism,' 'Imperialism,' 'the Crusades,' and so on. The focus of the book was about the rhetoric that the war had generated among intellectuals and the chasm between that rhetoric and the reality. Between these two realities – the words of the intellectuals and the words of the victims – was a yawning gap.

The cry of the book was for 'putting cruelty first', as I put it. I took this phrase from a person who had begun to influence me greatly. Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* is a wonderful book[7] and it contains an essay that is almost my Bible, titled 'Putting Cruelty First'. *Cruelty and Silence* was not a very complicated book at all. It was about the importance of putting cruelty first.

Johnson*: Cruelty and Silence was met on parts of the left with a quite extraordinary hostility. In 1993 Edward Said called you and the book 'scurrilous'. By 2002 he had still not let up: 'Most of what Makiya wrote in the book was, in my opinion, revolting, based as it was on cowardly innuendo and false interpretation, but the book, of course, enjoyed a popular moment or two since it confirmed the view in the West that Arabs were villainous and shabby conformists.'[8] Unwittingly, by invoking the reaction of the West as the prism through which to read and judge the book, and by his use of this figure of*

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[7] Shklar 1984. See also Shklar's 1982 essay 'Putting Cruelty First' reproduced in Democratiya 4.

[8] Said 1993, 2002.

'the West' as a means to exculpate the Arab intellectual, Said proved your case.

Makiya: In writing that book, I was naïve. I had thought that I would stimulate a debate in the circles I had come from. But there was to be no debate or dialogue. I had thought that the weight of the words of the victims would make the case – all you had to do was read the first half of the book. But as it turned out, most of these intellectuals only read the *second* part of the book, and the references to themselves. I was naming names, you see, not just writing general abstractions. I was pitting words against words. Two sets of words had to clash with one another. So I named names, and that upset people no end. The book was blasted by the very people I thought I was opening a dialogue with. I realise now how naive that whole approach was.

Johnson: And there was character assassination. You were personally attacked.

Makiya: Oh, it was the beginning of a terrible period. After that book came out in 1993 I was actually depressed for a couple of years. I couldn't write anything. But this hostile reaction was not an Iraqi reaction and I was buoyed up by that fact. A chasm had opened up between the way Iraqis viewed politics and the way the rest of the Arab world, and the left, did. Among the latter there were only individuals – I have in mind people like Fran Hazleton, Peter Sluglett, David Hirst, and, of course, the CARDRI people (The Campaign Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq) – who really faced the nature of the regime.

Part 4: The Death of a Left

Johnson: How do we account for the intellectuals' refusal to engage with the first part of Cruelty and Silence*? Given the expressed values of the left one would expect them to have attended to it very closely, and to have cared very deeply. But that's not what happened. How do we explain that?*

Makiya: You are putting your finger on the central issue of what's happened to the left since the fall of the former Soviet Union. There is a vacuum at the moral centre of the left which

is what makes it so ineffective today. How did that come about? There are many forces at work.

The left retreated into a politics of cultural relativism during the 1980s. The activist generation that entered politics for the anti-Vietnam war campaign and the civil rights movement retreated into academia and began theorising without having any active role in politics. Increasingly the language of being against the Vietnam war underwent a subtle transformation. It became a form of cultural relativism that deep down, through such movements as deconstructionism, became antithetical to the original values upon which the internationalist left had been founded.

Look back at the Spanish civil war and think of the brigades of volunteers who went to fight. Think of George Orwell. That's the spirit of the traditional left. The language of human rights comes naturally to it as an extension of its internationalism and its universalism. Yes, perhaps culture was not studied enough by that older left. But it was right to subordinate culture to that which we had in common as human beings. Increasingly, by the 1980s, that is no longer the case. That which makes us different began to be posited as a positive value *in itself*. By contrast, the internationalist concern with those universals human beings have in common declined in importance. Any form of intervention began to be seen as immoral, not just a particular intervention, at a particular time. There is a generalisation against all intervention that takes place from Vietnam onwards. And, in the Arab case, all this mixed with the moribund state of our political culture.

I feel the left that I came from has almost become nationalist. This language of relativism has translated itself into 'Well, even if the regime of Saddam Hussein is so nasty, why should *we* go and liberate it?' Now that is something you would have got from an American isolationist, back in the old days. You would *never* have got it from somebody on the left. The positive element which I carried from the Trotskyist movement, from the writings of Trotsky himself, was an internationalist spirit. It was more alive in me, I think, than in many of those who claimed Trotsky's mantle, but did not practise that internationalism. It is a very sad state of affairs. The left has turned against its own internationalist traditions

and thrown away its own universal values. The older left was able to cross boundaries and *think* across boundaries. That was its strength and its weakness.

I am *not* saying that intervention is always a good thing. I argued for intervention in Iraq because of particular circumstances. First, the exceptional nature of the Saddam Hussein regime. Second, the world owed the people of Iraq after putting them in the straitjacket of sanctions for 12 years and giving them no way out. The country was rotting, sanctions weren't working, and the regime was not about to topple from within. So you had to either remove the regime or re-legitimise it. Continuing with the status quo was morally unacceptable – the price being paid inside Iraq was too high. The case for war, the case for regime change, can be made on many levels in the Iraqi case. But this does not necessarily apply elsewhere. They certainly don't apply for Syria, or Iran today. Everything has to be looked at in terms of the concrete circumstances.

Part 5: Islam, Victimhood, and the Civilisational Challenge

Johnson: After 9/11 you noted that Arab and Muslim political culture was 'continuing to wallow in the sense of victimhood to the point of losing the essentially universal idea of human dignity and worth that is the only true measure of civility,' and you warned that 'The Arab and Muslim worlds suddenly find themselves facing a civilisational challenge such as they have not had to face since the fall of the Ottoman Empire.'[9] Can you say what you mean by this notion of a 'civilisational challenge'?

Makiya: I mean there is a culture of not taking responsibility for the state of one's house. The culture of constantly shunting that responsibility to others – 'imperialism,' 'Zionism,' and so on – has become a brake on moving forward across the Middle East. Look at Muslim societies today. They are relatively backward in terms of income levels, have been unable to create democracies, and are stuck in a language and a rhetoric that is patently unmodern. The defensive wall that

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[9] Makiya 2001.

exists between Islam (at least as it is currently constructed) and the necessary changes needed is built on the idea that others are responsible for what we've done, and that everything bad that happened to us has happened because of others. The answer to the question 'what is wrong?' is always 'it's somebody else's fault.'

The 'civilisational challenge' is this: can the Arab Islamic world come to terms with the fact that it is responsible for its own ills, and for pulling itself up by its own bootstraps in order to get into the world, rather than find ways of staying out of it? It is not an easy thing for a religion to undertake a real reformation of itself. Christianity was able to do that, and Judaism, in a different way, was more or less able to do that, though not as completely. But Islam hasn't even *begun* to do that. In the meantime there is taking place a kind of rot represented by the rise of Salafi Islam and Jihadi Islam that is threatening us all, and Islam itself, above all. We don't live in a world that allows long periods of time for making this kind of internal reformation.

Islam is largely at war with itself. The greatest number dying on the battlefields are Muslims. Muslims are fighting Muslims. Think of Algeria. Think of the struggle inside Egypt. Think of the Lebanese civil war. The greatest number of casualties so far, 9/11 notwithstanding, is Muslims fighting Muslims. But we don't have a properly focused debate, with those trying to reform and transform the religion leading one side and those trying to hold it back leading the other.

However, there are very important changes starting to take place. New voices are being heard. My book *Cruelty and Silence* is everywhere, and that was impossible back in 1993. There are Muslims critiquing Islam itself. The reformation may be beginning, but hasn't yet cohered into a clear movement with an agenda – these new voices aren't anywhere near as strong as they need to be. Moreover, Jihadi Islam now has a substantial social base it didn't have ten years ago. One could even say we look like we're losing the battle at the moment. I certainly hope that's not the case. A deep convulsion is taking place within Islam itself, among Muslims, and we have no way of clearly predicting how this is going to turn out. I call that a civilisational crisis of the first order.

Johnson: *On the one hand, you have pointed out that 'Islam has a relation to politics which is very different from Christianity and Judaism.'[10] On the other hand, you have made this appeal: 'It's very important that Arabs and Muslims believe in your heart of hearts that fundamentally it's both important and necessary to break the stereotype that just because someone's a Muslim or an Arab, there's somehow an antithetical relationship to democratic values.'[11] Is there a tension between your insight into Islam's unique attitude to politics and your fervent hope that Islam comes to terms with democracy?*

Makiya: It's a tension only in the sense that every great religion has to find its own way of freeing itself and moving forward in the world. Islam will find a way that is different to that of Christianity. The same formulas – separation of church and state, etc – may not play themselves out, in the convulsions that take place within Islam, in exactly the same way they played out in Christianity. We should not look for a straight line between the European experience and the Islamic experience. But can it in principle be resolved? Absolutely, I think it can.

Yes, Islam's relation to politics – its insistence that it legislates for day to day life – can cause problems when you try to separate it from politics (quite different from Christianity where you can *start* to put religion and politics into two separate boxes). So however we negotiate this reformation-transition, we know it is going to be *different*. But that it *can* take place is a proposition I completely believe. It hasn't taken place this far simply because the individuals, the subjective factor able to *make it* take place, have not yet emerged strongly enough from within Islam.

It's not the same thing for a secular person like me to write about these issues, and for a cleric, breaking with his own traditions, to do so. In Iraq today there are reformist clerics. Think of Sayyid Ayyad, a remarkable man in his mid-forties who has arrived at a series of conclusions utterly from within the Shiite tradition of Islam, which accept the separation

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[10] Makiya 2002.

[11] Makiya 2003.

of church and state. He's on the lists, he's up for elections, he's on TV, and he's a real firebrand. He is a new kind of force speaking a new kind of language, shocking traditional Muslim audiences. He has a very high opinion, for instance, of the American constitution and the Bill of Rights. Many more people like him need to engage in the debate, as well as people like myself. I and others like me can't break through that wall by themselves; we need help from inside the fortress of Islam. Missing, at the moment, are the clerics who will fight from within and make their argument, not in the way I make my argument (from Western texts, general texts of human rights, or from someone like Hannah Arendt), but from within the religion itself. This is, after all, how the reformation came about – very religious and pious men constructed arguments for human rights from within their own tradition. That this can be done in Islam I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt. The nature of scriptural texts is that they are infinitely malleable; it is what you chose to put forward that counts. In fact, it is really quite remarkable how the growing Salafi, or Jihadi, trend of Islam rests on a *tiny* body of text. It represents a very small minority position within Islam and has succeeded largely through the strength, vigour and energy of its own militancy, which it has used to capture a whole section of the tradition. That's never happened before. There is, in principle, a huge body of texts and many traditions with which to create an alternative version of Islam. I haven't a shadow of a doubt that it can be done. It just needs the men and women from within to do it.

Johnson: *The Western left has responsibilities here. When the left says 'Bush is engaged in a war on Muslims', it isn't just factually wrong. It's also politically dangerous. It echoes the message of the Jihadi groups, boosts them, while leaving the Muslim democrats and reformers isolated from a left that should be its natural ally.*

Makiya: You're right. And Alan, I'd go even further. It's not just the left. People like myself who went into Iraq after April and March 2003 as part of the effort to transform this country, have felt betrayed by Europe as a whole. We were attacked by the media of all the surrounding countries who are utterly hostile to the values on which Europe rests. Arab satellite stations distorted what was going on. The silence in Europe

at *that* moment gave enormous sustenance to all those forces struggling against the transformation of Iraq. It enabled the Jihadis, the Ba'athists, the extreme Arab nationalists, and the Arab regimes, to say, 'Look at the hostility of Europe to what the United States has done!' Europe made it possible to isolate not just the United States but *everything that is represented by the West.* Europe gave strength to the argument that it was a traditional colonist land grab or oil grab, which was nonsense, of course.

I would say that much of the strength of the hostility of the Jihadi movement, and of the forces that have made life so horrible in Iraq, came from the silence of Europe. Europe has a lot to answer for. It's not even that it was half-hearted. They fell in completely with the language of the non-democratic Arab regimes, seemed to stand for the same things, and undermined entirely the values of the operation. Europeans *knew* that the United States was not going to permanently occupy Iraq. Deep down the smarter Europeans must have known it wasn't just about oil. It was – rightly or wrongly – a way of changing the traditional Western attitude towards the Arab Muslim world by ending the support for autocratic and repressive governments. It was a new view: if we are going to succeed in this war against terror then we must be viewed by the populations of this part of the world in a totally different way. Now Europe might not have thought it was the right time. Europe might have thought it should have been done differently. But Europe should never have been seen to be undermining *the argument itself*.

Europe was justifying and supporting the foundations on which these repressive regimes stood. It had acquiesced so fully in that relativist language it had no views of its own. More: it looked racist because it looked like it was not possible for Arabs and Muslims to enjoy the democratic values Europe enjoyed. The shoe was on the other foot entirely as it was not the Americans who were the imperialists or racists but the Europeans who, by sitting back, were saying, 'You Arabs and Muslims really can't do any better than this, so why mess around with this thing in the first place?'

Johnson: *You have also written about an Arab silence about Iraq that goes back to 1991 when a gulf opened up between*

Iraq and the Arab world. What caused this gulf?

Makiya: In a nutshell it was a gulf between Iraqis, who began basing their politics on their own experience of tyranny, and the Arab world, which carried on thinking that politics amounted to the Palestinian question. It was not that we Iraqis didn't think Palestinians needed rights, a state, and so on. We totally support that. But we had a *huge* problem of our own. Deep down, the debate between Edward Said and myself was about that tension inside Arab politics.

Iraqi people are angry that for the last three years the Arab world has not supported them. In fact the Arab world seems to support the terrorists, in the name of 'Arab solidarity' or 'Arab unity'. There is a real fury about this. Take the case of the Jordanian suicide bomber, Raed Mansour al-Banna, who killed 125 Iraqis in Hilla when he blew himself up on February 28, 2005. When his body was flown to Jordan, instead of a funeral there was a celebration of the hero's return! They said he had sacrificed himself for God and for the holy struggle against the Americans. This was not organised by the family itself. Often, as in the Palestinian case, families of suicide bombers are forced into these things. They want to mourn the young man who was their son. Instead they are forced by the organisation around them to treat it as a wonderful thing and a great sacrifice. They are kissed and told that they are so fortunate their son is now in Paradise. When Iraqis heard about this Jordanian celebration there was *such* a popular fury! The Jordanian government had to officially apologise. And – this is the world of ignorance we live in – the parents of the suicide bomber asked reporters, 'Didn't he kill Americans?' The reporters informed the parents, 'No, actually it was 120 *Iraqis* who were killed.' Again we have the gulf between rhetoric and reality that was at the heart of *Cruelty and Silence.*

But in spite of the European silence, and the Arab silence and complicity, we now see the ripple effects from what has happened in Iraq. Think of the reaction to Rafik Hariri's assassination in Lebanon, of the isolation of Syria and of the civil society movement in Lebanon. I was almost a pariah in Lebanon for ten years, because of *Cruelty and Silence.* Suddenly, all these Lebanese NGOs appear, interested

in memory, and in what happened during the civil war. They are digging up mass graves and inviting me over to speak. Hostility to Syria is now the predominant tenor of Lebanese politics (with the exception of Hezbollah, which is still supposedly fighting the good fight, and waiting for the good struggle against Israel). And there is opposition inside Syria itself. The Syrian regime is in its final stages. The overwhelming majority of Lebanese people are angry because they know exactly who is behind these assassinations and bombings. The attempt of the Syrians to pretend there is some greater plot to isolate Syria in the world (they haven't yet managed to specify exactly how Israel is behind it) is not persuading anybody. So you have change taking place in spite of everything.

Part 6: The Iraq War

Johnson: *In the run-up to the Iraq war, few radical democrats were as close to the centres of decision-making as you, or more privy to the crucial debates. Few are in a better position to draw lessons. Can we begin in June 2002 when you are approached by the State Department and asked to participate in the Future of Iraq Project. Initially you clashed with the State Department over the very terms of the project and of your involvement, right? What was at stake?*

Makiya: When I was approached I was aware events were heading towards war. The State Department was actively preparing for it, and had invited a series of former Iraqi military officers over. The implication was that they were being groomed for leadership and that the Department of State was seeking change from within the Ba'ath regime, not from without by means of the organised Iraqi opposition. Regime change led by former Ba'athists was their way to the future and I would have none of that. I objected vigorously and refused to participate in the Future of Iraq project unless it was clearly and unambiguously about bringing democracy to Iraq. In its origins, and I am talking about the period between May and August 2002, the Future of Iraq project was clearly not conceived by the State Department as a project for building democracy in Iraq. It was about regime change without democracy. Letters went backwards and forwards

between myself and United States government officials on these issues between May and August in 2002.

After it became the American position to democratise Iraq (around August 2002) I agreed to participate in the Future of Iraq workshops. I had a meeting at the highest levels of the State Department and formulated a set of conditions regarding my participation. I participated in the Democratic Principles Workshop (it was called the Political Principles Workshop but the title changed after democratisation became the goal, and on the insistence of the US Congress, as I recall). My idea, as put to the Department of State prior to my involvement, was that a plan for the transition in Iraq would emerge from the discussions of the 32 Iraqis they had already chosen for the workshop. The Americans said they would not participate in the discussions, only host them. It was a tumultuous experience but in the end a document of several hundred pages was produced. *The Transition to Democracy in Iraq* is still available on the internet.[12] I was intensively involved in the writing with four or five other leading figures, as is the nature of these things; but it was discussed thoroughly and finally approved by all 32 members of the workshop.

But we soon realised that the State Department had a totally different vision of the workshop. In their eyes it was about learning democracy, 101-style. They thought Iraqis would benefit from the process of sitting around a table and airing their views. I found this very condescending and wanted instead a position paper on the transition to be produced that would provide, in a crude sort of way, a joint Iraqi-American blueprint for the transition. They did concede to me that the document could be put to a vote at a conference of the Iraqi Opposition in London in December 2002, but they did not tell me before the workshop that they were not going to tie their hands in any way by its conclusions. In fact they took distance from it the moment it was produced, especially after they realised the document was arguing strongly for a transitional provisional Iraqi government as the way forward, *not* American military occupation. That was a source of a lot of tensions in the run-up to the war.

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[12] Conference of the Iraqi Opposition 2002.

The Inter-Agency Process

Johnson*: You have called the inter-agency process – the co-ordinated efforts of the White House, State Department, Department of Defence, and CIA – 'the great albatross of our lives,' and blamed many post-invasion problems on 'squabbling within the U.S. administration,' even saying, 'the State Department and the CIA have consistently thwarted the president's genuine attempt … to do something very dramatic in this country.'[13] What was the basis of these inter-agency disputes and what were their consequences?*

Makiya: The little story of the Future of Iraq project unfolded against the backdrop of a much larger problem in the preparations for war. There was tension – I would even call it warfare – between the different branches of the US government. This has still has not been written about properly. Deep internal American conflicts hobbled the whole enterprise from the outset. Matters reached the level of hatred between and among Americans. Iraqis were portioned off by different agencies – some were close to the Department of Defense, some to the CIA, some to State, and so on. The warfare at the heart of the Bush administration was shaping the agenda rather than any positive plan.

The change in policy that brought about such tensions *within* the administration goes back to September 11 – a transforming moment in American political culture. From that day a small minority of influential people in the United States government emerged who said that the way forward was democratic change in the region, starting with Iraq. They argued that US foreign policy towards the Middle East had rested for 50 years on support for autocratic regimes like Saudi Arabia, Saddam in the 1980s, or Mubarak's Egypt in the interests of securing oil supplies, or whatever it might be. This policy had led to a level of anger at the United States inside the Arab world that provided fertile breeding ground for organisations like al-Qaeda. So, at the strategic level, a dramatic change in US policy was needed. The US should reach out to peoples not governments, to focus on democratisation as opposed to

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[13] Makiya 2003.

stability, and so on. That school of thought emerged in the Pentagon, led by people like Paul Wolfowitz. It ran headlong against the State Department's traditional accommodationist policies. The conflict was between those agencies that were wedded to the policies of the past and those breaking new ground. The former were often in the State Department – people who knew that part of the world in a very particular way. They had been Ambassadors, they had hobnobbed with the Saudi ruling families, and they had developed certain preconceptions about how the Arab world worked. By contrast those who were pushing for a dramatically new policy, like Paul Wolfowitz, were not shackled by such a past, nor burdened by the weight of those prejudices. But they did not necessarily know the Middle East as well. They were not Arab linguists, and these people tended to reside in the Pentagon and in parts of the White House.

In this struggle the CIA was close to the State Department. The Pentagon was close to the White House (though the White House had no single view). The struggle could have been a healthy one resulting in a plan of action for post-2003 had there been sufficient control of these divisions from the top. There wasn't. Bush just laid down a policy and was not a man for the details. And the National Security Council did not opt clearly for this or that way forward. Instead they set up something called the 'inter-agency process'. This involved representatives from the different warring agencies who would sit down and compromise over every single decision. The result was not that there were no plans, as people say, but that there were too many plans that were no longer coherent because they were picked apart in this inter-agency process until they were a little bit of this and a little bit of that. For instance, the Pentagon was for a provisional Iraqi transitional authority rooted in and stemming from the Iraqi opposition. The State Department was dead set against that. And its intense dislike of the Iraqi opposition drove them to support what I think was the worst possible strategic formula for the transition: an American military occupation of Iraq with all that that entailed in terms of responsibilities for the minutest of details in the post-war period.

Johnson: You have complained bitterly about a distinction that was created between 'the inauthentic externals and the

authentic internals.'[14] Did the State Department think the exiles had no base and so could not be trusted?

Makiya: The State Department didn't think the Iraqi opposition was up to it. It wanted Iraqis who were from 'the inside'. We were very suspicious about that formulation because at the outset it was clear they did not mean the broad mass of Iraqis. They meant the former elements of the regime. They invented this great big artificial wall between the exiles on the 'outside' and the Iraqis on the 'inside'. The exiles were portrayed as Rolex-wearing opportunists or dreamers (or, worse, Kurds) who didn't know their own country. Ironically the State Department, which was against the war in the first place, ended up being for the most dramatic form of transformation: military occupation. But having agreed military occupation as the way forward, which agency was going to supervise the plan of occupation? It turned out to be the Defence Department, which favoured a transitional provisional government! So it ends up a little bit of this, and a little bit of that, and we ended up with the worst of all worlds as a consequence.

Iraqis and the Liberation of Iraq

Johnson*: So we end up with a war that was a stunning military success – in terms of the rapidity with which the coalition reached Baghdad – but which was an unfolding political failure?*

Makiya: Yes. You have put your finger on the central problem. The formula that was chosen by the United States government for the transition – occupation – by its very nature did not involve Iraqis in their own liberation. A huge number of American troops entered Iraq but – and this is really an important statistic – only 63 Iraqis were part of that American army. 63 people who knew the language, the mores, and who could interact with Iraqis. By all accounts they performed brilliantly, but there should have been thousands of those Iraqis trained in the months running up to the war to go in with every American unit so that the necessary bridges of

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[14] Makiya 2003.

trust and understanding could be built. Then you could have put your hand on your heart and said Iraqis had participated. Where else could you draw these Iraqis from other than the organisations of the opposition and from the Kurds, the Shiites, and from the millions of Iraqis in exile? Had that been done you would have had the nucleus of something Iraqi even as you arrived in Iraq.

The Iraqi opposition wanted to be involved in the fighting but was excluded. This was a tension that continued right through January and February of 2003. Finally, there were scenes between the opposition and the US representative sent to the meeting of the opposition in Salahadin in Northern Iraq. At that meeting structures were set up to discuss Ministries, Security, and so on, but the Americans totally bypassed them, another missed opportunity.

The moment the United States government turned Iraqis into spectators in this transformation they set in motion a dynamic that was to last a very long time, until the Americans realised the error of their ways and transferred sovereignty to an interim government in June 2004. One consequence was that there was a constant tension between the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which had many former exiles in it, and Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). This paralysed things. The Iraqis were sitting there with no authority or responsibility over anything, so naturally they could irresponsibly discuss irrelevant little details in exactly the way they did in opposition. They were not, after all, responsible for delivering things on the ground; Bremer and his CPA staff were. So, very quickly, it became a case of armchair discussants on the one hand and Bremer on the other. The exception, by the way, was the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) which was the precursor to the current constitution. That was drafted by Iraqis working with Americans, and showed the kind of working relationship we needed throughout.

Johnson: *Instead we had tank columns racing up towards Baghdad, leaving behind Fedayeen thugs on every street corner…*

Makiya: And confused Iraqi people…

Johnson: Who desperately needed to feel confident about what exactly what was happening….

Makiya: Absolutely. And look, I admit, we in the opposition got many things wrong as well. I personally, in retrospect, realise that I underestimated the wounds in the population left by the betrayal of the Iraqi intifada in 1991. People didn't trust the Americans after they were let down in 1991. 'I don't believe they are going to do it,' was the dominant feeling amongst Iraqis inside the country. Even after the coalition had taken half the country the people remained sceptical of American intentions to see the thing through. 'Are the Americans going to let us down again? They did it to us once before,' was the prevailing mood. In 1991 more Iraqis died in the crushing of the uprising than in the war and, frankly, I underestimated the degree of residual hostility. The presence of Iraqis with that army, Iraqis who could have talked to the sceptical people on the ground, could have helped meliorate that hostility.

Johnson: Were the Americans taking their distance from Chalabi specifically? You have been a supporter of the Iraqi National Congress since 1992 and you will know that the one thing the far left, the CIA, and the State Department agree on is, as the saying goes, 'ABC – Anyone But Chalabi.'

Makiya: He was certainly the lightning rod for the hostility toward the opposition on the part of the CIA and the State Department. There's simply no doubt that his personality, and so on, played an important role. But there were other factors. For instance, the State Department – which has never really been sympathetic or understanding towards Kurdish aspirations in Iraq – was very worried that disproportionately large numbers of Kurds would be involved in the liberation. The Kurds had run their own affairs for a very long time and had a huge number of very well trained fighters organised in the Peshmerga. I understand why there was the resistance to the idea of involving the Kurds in the liberation of Iraq; it was thought the Arabs would be deeply hostile. I just don't think that was true, and it would have been infinitely better than not having anyone there who spoke Arabic and was part of the country.

The State Department worried the Kurds would become too strong and create an overly-Kurdish government, which would be very negative for the rest of the Arab world. In fact after three years we can see the Kurds have played an important and positive role as a moderating and stabilizing force in the Iraqi interim government. They've behaved very responsibly compared with some of the Arab parties, quite frankly. Without them the state would be a total shambles. Some of their maturity is because they had ten years of experience of running their own affairs, and because their political organisations had some historical depth and weight to them, something entirely lacking in the thoroughly atomised Arab parties of the opposition.

Imposing the Bremer Model

Johnson*: What were the consequences in your view of adopting the pro-consul model of running Iraq in 2003-4?*

Makiya: There are many things you can say about Bremer's style: overbearing, and so on. But the main thing about the model is that for the first year, at least, it further increased the sense Iraqis had of not being involved in decision–making about their own affairs. It continued the policy that we talked about earlier, designed before the war and carried through in the conduct of the war, of not involving Iraqis. To be fair, Bremer and the US administration realised the error of their ways and changed plans – the occupation was originally going to last much longer than one year. But we paid a price for this change. You either do an occupation and you do it well, or you don't do it in the first place. But you don't do it in a half-assed way, with inadequate troop levels to boot! And the United States government *never* deployed enough troops. It opted for an occupation but didn't provide the wherewithal to do the job properly. Here again is this tension between the Pentagon and the Department of State. State wants an occupation, but Rumsfeld – who has theories about how to conduct warfare in the modern age with less and less troops – never wanted an occupation. In fact, he may never even have been for Iraqi democratisation. He was just an in-and-out kind of a guy. It was the other people within the defence department, in particularly the really extraordinary figure of

Paul Wolfowitz, who argued the political case for democracy.

You see, after 9/11 an enormous change takes place in the way the US thinks about this part of the world. But it's all happened so fast and not everybody has caught up with everybody else – so we have different levels of understanding that tear apart the administration. We have old ways of thinking interwoven with radically new ways of thinking and we have strange mixtures in between. And to cap it all there was no decisive decision-maker at the top. That, I think, is the mix that went so wrong.

Eventually there was an about-face on the question of the period of occupation and on the training of the Iraqi police and army. Many people ask why the Iraqi security forces are not up to the job yet. Well, you know, training didn't really begin in earnest until the summer of 2004! Bremer acted against advice from the Pentagon in his slowness in beginning the training programmes of the Iraqi police and army. So we have only a year and a half track record of training.

Dissolving the Iraqi Army

Johnson: *As war approached, you – and the Iraqi National Congress – warned President Bush, Vice President Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice against any reliance on the Iraqi army. The Iraqi National Accord, with CIA help, worked to keep the Iraqi army intact to the last minute. Many have said that the dissolution of the army, right down to the last rank and filer, was a catastrophe that made the insurgency all but inevitable. What do you say to that? Was that kind of total demobilisation what you had in mind anyway?*

Makiya: We argued very strongly for dissolving the army, but over stages. And we never argued for not paying them their pensions and their salaries! We argued for a staged dissolution of the army, not this sudden abrupt abolition. But, yes, part of the responsibility for what happened must also lie on the opposition and on people like me in particular. I was a strong and relentless advocate of demilitarisation. I had the terrible history of Iraq's military coups during the 1960s before my mind and the example of Pakistan looming

as a possible outcome. I suspect Bremer listened to us or had read parts of the 2002 Democratic Principles Working Group *Final Report on the Transition to Democracy in Iraq.*

However, there are two things that need to be said and they are somewhat contradictory. Number one is, in a very important sense, the army was *already* dissolved before Bremer formalised the matter. The army hardly existed, we discovered, after the war in 2003. It had been bled dry, it was corrupt, and the salaries of soldiers were barely enough to allow them to visit their families. The army was in horrific shape, we discovered, *afterwards.* Whether we should have known that that was the state of the army is an interesting question, but the fact is we did not. In fact when the war came the army did not fight. There was no Iraqi defeat in 2003 in the sense there was a defeat of the Nazis or the Japanese armies in World War Two. The army just disintegrated. There was no war of liberation in that sense. Our liberation and our civil war are occurring now, *simultaneously,* so to speak. Eventually the old order does fight the new order, but that fight didn't really happen in March and April of 2003 as the rhetoric of the Bush administration would have us believe.

Second, our great fear was that the enemy of democracy would be the army, as it always has been in Iraq. But our fears, as democrats, that the army could step in were perhaps not well grounded. In the wake of the Iraq-Iran war, and 1991, especially, it had become a hated institution; a far cry from the 1940s and 1950s when the army presented itself as a vanguard of modernity and espoused nationalist values. By the end of the Iraq-Iran war, after 8 gruelling years and hundreds of thousands dead, the Army was a creature of the Ba'ath party, and after the debacle of the first Gulf War it had lost all prestige.

We should not have alienated *that* army so quickly. It could have been purged and transformed from within over a number of years. So looking back on it I think we were wrong because it gave the insurgency a cause. It gave them many thousands of disillusioned potential recruits. And that was all unnecessary. So I look back critically on some of my positions dating back to before the war.

Losing control of the borders

Johnson: *I have an Iraqi friend who suspects that the US has deliberately left the borders porous. He suspects the US is applying a fly-paper strategy: draw the terrorists to Iraq and kill them. His complaint is that Iraq is a country not a piece of fly-paper. And you have reported that you 'had to go and bang the doors in Washington and say, '"Close those ******* borders." … everybody was telling me to say that. I mean, sheiks, clerics, everybody was saying, "Tell them to close the borders. They're pumping people in here. We're going to have trouble here."' Yet the borders remain porous to this day. What are the obstacles to closing the borders? Troop numbers?*

Makiya: Yes. I know of the theory that the United States is deliberately inviting the terrorists in so as to fight them in Iraq rather than anywhere else. I honestly don't think that's the case. I've been too close to this. There is *nothing* that has hurt the United States as much as its apparent inability to maintain security and make the Iraqi experiment work. The conspiracy theory completely fails to see that. The coalition never had enough troops to police those borders and we are back to the question of pre-war planning. They can take the insurgents out, anywhere, but then they have to move on and the insurgents come back. But now they're changing strategy. Iraqi troops are settling in and they are not just taking places but holding them.

Presiding over a security vacuum

Johnson*: You have described a meeting in Baghdad, on April 28, 2003, at which you and about 400 other Iraqis tried to persuade the US that the immediate restoration of law and order was the priority. This is how you described the reaction of the US officials present:*

> *[there] was again this incredible, very American, embarrassment at being what you are – in authority, in a position of power, in a position to determine government … somebody [said] 'You mean you don't have a plan for the government?' He [Jay Garner] says, 'No, we are here to meet to discuss that. This is your government, not our*

> *government. We don't want to impose this government on you.' It all sounds so ridiculous. (…) There was nobody in charge who understood that democracy [i]s not some sort of instant switch. It's institutions that have to be built over time.[15]*

Makiya: There was a very naive attitude on the part of some of the Americans responsible for decisions during the first months. Their attitude was that, well, democracy is freedom, and people now can express themselves and do what they want. It was total nonsense. Democracy is a process and it requires authority. You don't lift the lid on a population that has been ruled so dictatorially for so long and expect it to immediately act responsibly. Responsibility and democracy are very closely aligned, and responsibility doesn't come without authority. The idea that democracy is not about authority is an anarchist pipe dream. In Iraq political authority was absent once the Americans took out the old authority and then stepped back. They should have assumed authority, enforced curfews, held people back, shot looters, protected key strategic sites, and so on. The anarchy that broke out has accompanied this experiment down to this very day, creating a sense that the Americans are not in control. For example, there was a no-shoot policy towards looters. Why? The fear was that if Al-Jazeera filmed an American soldier shooting or intimidating potential looters, this would play badly. That is a new reality of global life. But every Iraqi wanted them to shoot the looters and was puzzled when soldiers gave the impression they were licensing this looting.

Transforming Iraq in a democratic direction requires the replacement of one authority with another. Somebody once called the Americans 'the reluctant superpower'. This is completely contrary to the view the left takes, but I think there is a large element of truth in it, having seen them at work in Iraq. Mind you, at the ground level I worked with American soldiers, colonels and lieutenants, and so on, who are just *magnificent* people. They are building projects, maybe as small as a school or a neighbourhood playground, and I witnessed the energy and the spirit of these young American

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[15] Makiya 2003.

men and women who didn't know this part of the world but who genuinely threw themselves into reconstruction and democracy building as they saw it. I feel *they* were let down by their leaders. The initiative, the will, the drive and the spirit were all there, and all that was felt at the local level. But American and Iraqi leadership failed to translate it to the political superstructure.

The Torture at Abu Ghraib

Johnson: *Around the world – and I bracket the question of whether this is fair or not – the dominant image of an American soldier is not the hero rebuilding a school but the tormentor at Abu Ghraib. From an Iraqi perspective how damaging to the whole venture has it been that some Americans have had such a fast and loose relationship to the Geneva Convention?*

Makiya: Look, I have no doubt that a fast and loose relationship with fundamental human rights is going on in the prisons of Iraq. The abuse is torture and it is totally unacceptable. For the people inside Abu Ghraib, and their families, there is justifiable fury. But the curious fact is that Abu Ghraib didn't have the same impact on American credibility in Iraq that it had on the rest of the world. I am not trying to gloss over anything. But remember, those very same prison cells witnessed infinitely worse forms of torture during the decades of Saddam's rule. Often, you hear people on the street saying, 'They call these pictures torture? You should see what I went through, my uncle went through, and my cousin went through. This is peanuts!' That's a typical Iraqi reaction as I heard it on the streets of Baghdad when the scandal broke out, even as we are horrified by what the Americans did inside Abu Ghraib. Of course, globally it's another matter – a punch in the solar plexus for the United States' whole effort in Iraq.

The USA, the democratic left, and Democracy Promotion

Johnson: *You met with President Bush twice. First, on 10 January, 2003. About that meeting you have said, 'He left me with the very clear impression that he was deadly serious about it [democracy promotion], that this was not just rhetoric,*

and he was committed to it personally and in some emotional way.' Do you still think that?

Makiya: It's not about Bush as a person. The Bush administration has a very black and white view of the world but maybe that was a good thing for Iraq, maybe that's what made possible the ambition to bring about regime change and attempt democratisation. The argument for a democratic Iraq was genuinely convincing to Bush, who became passionately wedded to it. How deeply did he understand all the implications? That's not really for me to say as I don't know the man. But the administration has genuinely pushed for this democratisation line. It isn't just a façade. I've seen it at work on the ground. I've seen Bremer and his staff try to make it happen. I've seen the committees, and the support given to women's organisations and NGOs. That it was done amateurishly and naively is all true, but the notion that it was not happening at all, or was not genuine, is just patent nonsense.

Unfortunately, that commitment may no longer be there. The insurgency and the setbacks mean democracy-promotion is no longer the driving force of American policy as it was in 2003 and 2004. Now there is a retreat and an attempt to get the troops back home. And the people of Iraq are the big losers. Now it is up to them to do the work, in a sense by themselves, and maybe that is how it should have been all along, even if regime change from the outside was the necessary condition. How much groundwork been laid? That's a good question.

Johnson: *Is it possible for the democratic left to retain its political independence while critically supporting democracy-promotion efforts led by the USA?*

Makiya: Of course democracy-promotion in Iraq stemmed in good part from a view of American national security interests. Consider the argument being made, especially after 9/11. It went like this: 'Our national security requires a spread of our values and democracy in other parts of the world. We reject the view that these people are not capable of democracy because they're Arabs or they're Muslims. We say it's possible and we should stop supporting autocracies. Monsters have been born in our midst as a consequence of that policy. We

didn't protect ourselves by virtue of supporting Saudi Arabia. No, we nurtured in our bosom the kind of creature that brought such monsters into the world as the 19 hijackers of 9/11.' That was how the argument was put: our national security requires a spread of our democratic values elsewhere to bridge the civilisational divide.

Now, that argument is not a bad argument. I, for one, support it. But I don't look at it from an *American* national security point of view. That's their particular way of looking at it. I look at it from an *Iraqi* point of view. My interest as an Iraqi patriot coincides with that view of American national security at this particular moment in time. Obviously, from the point of view of the Arab/Muslim peoples of the region, it's far better to embrace this point of view and move forward. Hence you have what's happening in Lebanon and Syria and so on and the tentative steps that many Arab countries are now taking towards reform and political participation.

I just hope Iraq does not end up being the price paid for bringing democracy to the rest of the Middle East. We thought we were going to be the beachhead of democracy but we may turn out to be the people who paid the biggest price of all for it. In any case it is up to us now, not the Americans.

Part 7: Towards a new Iraq

Johnson: *Let's move on to the new political architecture of Iraq. You think the 2005 constitution is 'a fundamentally destabilising document.'[16] What are your concerns?*

Makiya: The constitution is the founding document of the new state. Getting it right, or at least not getting it too wrong, is crucial. But the constitution that was voted in place last year throws the baby out with the bath water. Yes, we all argued for federalism as a solution to the problems of the Iraqi state. The diversity of Iraq is such that the devolution of power, by granting a measure of autonomy to the regions, is necessary. Iraq can't work as a centralised state in which

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[16] Makiya 2005.

all power emanates from Baghdad while the regions are sacrificed to the centre; that formula has produced endless death and destruction. However, the secret of federalism is that there must still be a strong central state able to act as the glue that holds the separate autonomous law-making regions together. But in their understandable reaction to the history of centralised dictatorship, Iraqis have overly weakened the central state. We need to write the central state back into the formula for federalism. We have a powerful insurgency to fight, a country to rebuild and a whole series of tasks that require the central state; let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

The poverty of the politics of victimhood

Once the Pandora's Box of Saddam's regime was lifted the furies came rushing out. That was natural. But when people have been oppressed on the basis of their identity (for their Kurdishness, for their Shiiteness) and then they have a chance to discover and express those identities for the first time in many years, then those identities become powerful *political* forces. And my fear is that no-one is speaking for the country *as a whole* across confessional and ethnic identities. Identity politics has become too powerful at the expense of democratic politics, so we need somebody to speak for Iraq as a whole, for the federal union. We need leaders for whom the victimhood of his or her sect or ethnic group is not the be-all and end-all of politics. I repeat, the competition over victimhood – 'we suffered, you suffered, I suffered more than you so I should get more' – is *a natural organic outgrowth of Saddam's tyranny*. The politics of victimhood is one of the diseases that tyrannies leave behind within terrorised populations. And everybody truly is a victim in Iraq. Moreover, everybody feels themselves a victim. But forging a *politics* out of being a victim is a debilitating thing. It's not a good thing to be a victim. It's a terrible thing. It's not a quality but *a condition*. Victimhood is something you have to *overcome* rather than something you should wave as a flag, or carry as a banner. A great deal of politics, not only in Iraq but the Middle East as a whole, and across the left for that matter, is about elevating victimhood. This is a legacy we have to overcome.

Think of the Palestinians. They have done this to the point of self-destruction so many times. Their rhetoric rests on the fact that they were victimised. It is a fact they were victimised, but it isn't enough to be political *on that basis*. You have to go *beyond* victimhood. People cannot bow and genuflect before you solely because you are a victim. You have to lift yourself up by your own bootstraps and not be a victim. Don't think like a victim even if you are one. Nelson Mandela was able to do that. He was able to don a rugby sweater, the game of white South Africans, because he recognised he had to be a leader of white and black South Africans. He was able to rise above black victimhood and that is true leadership. The Iraqi constitution and politics hasn't yet risen to that level.

Part 8: The Iraq Memory Foundation

Johnson: You have argued that the new Iraq needs people whose identity is based 'not on bombastic rhetoric [but] a different way of defining who one is and what one is and who one wants to be in the world.' The future Iraqi citizen, you say, 'must grow up deeply cognizant and aware of what took place in his country' and be possessed of a 'humility and a sense of their frailty, and a knowledge of what they did to one another during this terrible period, 1968-2003.'[17] For these reasons you have established the Iraq Memory Foundation and serve as its President. How did it get started? What are its purposes? How is it progressing?

Makiya: I had been working at Harvard University on documents of the Ba'ath regime since the 1991 Gulf war when the Kurds captured large quantities. On entering Iraq in 2003 we discovered much more important documents in the basement of the Ba'ath Party headquarters. The Iraq Memory Foundation became a magnet for documents that other individuals and groups collected, and now has holdings of over 11 million pages of documents of the Ba'ath Party, Ba'ath party intelligence, the Mukhabarat, and various other documents.

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[17] Makiya 2004.

The Iraq Memory Foundation rests on the premise that we're not going to be able to overcome our own victimhood unless we acknowledge what happened to us in the past. But this is not a question of who suffered most. The beginning of wisdom in Iraq is the realisation that the regime victimised *everyone* and implicated everyone in its own criminality (they were really artists at doing that). If you start from there you have a humbler sense of who you are, as opposed to waving the flag of your own victimhood and assuming that that gives you entitlements in politics. Acknowledging our own victimhood as Iraqis of every sect and every national group is the beginning of wisdom because it creates a humbler and more realistic sense of who we are and what, in certain conditions, we are all capable of doing to one another.

Democracy is an answer to the question of our deeply fragile nature as human beings. John Stuart Mill pointed out that we are always going to be different from one another and that is beautiful; it is what makes us human beings. Once we accept *that* then we need a system that builds difference into its ways of working. We need a system that acknowledges our capacity to be wrong and which allows the clash of different points of view to be resolved in non-violent ways. If you accept elections as a process then you have implicitly accepted your frailty as a human being. No one man, woman, party, organisation, or sect can ever know exactly what's best for everyone. So we need some system that sifts through people's firmly held opinions and works them out somehow and is acceptable to everyone.

Building our identity upon our intrinsically frail nature as human beings is new in Arab political culture. We have lived through the bombastic rhetoric and the heroic mythology of Arab nationalism, Ba'athism, and Islamism. The Islamists offer a different set of references and heroes but offer the same romanticised heroic sense of the past and who one is. But this is exactly what a democratic culture cannot be built upon. Of course, there will always be organisations, ideas, individuals with those views, but it is crucial that society, by and large and as a whole, believes that theirs is not the way forward. The war going on in Iraq is, at one very important level, about that.

The Iraq Memory Foundation makes it impossible to think, study, and write about the last 35 years in Iraq without passing through this mountain of documents that reveal all the microscopic ways in which power was wielded to control and terrorise people. The IMF also makes films of the testimony of victims for Iraqi television. You see, scholars are needed to sift, summarise, index and analyse the documents, and all that takes an enormous amount of time, but televised testimonies and DVDs are immediate and accessible. We conduct long interviews with individuals and create two formats. One is the 10 minute format which is aired on TV on a daily basis. These are very 'popular' – that is they win large viewing audiences. The second is a four-hour version that represents the archival/scholarly version that will one day be accessible and searchable through the same database as the millions of pages of documents that we have already digitised. This version, we hope, will eventually be cross-indexed against the documents.

The dream is to create a facility in central Baghdad where a citizen could walk in and find anything we have in a digital archive. We also have a website [www.iraqmemory.org] and we've been deeded a huge site in central Baghdad (about which, by the way, I wrote a book 15 years ago titled *The Monument*). We're trying to come up with an idea for the transformation of that site into a museum, an archive, a library, with offices for NGOs dealing with similar issues, and so on. The IMF is very much a long term project dealing with culture; it is not about political polemics in the present.

Johnson*: One critic has worried that the IMF archives, which include intelligence files, are outside the purview of either the outside authorities or the Iraqi government. Is it a problem that a private foundation holds intelligence documents?*

Makiya: First, we've been arguing for a law that governs access to these documents which, I agree, should not be made available in an irresponsible way, or simply thrown on the web. There are huge privacy considerations. We've tried to work with the Gauck commission, as it's called, that holds the Stasi files in Berlin. That too was started as an NGO – a Pastor and his flock occupied the offices of the Stasi and saved the documents. Because there was a stable federal republic of

Germany the documents were controlled by a commission of the German government and the head of this commission is voted by parliament once every five years. We don't have that kind of political stability in Iraq at the moment. Instead we function through a government order that gives us permission to do what we're doing. We're seeking an order from within the parliament to legitimise our work. Unlike the political parties that took these documents illegally and kept them, we took ours with permissions along the way: CPA permission, Interim Iraqi Government's permission, the lease with the Mayoralty of Baghdad, and so on. We've been absolutely transparent about all this throughout.

Second, it is wiser at this point in time for this activity to be outside the hurly burly of Iraqi politics, at least until the structures of democracy and law are set in place. Then, yes, perhaps they will pass on, or perhaps there will be a special law that will govern the relation of the government to such an NGO-like organisation. But we have been leading in this debate while no-one else is even aware of the problem. We have identified the problem, held conferences with experts about it, talked to the Europeans who have similar experiences to ours, and so on.

Part 9: Replying to Critics

Johnson: *The late Edward Said viewed you as a kind of philosopher king to the 'neoconservatives', a fig-leaf used to cover up Bush's real intentions: grabbing oil, defending Israel, getting revenge for his dad, the new imperialism, and so on. Noam Chomsky circulated seven single-spaced pages calling you 'a consummate liar.'[18] In a nutshell, the charge is that you are a shill for imperialism. How do you respond?*

Makiya: I've reached a point where I don't even bother to reply to such critics. They are just not serious people any more; they are expressions of failure, inactivity, and irresponsibility, rather than critics of substance with serious ideas. My case has always rested on an Iraqi perspective, on

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[18] See Ahmad 1993.

what is in the best interests of the 25 million or so people of Iraq. That's very important and something that people don't often see. It was the best thing that ever happened to me when I shed those kinds of abstract rubrics which for so many years enabled me to hide from the defence of Iraqi interests as I saw them. Abstract categories like 'anti-imperialism' and 'anti-Zionism' concealed behind them a cover-up for terrible things that were taking place inside Iraq, things that are implicitly condoned by people like Said. I can't engage in that kind of obfuscation any more. The be-all and end-all of politics for me is tyranny and totalitarian dictatorship. That was the theme of *Republic of Fear* and it was the main theme of *Cruelty and Silence.*

When there is abuse of human beings, there is no longer *any* philosophical or political argument that I can tolerate listening to if it justifies or somehow legitimates the continuation of that abuse. If there is any course of action that can diminish or eradicate the sources of that abuse from the world it seems to me that the high moral ground of politics is to call for it. And the left, by no longer doing so, has really lost its place in the world, and that is a sad thing and something I deplore. These accusations about Bush and the so-called neo-cons (a phrase, by the way, that I don't think has any clear meaning) conceal a failure on the part of people like Said to understand that human suffering is orders of magnitude more important than how much they like or dislike the US or the person of Bush, or even whether one likes this or that position of the United States. If I can reduce the amount of human suffering in the world by even a jot, if it is possible to demonstrate that overall suffering has been reduced, then the right position in politics is always to be for that reduction.

Johnson: *And are you still confident that a 'cost benefit analysis' would show a reduction of suffering in Iraq?*

Makiya: Yes. Ask Iraqis themselves. 14 million people voted [in the December 2005 poll). Every day the media inundates us with images of terrorist attacks and gore. But in a whole slew of polls 70-80 per cent of Iraqis are still shown to be 'optimistic' about the future! That's a remarkable statistic. One needs to ask what it means. What does it say about what

they came out of to be so optimistic about the future at this moment?

Things may very well continue to go wrong in Iraq. But the beginning of wisdom is to realise that today there is hope and the possibility of a future, where there was none before. Hope means you have a chance to change yourself for the better; you are now acting upon your own world and trying to shape it. That it's complicated and difficult, that you're like a child who doesn't know how to walk, that you're inexperienced in this because you've not been allowed to do it for 35 years, yes, all of this is true. You will stumble and make many mistakes as a consequence; this is also true. But you are a human being again precisely because the world of politics has in some small way begun to be reclaimed by you.

Johnson: *The historian Simon Schama has argued that you ignore the power and reach of religious fundamentalism and, as a consequence, have been consistently overly optimistic. He said, 'I was moved by Makiya's crucial point where he said it's patronising to the Arabs to say they're not ready for democracy. But there was one little big word missing, and that was religion. He didn't talk about it at all.' Bill Moyers quipped that '[Makiya] really does believe we're about to have a drive-through war on the road to democracy.' Schama argued democracy was not going to happen in Iraq because, after all, 'how many Makiyas are there?'[19] Knowing what you know now, would you concede the force of some of these criticisms?*

Makiya: Let me answer that on several levels. First, if you look at a book like *Republic of Fear* carefully, it is actually a pessimistic account of Iraqi society and polity. I talk about the damage done to society in such a way that it's hard to emerge from it as a rosy idealist…

Johnson*: … I re-read the book before the interview. I was struck by its portrait of an entire society degraded by the totalitarian experience at the cultural and psychological, as well as political, levels. That terrible legacy is going to take many years to overcome.*

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[19] Schama 2003.

Makiya: Yes. So perhaps when I turned from writing that book to political action, I said things that were not strictly speaking the right sort of formulations...

Johnson: ...when you said the troops would be greeted with 'sweets and flowers'?

Makiya: Yes. That is a good example. But look, democracy is not made because there are an awful lot of people with Makiya-type education. It's made by ordinary men and women with their little purple fingers. And they don't go to vote on the basis of abstract texts. It is ordinary men and women who make everything possible. Had there been a hundred Makiyas or one Makiya it wouldn't have made a vast amount of difference.

But in one sense I can accept a grain of truth in what Schama and Moyers say. In moments of great historic change, which is obviously what Iraq has been through, the leadership question becomes all important. Trotsky called it 'the subjective factor' in politics. So much hinges upon the emergence of a leadership able to draw together large numbers of people with a language that enables them to rise above their particular self-interest. Leadership is different from democracy in the broad sense. People like me were arguing for such a leadership to emerge. But Schama is right. It didn't emerge, or rather, it has not emerged yet. Our leaders are not total failures but they are certainly not up to the challenge of the historical moment. They have played with sectarian politics, for instance, as shown by recent events.

But Schama, of all people, should know that even religion is capable of change. Perhaps, here or there, I underestimated the strength of the confessional forces and the identity politics that emerged. I accept that criticism. But Islam is in motion and in flux. Surely Schama is not saying I should not have sought Saddam's overthrow just because there was a danger of religious forces rising to the surface? The fact of the liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein by the United States is of such enormous importance for the politics of the region that it is not possible to judge today whether or not democratic reforms will take root in the Arab world. At least there is a chance where there was not before. Perhaps

there will even begin to emerge among Muslim thinkers and activists a new sense of what religion is, or what it ought to be. This might not happen overnight. It might not even happen in five years. But the fact is that the beginning of politics in Iraq was made possible through this act of another country, and that is something bound to register in Iraqi political consciousness and amongst politicians of every religious stripe down the line.

Johnson: *What you are working on at the moment?*

Makiya: I am working on three things. First, a continuing critique of the constitution, with a view to helping influence its redrafting. Second, I am going to write a book about post-2003 Iraq. It will be an attempt to think through some of the big political questions that have been posed by this transformation. Third, most of my effort is still directed to building the Iraqi Memory Foundation and making sure it survives despite the hurly burly of politics in Iraq in the coming years.

Postscript: November 2007

Alan Johnson: *A couple of years on, in what ways would you update your views about the Iraq intervention?*

Kanan Makiya: It remains in 2007 what it was in 2003: a war of liberation from tyranny. However, the outcome of that war has gone horribly wrong. The measure for that is the daily death toll in Iraq, and the effective collapse of central government. No explanation that lays all the blame on the United States and Britain for what has gone wrong can possibly be adequate. Since the formal end of the occupation in the summer of 2004, the responsibility has shifted from the failures of the Bush administration to the much bigger failures of the new Iraqi political elite created by the 2003 intervention. The problem is political, a crisis of leadership you could say.

But the question that all thoughtful persons must now be asking themselves is: is there more to it than that? Could it be that a society of 25 million people that has endured

the kind of tyranny that Iraqis have endured since 1968 – a tyranny that worked by implicating its victims in its own criminality – could simply not be expected to make the transition to a better, perhaps even more democratic, way of life as smoothly as democratic activists like myself had allowed ourselves to hope? What really happened to society and political identity under the Ba'ath? The violence that was previously restricted to Saddam's policing and repressive bureaucracies has today been 'democratized'; it is coming from the bottom up rather than from the top down. To be sure, insurgents and militia leaders are responsible. But why are there so many of them? And why do they wield power so much greater than that of the elected government? What is happening to the state?

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Chapter 4

Interrogating *Terror and Liberalism*: An Interview with Paul Berman

Paul Berman is the author of *Terror and Liberalism* (2003), one of the most influential post-9/11 books about the nature of the Islamist threat. He has written about politics and literature for *The New York Times Magazine, The New Republic, The New Yorker, The Village Voice,* and *Mother Jones*, and is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (1997), and *Power and the Idealists, Or, The Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (2005). He is a contributing editor of the *New Republic*, a member of the editorial board of *Dissent*, an advisory editor of *Democratiya*, and a writer in residence at New York University. The interview took place on May 24, 2006.

Personal and Intellectual Background

Alan Johnson: In an interview with Brian Lamb for BookTV you talked about your 'social democratic heart'.[1] How did you acquire one of those? Can you tell me about your family and early experiences?

Paul Berman: I come from a typical New York Jewish background. My family came to America as immigrants more than a century ago and worked in the garment industry. My grandfather, who was a factory tailor, was active in building his trade union and he took part in the socialist movement, too, on its more conservative side. I grew up naturally identifying with the labour movement and the democratic left. In college I was active in the New Left, which was a lot more radical. Now I find I am reverting to the politics of my grandfather, who, it now seems to me, had a lot of wisdom.

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[1] Berman 2003c.

Johnson: What movements or thinkers have been especially influential for you?

Berman: During the course of the new left, a great number of people veered off rebelliously in Leninist directions of various sorts – to Maoism or Trotskyism or old-line Moscow communism. But I rebelled against the rebels. I found myself fascinated by an entirely different wing of the old left, the Anarchists, at a point when, in New York, any number of my comrades took up a nostalgic cult of the old American Communist Party. The old working class Anarchists of New York had created an organisation innocently, and rather cautiously, called The Libertarian Book Club. The club contained a number of people who had participated in the Russian Revolution. There were people who had gone to Spain during the Civil War, and there were a lot of Wobblies around. I got to know those people.

Johnson: What were the most important ideas you took from that milieu?

Berman: What drew me to that milieu was a revulsion against the Leninist passions that were claiming so much of the New Left. I always thought of the New Left as an anti-authoritarian movement, and suddenly here were too many of my friends and comrades drifting in an ever more authoritarian direction. The old-time anarchists, on the other hand, exuded a spirit and culture that was inherently libertarian. They had a whole literature – a very bitter literature – on the Soviet Union, and their criticism of Communism was at once philosophical and practical. There was also available, in New York, beginning in the 1960s, a serious anarchist criticism of Castro from the writings of exiled Cuban Anarchists in Argentina and Miami. In the old anarchist circles, you could learn about the firing squads and the prisons.

There was something of a 'high culture' spirit among the Anarchists. They took writing and literature seriously and this, too, was attractive to me. And from still another point of view there was a certain reasonableness to them, believe it or not. Of course, some of those old militants were pretty extreme – there was a fairly wild group of Italians, among others – yet a good many were affiliated with the old social democrats in

New York. The Jewish anarchist newspaper was supported by the garment workers union – my grandfather's union, the old social democrats of the labour movement. So those old anarchists were not as cut off from the institutions and spirit of American liberalism as you might imagine. All this gave me a good education, and I learnt how someone could be genuinely independent and indifferent to the opinions of the great majority. The old Anarchists in New York were brave – anti-Castro on one hand, and opposed to the gangsters in their own unions on the other hand. And they were indifferent to the rest of the left – really, to everybody: faithful only to their own judgments and opinions – and I found this really inspiring. I learnt a habit of independence of mind, or I like to think that I did.

Johnson: *In the 1980s you travelled to Nicaragua to report on the Sandinista Revolution. Did this independence of mind shape your reporting?*

Berman: I travelled to Nicaragua many times, beginning in 1985 at the invitation of *Mother Jones* magazine. I went there with a journalistic idea that drew on both the old anarchist notion of workers' autonomy and the 'history from below' school of Marxist and Marxist-influenced historians such as E.P. Thompson, Herbert Gutman, and David Montgomery. I had read pretty widely in these historians, and I went to Nicaragua precisely with the idea of studying the revolution from the bottom up.

I spent a lot of time in Masaya, a provincial industrial town in the eighteenth-century style, which had been the original home of the revolution against the Somoza dictatorship. Shoe-making is a big industry in Masaya and I became friends with some of the shoemakers who had played their part in the revolution. I began to look at events from their point of view – to see the revolution 'from below'.

But I found myself in an odd situation. On the one hand I was writing some of the most classically left-wing journalism (in my own eyes) to come out of Nicaragua – I was talking to workers' organisations and telling the story from their point

of view.[2] On the other hand, telling the story from the point of view of the Masaya workers did not put the Sandinistas in a flattering light. It took me a little while to realise that the Sandinistas were running a version of a Leninist revolution and that they had created a system of top-down oppression which descended all the way into workplaces, cooperatives, homes, neighbourhoods and schools. And this system was resented by a lot of people – the same people who had been at the forefront of the revolution against the Somoza dictatorship.

This was a big story – I had stumbled onto a Central American Kronstadt. But I was a little timid at first about arriving at conclusions that were at odds with those of so many friends and comrades. When I became more confident I found that I had become very unpopular among a great many people, and this was a little daunting. I found myself encouraged by some of the old Anarchists back in New York. A friend went to see my old Wobbly friend and mentor, Sam Dolgoff, not too long before his death, in the late 1980s. Sam asked about me, and when he was told that I had gone to Nicaragua and was reporting on the Sandinistas, he said, 'He better not come back liking them.'

Part 1: *Terror and Liberalism*

Johnson: Terror and Liberalism has been one of the most influential books published since 9/11.[3] What were your goals in writing that book?

Berman: At one level I was trying to interpret the events of September 11th. At a deeper level I was proposing an interpretation of modern history. The whole of the interpretation is really contained in the title – there is a dialectic between terror and liberalism. I offer a theory of terror – drawing some aspects from Camus – that sees terror as an expression of a larger idea, which can be described as totalitarianism, admittedly a vexed label. Totalitarianism

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[2] See Marshall 2005.

[3] Berman 2003a.

is a rebellion against liberal civilisation and the liberal idea – an anti-liberal rebellion generated by liberalism itself. Sometimes the rebellion is generated by liberalism's strengths and sometimes by liberalism's shortcomings. The rise of liberalism over the last few centuries, and the rebellions that have been inspired by that rise, account for the rise of the great totalitarian movements – that's the theoretical idea expressed in the book. It's a pretty simple idea, in the end. I don't think that my simple idea explains everything in the world. But it does explain some things.

My other purpose was to look at the modern Muslim world through this kind of lens and so bring it into world history and not exclude it. I looked for things that might be recognisable in the Muslim world as opposed to things that were utterly foreign. And I found this relationship between liberal civilisation and totalitarian rebellion. I found the modernity of our current situation. Other people were imagining that we were facing some anthropological exoticism from the long-ago past, or something that might just as well have come from outer space. I was able to show that, on the contrary, we were facing a modern and recognisable phenomenon which was different, but not all that different, from what we knew from the history of modern Europe.

Johnson: What is common to the Muslim totalitarianism of today and the European totalitarianism of yesterday?

Berman: First, an underlying mythology: people of good who are oppressed by a cosmic conspiracy which is external and internal at the same time; an all-exterminating war of annihilation; and, after that war, the arrival of a utopia that is a leap forward into the sci-fi future, yet, at the same time, a leap back into a lost golden age. This kind of mythology underlies all the totalitarian movements, in one fashion or another. Second, I thought a lot about Camus' insight that the romantic rebellions of the late 18th century and early 19th century were caught up in a frenzy which became a form of nihilism – a cult of death, murder and suicide. Camus described a strange process that has overtaken one movement after another – the movement begins as a conventional rebellion in the name of principles that can be admired and for reasons that can be understood and

applauded, but is then overtaken by a nihilistic cult of murder and suicide.[4]

It is the combination of these two things – the nihilist cult of murder and suicide on the one hand, the paranoid and utopian mythology on the other hand – that has created the great totalitarian movements. Stalinism, fascism, and Nazism offer variations of this phenomenon. But we ought to be able to see that the Ba'athism of Iraq and the more radical currents of Islamism are likewise variations. They arose in the same period – the 1920s and 1930s – but were a little slower than their European cousins in coming to power. In 1979 Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini both came to power, in Iraq and Iran respectively, and once they established their power, they began to bring about in the Muslim world the same phenomenon that we had seen in Europe: a wave of mass killings. One of the shocking aspects of the modern world is how vast has been the killing within certain sections of the Muslim world within the last quarter century. There appears to be literally millions of people killed. My interpretation in *Terror and Liberalism* was that the terrorist attacks of September 11 – like those in London and Madrid and other places more recently – ought not to be seen as isolated events. They ought to be seen as the foam from a larger wave. The great mass of the wave has swept across the Muslim world. A few flecks of foam have reached New York and London and other places. The really devastated places have been Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and so on. By looking at these Muslim events with an eye to the totalitarian past of Europe we can get them into focus a little more clearly. At the same time we can begin to recognise some of our own difficulties in understanding what is going on.

Johnson*: We have a tendency to treat pathological mass movements as rational political movements with grievances that can be negotiated. In 2004, Mo Mowlam (the former and much-loved Labour Cabinet Minister for Northern Ireland, who died tragically in 2005) proposed that the government sit down with al-Qaeda at the negotiating table just as she had sat down*

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[4] Camus 1962.

with Sinn Fein. How can we explain the 'rationalist naiveté' shared by 'almost every part of modern liberal society'?

Berman: Rationalist naivety is built into liberal civilisation and the liberal idea. Liberalism proposes that people *should* act rationally and that we *want* to act rationally. Liberalism's first step is to agree that we want to make a division in our own minds and imaginations between the rational and the theological. We agree to say, 'Well, we may have religious ideas, we may believe in divine revelation, we may believe anything we want, in one corner of our minds, but in another corner we are going to try to think things through rationally, according to criteria that can be judged and evaluated and contradicted.' Then we agree to make this division in society as a whole – the church will stay in this corner and the state will remain in that corner, and each will remain independent of the other. We hope that by doing this the state will be able to make rational decisions no matter what the advocates of divine revelation may say. The advocates of divine revelation are free to say what they want but they will say it in the church. The whole presupposition is that by allowing there to be a sphere of rational thought and behaviour we will be able to have a more successful society. And, on balance, the ways this has worked out well have outweighed the ways in which it has worked out badly.

But the liberal idea makes us very reluctant to believe that *anyone* is acting in a non-rational way. In the most naïve version it is imagined that nobody *really* acts in an irrational way. There are two consequences of this kind of naivety that are worth commenting on.

First, it is itself one of the sources of the rebellion against liberalism. There is something appalling, or at least deeply unsatisfying, in the idea that men and women are strictly rational. So people are always tempted to rebel against it. The romantic writers were the first modern people to see and rebel against the rational calculations of liberal society. They rebelled in the form of literature, which is the right way to rebel, but they saw something, and they were *right* to see it and to rebel against it.

Second, the liberal idea comes at a terrible cost in political

understanding. In the pre-modern age the rational and the irrational could *both* be understood. It was possible to think and to speak about such things as the soul in political terms, and to think about the distortions and perversions of the soul. This became impossible after the rise of liberalism as political language became impoverished. If you read Plato, his idea of tyranny is very different from a modern liberal idea of tyranny. For Plato, tyranny is not a system based on bad institutions. It's a perversion of the soul. The tyrant is someone who has lost the proper discipline over his soul and so is lost to his appetites and desires. There is even a fleeting passage or two where Plato mentions that the tyrant might succumb to an appetite for cannibalism. This is amazing to see because it means Plato has already identified a cult of death as a temptation, one of the possible perversions of the soul that can take place. This is *exactly* the kind of thing that – after the rise of liberal ideas – it became harder for people to understand. We took all the questions of the soul, and of virtue, and of the perversions of the soul, and removed them to a corner reserved for religion or psychology. In a different corner we assigned political questions.

In the political world, just as in the economic world, we wanted to accord everyone rationality, so we took all the questions of irrationality and put them in a different place entirely. It became very difficult to conceive that people might be behaving in irrational ways or might have succumbed to the allure of a cult of death.

Johnson*: You have written of the 'pathological character of mass movements,' the 'cult of death,' and, more recently, about André Glucksmann's notion of 'self-sustaining hatred'.[5] Are you consciously seeking to overcome the impoverishment of our political language and so make it possible for us to speak again of the irrational?*

Berman: Yes, that is the whole purpose. I want us to recognise that there are other impulses than rational ones, and discuss them. And here, let me discuss the style of *Terror and Liberalism*. I tried to speak about these things in a variety of

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[5] Berman 2005b.

tones and at different emotional levels. It is necessary to find new ways of writing and speaking, different from the social sciences, to express oneself lucidly but with emotion.

Part 2: Interrogating *Terror and Liberalism*

Is Terror and Liberalism politically naïve?

Johnson*: Let's explore some criticisms that have been made of your book* Terror and Liberalism. *The first is that you are politically naïve. Both Danny Postel[6] and Ellen Willis[7] thought the book was marred by a faith in the Bush administration as a force for freedom that was just naïve. Edward S. Herman[8] called you the 'very model of a Cruise Missile Leftist,' because you ignored the fact that 'U.S. liberalism is attached to an advanced, globalised, militarised, capitalist political economy whose material interests might be a more important force shaping its external policies than liberal principles.' 'Berman deals with this,' he said, 'by complete evasion.' Similarly, Kurt Jacobsen[9] suggested that 'the dark but distinct possibility that overtly noble wars …would be conducted according to realpolitik tenets and exploitative aims seems lost on Berman.' 'Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain, Berman admonishes, watch the impressive fireworks and shut up…' George Scialabba listed some US imperialist interventions and complained these were not mentioned in* Terror and Liberalism. [10] *How do you respond?*

Berman: One of the arguments I make in the book is that the totalitarian movements represent something that was originally tried out by Western imperialists in the colonised world and which then swept back over Europe: the Belgian atrocities in the Congo, the German colonisers who set out to exterminate the Herrero tribe, and so on. These were the first steps in what became the totalitarianism of Europe.

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[6] Postel 2003.

[7] Willis 2003.

[8] Herman 2003.

[9] Jacobsen 2003.

[10] Scialabba 2003.

The USA was not exempt from this sort of thing itself, in the Philippines and elsewhere. But US imperialism – if we are to use the word in any kind of reasonably defined sense – has mostly been a story of East Asia and Latin America, not of the Arab world.

In regard to the US I think it is my critics who are naïve. Their naivety takes two forms. First, they embrace Lenin's idea set out in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,* that the Western countries are a bloc oppressing the rest of the world and enriching themselves by impoverishing all non-Western countries. The US is very nearly a single unit (this is Lenin's argument) and everything it does has a single quality – imperialist and oppressive. But this is hard to accept. The United States, like any society, consists of thousands of different currents which go this way and that way, and the actions of the US – both of private individuals and the state – can likewise go this way or that, with many different effects. The same United States which acted so catastrophically and irresponsibly in Guatemala in the 1950s also managed to liberate France and give it back to the French a few years earlier, and defeated the Nazis in order to give Germany back to the Germans. The US is a country which can act this way or that way according to decisions that are made – decisions which can be influenced by the citizens. It's naïve to assume that what the US does is always, simply, by definition, imperialist.

The second kind of naivety is very American; it's a Protestant idea that what matters is our inner soul. If our inner soul is good our outer actions must, by definition, be good. This is a naïve idea in the extreme and the source of a certain kind of American nationalism. The person who expresses this idea with intuitive ease is George W. Bush. He said after the 7/7 bombings, while he was in Britain: 'If they could only see into our hearts they would know how good we are,' and he honestly believes that. He looks into his own heart and believes he is a good man and therefore his policies must be good, and everything the US does must be good. But there is a flip side: 'Well, my own heart is not so good. I see envy, rapacity, greed, lust, therefore I know I am not a good person, therefore nothing the United States does can be good. Everything must be bad.' It is George W. Bushism flipped on

its head. There is a great deal of this. People ask, 'What are we doing trying to fight bad guys in other parts of the world? We should look in our own hearts and see that *we* are bad. Instead of trying to rescue oppressed people in other parts of the world, let us improve our own characters.'

Johnson: *Joschka Fischer said, 'Americans don't play chess.' His thought, I guess, was that there is carelessness in US foreign policy associated with this notion that 'if we are right in our hearts, we can't go wrong.' Does that mentality get in the way of a more prudential policy?*

Berman: Some elements of Fischer's criticism are true – though you can go too far with that criticism very easily. But yes, I think some element of that did enter into the Bush administration's thinking about Iraq. Like everyone I have been dumbfounded at the stupidity of many of the things that have been done, and I struggle to understand how they could have thought things through so poorly. I think there was a simple faith that everything was going to work out for the best. Bush thought his intentions were good in his own heart and therefore the results were going to be good.

One critic accused *Terror and Liberalism* of presenting a Whig view of history, according to which everything gets better and better. No! On the contrary, I think the rise of liberalism contains within itself some horrors. It contains a blindness which leads not only to the inability to recognise the enemies of liberalism, but also an inability to recognise its own crimes. The story of King Leopold in the Congo is of a genocide committed under the slogans of progress. In this fashion, liberalism goes stumbling ahead, sometimes committing crimes, sometimes failing to recognise these crimes, and then inspiring rebellions. The history of liberalism is not a gradual achieving of good but a spiral of progress and horror.

Johnson: *And would it be fair to say that you don't see any point seeking guarantees that the spiral of progress and horror will straighten itself out over time and tend towards the good?*

Berman: It's just not an interesting question. We know that in the meantime millions of people can be slaughtered. And

we have no guarantee that nuclear weapons are not going to go off en masse. To posit the existence of a teleology towards the good is meaningless, and a ridiculous way to think. The whole point of my analysis is to get us to focus on the terrible things that do happen and not on an imaginary steady progress towards the good.

Johnson: Terror and Liberalism *echoed the French democratic socialist Léon Blum's call for an antitotalitarian third force to wage a battle of ideas. Can you explain your thinking?*

Berman: Immediately after 9/11 I wrote the draft of the essay 'Terror and Liberalism', which ran in *The American Prospect*.[11] That essay was completed by September 18. In it I worried about the Bush administration and expressed my fears about a neocon 'romance of the ruthless.' For example, I was worried about Bush's proposed UN ambassador at the moment of 9/11, John Negroponte, because, as a Central America reporter from the 1980s, I remembered his role as Ambassador to Honduras at the time the death squads were appearing. I banged on that particular drum more than once in the period before the invasion of Iraq. And in February 2003 I wrote an article in *The New Republic* that concluded that Bush appeared to be leading us over a cliff.[12] I could see the failure to act in ways calculated to gain political legitimacy, the diplomatic failure, the failure to draw on the precedents from Kosovo, and so on. Excuse me, but I made some of these points earlier and a lot more loudly than some of my critics ever did. Thank God for the Internet – it preserves everything.

In *Terror and Liberalism* I tried to say, 'OK, Bush is screwing things up, and we must warn against what might be the results. But, meanwhile, we want to propose actions of our own. We don't want to just say "no".' In *Terror and Liberalism* I tried to revive the ideas of Léon Blum, the French socialist, from the 1940s. He proposed what in the US would be called cold-war liberalism, but was in his case cold war socialism – my grandfather's position, by the way. Blum wanted to resist

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[11] Berman 2001.
[12] Berman 2003b.

the Communists, but he wanted to do it from the left not the right, in the belief that a left-wing opposition was bound to be more effective. Therefore he supported the socialists, the social democrats, and the trade unionists, and he opposed Communism by being in favour of democratic reforms. *Terror and Liberalism* aimed to revive that sort of idea, in regard to defeating Ba'athism and Islamism. People who criticised this idea described it as 'liberalism for Bush,' but it was never that. It was a call for a Third Force.

We recognised that the Bush administration was not going about things correctly, and we called for a Third Force and a war of ideas. We understood that totalitarian movements are fundamentally ideological movements and there is no way we can defeat such movements with police or military force. We must convince its adherents and sympathisers that the ideas of that movement are wrong and ought to be abandoned in favour of better ideas. Now this sounds preposterous to some people who can't imagine that anything can be won by the force of persuasion. But what finally caused Communism to collapse was that the Communists themselves recognised that they were wrong and that their own ideas were not worth defending. The possibility of crushing the Islamist movements by force does not exist – we have to win by persuasion. That means the central thing that should be going on is a war of ideas – even if, at times, there is also a need for a war of weapons.

The left and the intellectuals in the Western countries ought to throw themselves into this battle of ideas. But look what is actually happening. The left, in its great majority, has remained unengaged. It conducts itself as if its only struggle is with Bush. You can see this in the last couple of months in the rise of tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme. The more Ahmadinejad threatens to obliterate Israel and build nuclear weapons the more people around the world write about…Bush! 'Oh, no! What is *Bush* going to do?' As if the problem here was Bush! Bush may well be a problem, but the first problem has surely got to be Ahmadinejad.

The crucial place for this war of ideas, by the way, is Europe. In so much of the Arab world, and Iran, it is very difficult to have a serious debate because the conditions don't exist.

In Europe they do. And in Europe there is a vast Arab and Muslim population. In fact, many of the underlying ideas of radical Islamism, Ba'athism, and radical Pan-Arabism were *European* ideas to begin with. So a very forceful debate should be taking place in London, Paris, Berlin and Madrid. We see a right-wing version of this debate in which there is prejudice and racism against Muslims and against an ancient and noble religion, Islam, and this only bolsters the Ba'athist and Islamist arguments. Where is the left-wing anti-totalitarian contribution to this debate? It's as if a unilateral intellectual disarmament has taken place on the part of the liberal left.[13]

Totalitarian movements have regularly been greeted by the blindness to which liberalism is prone, and even by apologetics. Hitler as well as Stalin had his apologists. Without these apologists, neither would have been able to get as far as he did. Today, there are only a few screwballs defending al-Qaeda, or Zarqawi in Iraq, or applauding Saddam. But the people who really matter are those (more numerous) who find some way to say either that these totalitarian movements are natural and rational or, in any case, that they should be ignored because we should focus our attention on defeating Bush. In these ways, the adherents of the totalitarian movements are not given much opposition and sometimes they are even given back-handed support. So, naturally, the movements prosper.

Johnson*: In the meantime, the Muslim democrats who desperately need our support are often ignored. There are very few solidarity movements with these beleaguered people.*

Berman: Exactly. And you and I both know that there is nothing more fashionable than to look at some Iraqi liberal democrat and sneer. People will even sneer at Afghani liberals. If I say, 'Hamad Karzai is making a good effort,' the initial response will be to say, 'Tsk, he only rules three blocks in Kabul!', and leave it at that. The situation in Iraq is really shocking. The trade unionists have suffered terribly, many have been killed. One certainly cannot say they have received enough support from their fellow thinkers in the West. I think

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[13] See Berman 2007.

that is just a shocking scandal. The kind of journals that used to publish Havel, Michnik, and the other dissidents of the Eastern Bloc will not have anything to do with the dissidents of Iraq and of the Arab world. We do see some rallying to the democrats in Iraq and Iran – people like you and me are not entirely isolated on these matters. So the picture is mixed. But overall, it's pretty terrible.

Does Terror and Liberalism present a simplistic intellectual history of Islam?

Johnson*: Hamid Algar, in a letter in* The New York Times, *argued that you had 'failed to show any line of filiation from Qutb, executed in 1966, to al-Qaeda' and that you exemplified a tendency to 'conflate into a malevolent blur all Muslims regarded as troublesome.'[14] Stephen Schwartz claimed to find in your book 'an Islam completely without nuance,' alleging you had 'made no effort to place Qutb in the context of the diverse intellectual trends and developments in Islamic history.'[15] How do you respond?*

Berman: In regard to Stephen Schwartz's criticism, I don't write about Islam at all. I only write about Islam*ism*. I assume that Islam, like the other great religions, is a huge piano keyboard on which one could play this tune or that. Islam isn't the cause of the problem. Islam is the *setting* of the problem. Islam has offered a language for the totalitarian movements, but an antitotalitarian language could just as easily be drawn out of Islam, and is by some people. Schwartz is complaining that I do not do something that I did not set out to do.

As regards Hamid Algar – one of Qutb's translators and a great admirer of Qutb – I think it's a pretty conventional view that Qutb is a master-thinker for al-Qaeda. With all due respect to Algar, I don't think that part of my book is controversial. I make the point myself that Qutb worked out a lot of theories, that it was a long time ago (he was hanged in 1966) and that the line from Qutb to al-Qaeda is not necessarily straight.

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[14] Algar 2003.

[15] Schwartz 2003.

And yes, Qutb does say some things that are more moderate at some points. But still, I think al-Qaeda has a pretty good claim to be faithful to the inspiration that you find in Qutb, even if it's the case that other people have drawn from Qutb without being wild extremists.

Does Terror and Liberalism ignore the material causes of Islamist totalitarianism?

Johnson*: Some critics argue that you ignore the material causes of Muslim (and every other) totalitarianism. According to Kurt Jacobsen, '[Berman] writes as if religion or ideology alone dictates action,' ignores 'underlying political or economic drives,' and so 'narrows our buzzing, blooming confusion down tidily to one factor, those darned pathological mass movements.'[16] George Scialabba argued that you explained totalitarian mass movements as a 'mysterious upwelling of hatred for liberal values,' and asked, '[w]ere there no predisposing material influences?'[17] Ellen Willis suggested that you failed to explain the roots of totalitarianism because your 'framework for discussing the totalitarian impulse is moral and literary.'[18] How do you respond?*

Berman: There is a tremendous error in modern social and political thinking which is to fail to see that ideas have a force entirely of their own: the materialist error. When Marx says we make our own history but not in circumstances of our own choosing, there is a temptation to focus *all* of our attention on the circumstances – the material conditions that shape what people think and do. Yes, ideas, and the movements that draw on ideas, are shaped by material conditions but, nonetheless, ideas have an independent role. Sidney Hook made this argument very persuasively in *The Hero in History* where he explained that the greatest disproof of Marx's theory of historical materialism is the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution itself.[19] Everyone who has examined that revolution closely, beginning with the Bolsheviks themselves, recognised that

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[16] Jacobsen 2003.

[17] Scialabba 2003.

[18] Willis 2003.

[19] Hook 1943.

the Revolution would not have taken place without Lenin. If you've got one of the biggest events in world history and it would not have happened if one man had been removed, then historical materialism is not enough to explain great events. It can explain some things but it is not sufficient. Among the things that it can't explain is the independent role of ideas in history. The twentieth century is an illustration of that. The rise of Communism, then the collapse of Communism, took place, above all, in the history of ideas. Communist ideas arose because they were very powerful and appeared to be very convincing. And they were defeated intellectually, not militarily. The Eastern bloc did not collapse out of material poverty. It collapsed out of intellectual poverty.

Yes, the rise of mass Islamist movements has been conditioned by immigration, sociological events, economic displacements, and so on. And I am in favour of other people analysing those things. I am aware of the work of Gilles Kepel and others. But I don't think those analyses can suffice. There remains this other factor: the force of an idea which carries people along – in part, because of its intellectual strength. Qutb is a marvelous writer and a wonderful thinker, a brilliant person whose books are engrossing. If he wasn't and they weren't then the movement he helped to inspire would be a lot weaker. That's why we need to fight, finally, on the plane of ideas – to argue against this writer and his books and their independent history. This factor is systematically omitted because we are ourselves in the grip of this rationalist naiveté and this materialist error. If we imagine that material factors (economic and sociological facts) are the only thing to consider, then we make the mistake of thinking that everything that happens is rationally explicable…

Johnson: *…and that we don't need to pay any attention to the specific ideological complexion of particular movements because it's all just a surface reflection of something deeper…*

Berman: …yes, but it's more than that. The rationalist presumption also causes us to distort those ideas by converting them into ideas that we find recognisable. We end up saying, 'It's not true that Hamas has encouraged a cult of suicide and murder. People in the West Bank and Gaza are engaging in suicide bombing because they lack water

rights, or because the Peace Plan offered by Clinton created a border which was inadequate.' In other words, we end up attributing to people ideas that are not *theirs*, but which fit *our* assumption that everyone acts in accord with a rational calculation of their material interests.

The same thing has been happening in regard to Iraq. A lot of people assume the Sunni insurgency is a natural Iraqi nationalist reaction to foreign occupiers. But there is nothing natural about it! The vast majority of the Iraqi people do not support the insurgency. In fact the insurgency has been engaged in a programme of mass indiscriminate extermination of Shiites – that is, of *Iraqis*. There is nothing rational about that, and it is not a 'nationalist' response to occupation. It has to do with a very different and much more alarming set of ideas. We fail to perceive the ideas that are at work. Instead, we attribute to these people ideas they do not have, but which we find easy to comprehend. This happens systematically and arises, in part, from the liberal rationalist and materialist assumptions of modern social science.

Johnson*: You recently reviewed Francis Fukuyama's new book,* America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy.[20] *I found it an excellent book in many ways, but I did think Islamism was disappearing from view…*

Berman: …*ideas* disappeared from view! That's also true of *The End of History*. Fukuyama wants to talk about structures – economic structures, social structures, psychological structures. He systematically neglects the independent role of ideas. I think he is typical of many modern thinkers. We have a real problem. While Bush thinks that force, inadequately deployed, plus advertising in a kind of Madison Avenue spirit, is enough, Bush's opponents seem to agree with him that there is nothing to *argue about*. Bush's critics are not talking about movements animated by ideas either.

Does Terror and Liberalism offer an anachronistic history?

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[20] Berman 2006.

Johnson: Joshua Micah Marshall has argued that your book is anachronistic because you 'lay the template of fascism and anti-fascist commitment onto the current reality of fanatical Islamic terrorism and Arab nationalist authoritarianism.' In his view, while the existential threat of a terror network getting a WMD is real enough, Islamism is 'hardly the kind of ideological or political threat that great totalitarianisms posed a half a century ago.' You risk lulling us into a dangerous grandiosity by viewing Islamism through 'the distorting prism of our grandparents' world.'[21] How do you respond?

Berman: Look, if you got up tomorrow morning and learned that a gigantic bomb had destroyed a major capital in the Western world you would not be surprised. You would be horrified but you would not be surprised. Now, if we all know that millions of people could be killed tomorrow then we make a big mistake in thinking we are not facing an existential threat. The threat from the radical Islamists is different from the threat from Nazis and Communists, yes. And it's obviously the case that Ahmadinejad's fantasy that the whole world will convert to Islam has a singularly unconvincing quality. But we face terrorism of a nihilist kind, *different to anything we have faced before.* Brezhnev was never going to launch a nuclear war out of destructive zeal (though perhaps we delude ourselves in thinking that the cold war had to end in the peaceful way that it did end).

Some respond by saying, 'They do not desire to kill millions of people.' But there *is* such a desire. We know the goal of the 1993 Trade Center bombing was to topple the buildings over, and, by setting off a domino effect, to kill 250,000 people. They admitted that. What's standing between that kind of intention and mass killing, apart from our security systems, is just the failure thus far of those who hold the intention to come up with a clever enough idea to achieve it. It seems to me we can't bank on that lack of imagination for long.

Joshua Micah Marshall's kind of objection rests, I think, on an assumption that Islamist terrorism should be compared to the kind of terrorism that was widespread in Western

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[21] Marshall 2003.

Europe in the last thirty years – IRA, RAF, ETA, and so on. But that threat was not existential. Islamist terrorism is. The Islamist threat is not that some hundreds of people will be killed, or even that once every so often they will get 'lucky,' and kill some thousands. In the Muslim world the victims of totalitarian movements have been in the *millions*. In the Western countries we have experienced a few flecks of foam from that wave. So it is easy to imagine that that is all we will *ever* experience. Many find it impossible to grasp that one day the victims here could be in the millions. But from the non-West to the West is not such a great distance. Sometimes the two places are the same place. It's a fantasy to think we can weigh the terrorist threat we face in the West without considering this background in the Muslim countries.

Something ought to bother us, too, in the nonchalance of Marshall's claim that Islamism is 'hardly the kind of ideological or political threat that great totalitarianisms posed a half a century ago.' How many victims does he want? Algeria, the Sudan, Afghanistan…those places are already at a level Europe lived through. Here is the liberal blindness.

Is Terror and Liberalism a neoconservative text?

Johnson*: Reviewing* Terror and Liberalism *in* The New York Review of Books*, Ian Buruma likened you to 'the quiet American in Graham Greene's novel, the man of principle who causes mayhem, without quite realising why.' He found it 'hard to distinguish [Berman] from the more radical neoconservatives, whose mentors under Reagan mixed up Straussian conservatism with the revolutionary zeal of their Trotskyist origins'.[22] How do you respond?*

Berman: Buruma also wrote that I had jumped on the Bush bandwagon. His charge of zealotry only makes sense if that is true. I think he read some parts of my book, and skipped other parts. I thought it was a good idea to overthrow Saddam; and I thought that Bush was going about it in the wrong way: we needed a third force. Buruma did not want to acknowledge

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[22] Buruma 2003.

the second part of that statement. Still, I should add that, in his book *Occidentalism,* he and his co-author, Avishai Margalit, produced a very valuable little study – useful and insightful in many ways, even if they never told us what to do about the problem that they discussed.[23]

Part 3: The Lessons of the Iraq War

Johnson*: 'The invasion of Iraq was a tragedy from the start,' you wrote in Power and the Idealists.[24] You note that leftist humanitarian interventionists watched gog-eyed as it unfolded. To take only Bernard Kouchner, we are told he 'fumed' and was 'beside himself', 'dumbfounded', 'amazed' and 'apoplectic'. Your own reaction to the unfolding fiasco was to 'devot[e] most of this past year to composing op-eds, conference papers, Q&As, and statements of every shape and size, and lobbing these things into the pages of newspapers and magazines in some 15 or 20 countries in a one-man campaign to minimise whatever sorry consequences the National Security Strategy and sundry related White House policies might be having on world opinion and events in Iraq.' You set out a vision of what could have been done in Iraq:*

> *We could have presented a human rights case to the world, instead of trying to deceive people about weapons and conspiracies – and we would have ended up with more allies, or, at least, with allies who understood the mission. We could have applied the lessons of Kosovo, which would have meant dispatching a suitable number of soldiers. We could have protected the government buildings and the National Museum, and we could have co-opted Saddam's army – further lessons from Kosovo. We could have believed Saddam when he threatened to wage a guerrilla war in Baghdad. We could have prepared in advance to broadcast TV shows that Iraqis wanted to watch. We could have observed the Geneva Conventions.* (What humiliation in having to write such a sentence!) [25]

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[23] Buruma and Margalit 2004.

[24] Berman 2005a.

[25] Berman 2004.

Is it reasonable to think that that kind of war might have been fought, and could be fought in the future?

Berman: A better intervention was unquestionably possible. Before the war I was arguing to continue in the path of the Kosovo intervention: marshalling the right arguments, doing the diplomacy, assembling the right allies, making adequate plans, recognising what sort of occupation was going to be necessary. Kosovo was not brilliant by any means, but neither was it a total catastrophe. I made those arguments as an observer reading the newspapers. Now we have books like *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, by Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, and it turns out top generals were arguing for precisely that kind of thing – for drawing on the Kosovo model. The criticisms of outside observers like me turn out to have run parallel to criticisms made inside the armed forces. [26]

What is odd is that an ideology as peculiar as Rumsfeld's prevailed. This has not been examined enough. We have heard a lot of discussion about naïve American nationalism, imperialist ambitions and the lust for oil, racism against Arabs – that are said to have determined how the Bush administration proceeded. But what appears to have been critical was a somewhat bizarre doctrine held by Donald Rumsfeld. He applied to military doctrine a set of theories drawn from modern business school theory (stripping down corporations to their minimum personnel on the basis of computer models, this kind of thing). It's called 'military transformation' and the Iraq war has been conducted according to this doctrine. It turns out to have almost wholly inapplicable to situations like Iraq. If we want yet another example of the strange and unpredictable role of ideas in history, here it is. And we now know that many generals were protesting against it.

In regard to the future, of course we are going to be called on to make interventions, and we ought to. Bush has blundered, but it would still be right to intervene in Darfur. There is now a long history of liberal and humanitarian interventions.

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[26] Gordon and Trainor 2006.

Some have gone badly, some so-so, and some pretty well. The struggle we face is fairly simple: to try and do as best we can.

Johnson*: You have criticised neoconservative foreign policy thinking for indulging a 'romance of the ruthless'.[27] What do you mean?*

Berman: The word 'neoconservatism' has become troubling. There are a vast number of fantasies about who 'the neoconservatives' are, what they stand for, and what role they have played. It has reached the point that whenever you read the word you should say it out loud in falsetto, as if a mouse had just run across your foot, otherwise you will not have captured the right tone. At some level I don't like to use the term. Many people who are called neoconservatives, it seems to me, are just Washington operatives who have worked for Republican and Democratic administrations. Some were for the Kosovo intervention, others were against it. To some extent, *there is no ism in the ism*. It's difficult to point to fundamental *texts* of neoconservative doctrine. Where are the books? What distinguishes them from other cliques and factions is a certain intellectual style marked by ruthlessness formed at the University of Chicago, and at *Commentary* magazine. I've been talking about their 'romance of the ruthless' for decades. It was visible in Central America during the Reagan administration – the expectation that a small number of people could be very effective if they acted ruthlessly enough; an over-reliance on military force and proxy armies; a tendency to an apocalyptic hysteria about the danger that Communism in Central America presented to the United States, and so on.

This ruthless style has contributed to the gigantic errors that have been committed in Iraq: 'let's not send a large number of troops but let's not tie the hands of those we do send.' That is, you send too few troops on the one hand and practice torture on the other. Neoconservatism is in this respect compatible with the errors of 'military transformation' theory. And yet – here is the complication – some of the leading

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[27] Berman 2006.

neocons have been loudly and insistently arguing *against* the application of military transformation theory. So there you are. Neoconservatives exist; but there isn't much of a consistent doctrine.

Another element of neoconservatism – or maybe just of right-wing republicanism – I have always found very unattractive is a PR approach to debate. Debate is manipulated. Reagan's administration engaged in all kinds of propaganda machinations. The same approach was exactly what we saw in the build up to the Iraq war – the emphasis on WMD on the one hand, and the supposed conspiracies between Saddam and Osama bin Laden on the other hand. Instead of laying out the whole set of strategic, humanitarian and ideological issues that were really behind the war, the administration chose to present arguments based on manipulations that could make an easy 30-second sound-bite on the TV news. This conformed to ways the Reagan administration used to operate – and sometimes involved the same personnel.

Johnson: 'There are many paths to hell, and one of those paths is called the National Security Strategy of 2002,' you wrote.[28] *Can you explain?*

Berman: The National Security Strategy of 2002 made two disastrous points. First, it argued in effect for an American hegemony. This was foolish in the extreme because it's not desirable and it's not achievable. The only way we can successfully confront the dangers we face is to arouse the support of an enormous number of people and states all over the world. Second, it argued that the antitotalitarian ideological struggles of the twentieth century were 'over'. The new danger, it said, was 'rogue states'. This was one of the intellectual errors that led to the disaster in Iraq. It underpinned a belief that the enemy in Iraq was not motivated by powerful ideas, and it led people to think all bad guys were now like Manuel Noriega of Panama, whom Bush the father had captured in 1989 – gangster-dictators with populist rhetoric and thin support. Panama was a rogue state and the US invasion encountered very little resistance – a great many Panamanians were thrilled

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[28] Berman 2004.

to have the US invade. Noriega had his irregular forces, the Dignity battalions, but they folded immediately. Noriega-ism commanded the support of nobody. I think the people who wrote the 2002 National Security Strategy imagined that the world consisted of Noriegas and Panamanians. I'm guessing the Bush administration anticipated something similar in Iraq. (By the way, some of the administration personnel were the same in both invasions.)

The Bush administration made the error of assuming the world is no longer populated by people animated by totalitarian ideas. But Saddam's followers did and do honestly believe in key elements of the Ba'ath doctrine. The Islamists believe fervently. And people who believe in this way – in a sinister cosmic American-Zionist conspiracy to annihilate Islam or to crush the Arab people – are going to fight to the death. They are not going to fold the way Noriega's Dignity Battalions did. The ideas contained in 2002 National Security Strategy led to catastrophic errors in the years that followed in Iraq. For one thing, it meant Bush refused to admit there was an insurgency for a very long time. For another, it meant Bush was desperately slow in realising that he had to talk about ideas in order to counter other ideas. It was a calamitous statement that should have signalled to us on the left that we needed to come up with our own analysis. That was my goal in writing *Terror and Liberalism* – to add my own two cents. But one would have to say that a lot of people on the left have responded instead by just folding their arms and saying 'no'.

Postscript: November 2007

Alan Johnson: A couple of years on, in what ways would you update your views about the Iraq intervention?

Paul Berman: I would note that, in retrospect, the catastrophe has turned out to be grimmer even than I had imagined back in 2005 – not that I have ever been wildly optimistic. And I note that Iraq is hardly the only site of the disaster. It may even be that, viewed from today, 2005 marked something of a highpoint for liberal hopes in the Arab world. The relatively successful elections in Iraq in that year, the

Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, the unmistakable intentions of the Israelis to withdraw (as they eventually did) from Gaza, the larger stirring for liberal democracy that came to be called "the Arab spring," the rise of a liberal democratic opposition in Egypt especially – those several developments, back in those days, did seem to hint at grander possibilities. But that was then. It would be almost reassuring to blame every last jot and tittle of the current disaster on George W. Bush. (One of the great appeals of anti-Americanism and the maniacal anti-Bush-ism of our moment is precisely its reassuring quality – the affirmation that every bad thing that happens can be traced back to a single, simple, and therefore opposeable force.) But maybe there are other factors to consider, as well. I'm still struck by the crucial and sometimes autonomous role played by ideology and its vagaries – by the intellectual strength of the several related isms that underlie the various radical political movements that are currently prospering. And I'm struck by the political and in some cases even the intellectual weakness of those isms' liberal opponents.

This last point raises another matter for gloomy updating. Back in 2005 I complained about the Western liberals and leftists and intellectuals (meaning, my own friends) who responded to Bush's failures and errors mostly by stamping their feet and saying 'no,' instead of offering an alternative on the left – the kind of alternative that Kouchner, to cite him again, did try to offer. Today the foot-stamping has turned into something still less attractive. A good many intellectuals and people on the left have lately slid noticeably to the right (if I may use these too-simple labels of 'left' and 'right', which maybe do have some meaning, after all). There has been a tendency to concede the debate to the Islamists in one fashion or another. The tendency to sneer at Muslim liberals has become, in the last couple of years, more pronounced than ever among Western intellectuals and the people who call themselves progressive or left-wing. I mean the tendency to sneer at Iraqi liberals, sometimes at Iranian liberals, at non-believers and atheists from Muslim backgrounds, and at feminists. Somebody ought to collect the many published attacks that have been leveled at – to cite a single name – our friend Kanan Makiya, and on quite a few other liberals and dissidents from sundry Arab

and Muslim backgrounds, and bring out those accusatory documents in a single illustrative book. What a gruesome anthology that would make! Properly annotated, the documents would show how unerringly the present-day denunciations of Arab and Muslim liberals have echoed the nasty accusations that high-minded liberals and left-wing intellectuals in the West used to hurl, mid-twentieth century, at their own fellow liberals and democratic leftists from the Soviet zone.

In spite of every disaster, the Iraqi elections of 2005 did bring at least a number of reasonably attractive people to power, notably politicians with social democratic credentials of one sort or another from Kurdistan – politicians who, after two years in national office, do seem to have clung, by and large, to their original principles. And it is worth noting that, chiefly because those Iraqi politicians have found themselves allied willy-nilly with Bush, they have managed to win not even a smidgen of additional sympathy from their social-democratic counterparts in the West, a few noble exceptions apart. A pathetic fact, an enraging fact – also a fact that might help explain the failures within Iraq itself.

All in all, we are seeing a depressing triumph of the extreme right in some of the main Arab countries and elsewhere in the Muslim world. And a depressingly parallel abandonment of liberal values by a good many people who ought to know better in the Western countries. Global warming, in the zones of the environment; and global chill, in the zones of political and intellectual life. Such is my downbeat update. Are there any new grounds for hope, under the present dismal circumstances? Well, possibly. There is, at least, a new foreign ministry in France, staffed with all kinds of human-rights veterans who appear to be not the slightest bit jaded, our own comrades unexpectedly in power, in eloquent testimony to the still-powerful appeal of an activist human-rights agenda. But I have no prophecies to offer.

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Chapter 5

Global Social Democracy: An Interview with David Held

David Held is Graham Wallas Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics and co-director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance. His recent writings have been concerned to understand the dynamics of globalisation and to reconfigure democratic theory for a global age. These two concerns were brought together, and given a political and programmatic expression in his book *Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (2004). The interview took place on November 21, 2006.

Personal and Intellectual history

Alan Johnson: Can you tell me something of your personal and intellectual history?

David Held: That's a big question to start with! I was born and brought up in London in a family with four children. I went to the Universities of Manchester, MIT and Cambridge. My academic work has involved positions in Cardiff, York, the Open University and now the LSE. I live in London with four children of my own – too many!

My intellectual and political history starts in two places. I was the only boy in my family, and much favoured. That was great! But it also gave me an elementary sense of some of the injustices of the world. My sisters would look at me glumly sometimes while I was showered with attention. So I learnt certain dynamics of injustice when I was young – a process which continued into my student days in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What I took from that era was a critical search for a politics that was not simply state-based or market-based. Yet most of the positions on offer at the time failed to meet the test of adequacy and durability.

I sharpened this critical sense through an encounter with the work of critical theorists in the 1970s, particularly with the work of Jürgen Habermas. My background, and his strong emphasis on defending certain enlightenment ideals, meshed well. Yet I also knew that I would have to cut my own way through the questions if I was both to defend some of these ideals and to say a little about how they could be brought to bear on practical politics.

Part 1: A critique of the Washington Consensus and the Washington Security Agenda

Johnson: Let me begin with a deliberately naïve and provocative question. What's wrong with the Washington Consensus? Hasn't it lifted more people out of absolute poverty, more quickly, than at any time in human history, as Philippe Legrain shows in his book Open World:/ The Truth About Globalisation*?[1] Martin Wolf, author of* Why Globalisation Works*,[2] has suggested that 'David Held should cheer up,' and stop frightening us with 'an imaginary enemy.'[3] In his view economic globalisation – openness of trade, free movement of capital, expansion of foreign direct investment – has boosted the prosperity and life opportunities of all. Why is he wrong? What's wrong with the Washington consensus?*

Held: First of all, I am a little unusual in the respect that I am both an academic and a businessman. I am not against markets. I co-run Polity Press and I have a certain sympathy for the marketplace. I make my critique of the Washington Consensus as a social scientist and not because I am anti-market. I am concerned with what the evidence tells us, rather than with an ideology. Markets are probably the most dynamic and responsive way of dealing with issues of resource distribution and supply. If you are in business, the one thing you need is a buyer, and if buyers don't like your product you haven't got a business. Unless you are dealing with monopoly situations, there is an inherent

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[1] Legrain 2002.

[2] Wolf 2004a.

[3] Wolf 2004b.

responsiveness of markets to people.

The thrust of the Washington Consensus is to open up and liberalise markets and to integrate economies into the world economy. It has quite a complex set of recommendations, developed over two phases. The initial Washington Consensus, in its conventional form at any rate, had an emphasis on tariff liberalisation, financial market liberalisation, privatisation, intellectual property rights, and so on. In the second and more sophisticated phase, from the late 1990s, there has been a greater emphasis on institution-building, capacity-building, and so on. But this more sophisticated phase still presupposes the first phase.

The Washington Consensus claimed that liberal and open markets would increase economic growth, reduce inequality and reduce poverty. But what does the evidence show? First, that those countries that have most vigorously enforced the Washington Consensus have done the least well. And those countries that have chosen their own path of national development – partly because they were big enough and powerful enough to *resist* the Washington Consensus – have done better. It is easy to claim victory for the Washington Consensus if you don't analyse what actually happened on a region-by-region and country-by-country basis.

If you had said 15 years ago to the liberal market economists that over the period of liberalisation, India, China, Vietnam and Uganda would be among the most successful developing countries in the world, and that the Latin American economies and the transition economies would be among the least successful, they would have thought you were nuts! But that is broadly what has happened. Those countries which have managed the process of integration into the world economy have done best. Those that simply liberalised have done worst.

Now, let's be more precise. Those in Latin America that followed the mantras and the doctrines of the Washington Consensus liberalised their tariffs and liberalised their financial markets. The result was that their performance has been worse compared to their own performance prior to liberalisation, and, certainly worse judged by the East

Asian economies. Secondly, their rates of inequality have increased significantly in many cases. Thirdly, they have been unsuccessful in poverty reduction.

Now, take India and China. Of course they have to some degree liberalised their economies. But their heavy tariff reductions came *after* the point of economic take-off. 40 per cent of Chinese tariff reductions have been undertaken in the last ten to twelve years. Second, the Chinese have not radically liberalised their financial markets. They have partly opened them, but they have kept strict political control over them. Third, they have largely rejected currency convertibility on the grounds that they would lose control over their currency, which would become subject to global market fluctuations. The same goes for India.

So, in critical respects we can't claim the most successful developing economies as successes *for the Washington Consensus*. Where the Washington Consensus has most effectively bitten it has weakened those economies in the international economy. Where countries were able to design their own form of sequenced engagement with the global economy they have prospered – and not just India and China, but also Vietnam and Uganda. All this was unpredicted by liberal economic doctrines.

Second, when you look at the data in detail, which I have done in a new book on global inequality, it shows that if you include China then, yes, since the 1980s and the introduction of the liberal programmes there has been a broad liberalisation of the world economy and poverty-reduction.[4] But if you take China and urban India out of the equation you find that those who were best off at the start of the period of liberalisation ended best off, and those that started worst off, not only ended worst off, but lost ground. You find a worsening of global poverty and a worsening of global inequalities. So the period of the Washington Consensus is associated with growing global inequality and growing global poverty.

Now, is it legitimate to 'remove' India and China in this way?

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[4] Kaya and Held 2006.

Well, in one sense you don't want to – they are part of the world economy. But the argument for removing India and China is the one I made earlier – India and China prospered because they did their own thing! They kept political control of key aspects of their economy and in so doing produced better results. So they are not instances of the liberalisation phase. Put them in and it looks like everybody liberalised and prospered. Take them out and what we see is precisely what we know – those countries that have done best have more successfully managed and sequenced their integration into the world economy, were very careful about tariff reduction and were cautious about global financial market integration.

Johnson: Your book Global Covenant *offers a social democratic alternative not just to the Washington Consensus but also to the Washington Security Agenda. First, can you please set out your critique?*

Held: There are two huge powerful policy packages that have been driving the shape of globalisation as we know it: the Washington economic consensus and, increasingly, the American and British security doctrines – the 'war on terror'. I argue that both these programmes have failed.

In the case of the security doctrines and the 'war on terror' we see that when states act alone, or in small coalitions, they have made the security of the world worse not better. And in the two instances of concentrated power politics – Afghanistan and Iraq – we have seen catastrophic developments.

The war in Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003 gave priority to a narrow security agenda which is at the heart of the Bush security doctrine. This doctrine contradicts many of the core tenets of international politics and international agreements since 1945. It sets out a policy which is essentially hegemonic, which seeks order through dominance, which pursues the pre-emptive and preventive use of force, which relies on a conception of leadership based on a coalition of the willing which aims to make the world safe for freedom and democracy – by globalizing, essentially, American rules and conceptions of justice. The doctrine was enacted as the war on terror. The language of interstate warfare was preserved intact and projected onto a new enemy. As a result, the terrorists of 9/11

were dignified as soldiers, and war prosecuted against them.

But this strategy was a simplification of reality and a predictable failure. The war on terror has killed more innocent civilians in Iraq than the terrorists on 9/11, humiliated and tortured many Iraqis, created numerous innocent victims, and acted as a spur to terrorist recruitment. It has showed little, if any, understanding of the dignity, pride and fears of others, and of the way the fate and fortune of all people are increasingly tied together in our global age. And it triggered an orgy of sectarian killing among the Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq, and the displacement of over 300,000 people.

Instead of seeking to extend the rule of law, ensuring that no party – terrorist or state – acts as judge, jury and executioner, seeking dialogue with the Muslim world, strengthening the multilateral order, and developing the means to deal with the criminals of 9/11, the US and its allies, notably the UK, pursued old war techniques and has made nearly everyone less secure.

Johnson: Is it your view that the Labour Party's foreign policy – after starting out with the doctrine of the international community, as expressed in Blair's 1999 Chicago speech – became trapped within the Washington Security Agenda?

Held: I think one has to have a fairly subtle and differentiated appraisal of the Blair premiership. There is no question that in many ways he has been a very fine leader. Looking at the results of his domestic policies there is much for the UK to be proud of. Internationally, that the work of the Department for International Development (DFID) over the last several years, the work at the G8 on poverty-reduction in Africa, and the work on climate change, is exemplary in many respects. Blair has helped move the UK into very significant positions in a number of areas of progressive politics.

But, in Blair's hands, the Third Way project has two failings. One is associated with social justice, the other with global security. The social justice failing can be put very simply. Social democracy should entail a strong egalitarian commitment – we need to worry not just about those who are excluded from the market at the bottom end but also about

those who exclude themselves at the top end. But the New Labour project redefined social justice away from egalitarian conceptions and towards the idea that exclusion from the market is the core meaning of social injustice. Social justice became defined as inclusion in the market. And if that is your view, then you concentrate on those who are marginal, and seek to bring them back into the mainstream of society and economy through employment, and so on. Now, much of that policy work is very important. But if that is *all* the emphasis is, and if you don't also consider, as it were, the corrosive significance of concentrations of wealth and power, then you weaken the social democratic project.

At the global level Blair came to power with the promise of a Shakespearian prince! He was a great internationalist and a great Europeanist whose crowning moment was to speak in French to the French parliament. He was very much the prince in shining armour, and was welcomed with open arms on the continent. Ten years later the record is that he has by and large failed to lead on Europe and that Europe is not stronger as a result of his contribution. The international position is close to disastrous because he believed, mistakenly, that he could act as a mediator between Europe and the United States and that closeness to the Bush administration would give him critical leverage.

The UK went to war on false grounds. Some of us thought they were false from the beginning, but now it is clear to all they were false. The war in Iraq was promised to be short and quick, but it has been long and protracted. And now tens of thousands of people have died under appalling circumstances. The breakdown of law and order has unleashed a level of violence in Iraqi society which is truly horrifying.

I wrote an article just before the war started called 'Return to the State of Nature' – my view of what the war in Iraq would come to.[5] The one thing I did not get quite right is just how appalling it would be. The alliance with Bush has been fundamentally mistaken. There was some justification for the invasion of Afghanistan but I think none for the invasion

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[5] Held 2003.

of Iraq. I think the 'war on terror' was a false metaphor – a mistaken way of thinking about global security that involved an illusory conception of the magic of military power in the contemporary age. And I think all of this was predictable and it is now inexcusable.

If you go to war on false pretences, if you go to war and you don't deliver on your promises, if you go to war and the situation is worse at the end and not better, surely you are culpable for the failures of your judgement? I believe that at some level this tragic Shakespearean prince should be held accountable for these errors of judgement.

Part 2: Humanitarian Intervention

Johnson: Should the social democratic alternative include a commitment to military intervention to meet a 'responsibility to protect,' or do you agree with Patrick Bond that 'humanitarian interventionism' should be opposed as part and parcel of the 'Washington security consensus'?[6] How should we distinguish those conflicts in which we social democrats should favour military intervention from those we should oppose – what would the social democratic tests be?

Held: I think we must distinguish different kinds of humanitarian intervention. We must distinguish, for example, the intervention in Iraq from the intervention to stabilise Bosnia and Kosovo. Although those latter interventions came late in the day they were broadly beneficial in stopping appalling breaches of human security and a deep and profound set of crimes against humanity. The war in Iraq, it seems to me, was a flagrant act of war – misconceived, mistimed, mistaken, mis-strategised.

Humanitarian crises get out of control for complicated reasons to do with, among other things, warring ethnic groups, desertification and environmental crises, the activities of local warlords, and so on. Are we going to say that under no circumstances should we ever intervene because

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[6] Bond 2004.

any intervention is bound to be thought a form of Western imperialism? No, that would be absurd. It's like saying that the intervention from 1939 to stop Hitler was an inherently an imperialist one. Would we have been pacifists in face of the threat of Nazism? I don't think many people would have been. So by extension, we must see that in the case of certain rogue states, or in the face of certain appalling situations driven by political elites or ethnic groups, there may be grounds for humanitarian intervention.

However, we need to learn from situations in which humanitarian intervention has worked and from situations in which humanitarian intervention has failed. Politics is not a panacea and nor are military strategies. Sometimes you can't intervene because a situation is just too complex. Sometimes intervention can be effective, but not on the basis of old war politics. It has to be on the basis of multilateral intervention, with an international mandate for intervention, if at all possible, and with a conception of security quite different from what we have had in Iraq.

There are very interesting ideas circulating now within the military, within European policy networks, and here at the LSE under the influence of Mary Kaldor, on the development of a Human Security Force – a military force operating on different principles and different objectives, with different capabilities, to achieve different ends. We need to rethink our military as part of rethinking our foreign policy approach. The baroque armies of Europe, for example, are pretty useless in dealing with many contemporary conflict situations.

Part 3: Islamist Terrorism

Johnson*: Any Human Security Force would have to confront terrorism. In your book Global Covenant[7] you use the terms 'global terrorism,' 'mass terrorism,' 'transnational terrorism,' even 'the simply deranged and the fanatic,' but you never use the term 'Islamist terrorism'. You do write of a 'fundamental fissure in the Muslim world' between those who seek to come to*

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7 Held 2004.

terms with modernity and those who represent 'fundamentalist' ideas. But you don't relate this insight back to the terrorist threat we face. In the book, terrorism never seems to come into focus as one face of that civil war within the Muslim world. I wonder if there would have been a value to have brought together those two developments.

Held: That's a very interesting question. I have no difficulty in using the concept of terrorism. Terrorists are those who breach cosmopolitan principles without any consideration for others; who believe that they have grounds that permit them to act as judge, jury and executioner; and who oppose the most elementary principles of cosmopolitanism – the sanctity or preciousness of human life.

There are certainly radical Islamic terrorists but terrorism has taken many forms both in the form of non-state actors and state actors. If you look for example at the Middle East today you surely would have to combine a critique of the terrorism of Hamas and Hezbollah with a critique of the way the Israeli state has acted. Many of the fundamental principles of cosmopolitanism, and the liberal principles of the rule of law, are violated in the Israel-Palestine conflict by both sides. In a sense both act in a manner that more resembles outlaw politics than it does the rule of law. Both state and non-state actors are capable of 'terrorism' as I have defined it. Terrorism does not just take the form of the behaviour of non-state actors.

Of course there are many complex constellations of non-state actors, including Islamic terrorists, al-Qaeda networks, and I have absolutely no time for them. Their political programmes have nothing to do with Robin Hood principles, or with principles of social justice, or with honouring the dignity of human life. They are *another* form of vicious geo-politics, as it were. The vicious form of Islamic geo-politics meets the vicious form of Western geo-politics. In Iraq, certain Western powers have also acted as judge, jury and executioner, arrogating the right to determine fundamental issues of life and death. There is a certain symmetry between the appalling politics of non-state actor terrorists, in this case al-Qaeda, and some of the actions of the Western alliances that have intervened as judge, jury and executioner.

Johnson: What would you say to the view that, whatever the errors, and even the crimes, it is wrong to equate the Western coalition with al-Qaeda in that way, because the former removed Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath, supervised a number of democratic elections in Iraq that produced an elected Iraqi government, oversaw a popular vote on a new democratic constitution, opened up the mass graves, enabled the religious freedoms of the Shiites, returned the refugees, re-flooded the lands of the Marsh Arabs, created the space for free trade unions and a free press, and so on, as well as training up the Iraqi security forces? This view would say that whatever the wisdom of the invasion the coalition seeks to leave behind not a colony but a free and democratic Iraq. On the other side is a sectarian Sunni insurgency, sectarian Shiite death squads, and fascistic al-Qaeda operatives, and to create an equivalency between these forces and the Western coalition is wrong.

Held: 9/11 and al-Qaeda has complex origins that go way back in time, before Bush and Blair. But I think the war in Iraq has been a massive recruiting ground for young men to engage in terrorist acts around the world. The failure of the alliance to think through its intervention, the failure of its justification for war, the broad failure of its moral and political actions since the invasion, the failure to nation-build, the failure to act in line with human rights, all these things have compounded the problems of violence. And violence begets violence.

There was an opportunity to act against terrorism by acting against criminal behaviour – creating a global cross-cultural consensus to act against terrorism and act within the rubric of international law. After 9/11 many Muslim countries were very sympathetic to the United States. That moment was largely missed, but I don't think that moment has been definitively lost.

So, to someone like Tony Blair who would offer the defence you have set out to me, I would say 'you are one of the last people standing who still believes this is what is happening.' The situation in Iraq is probably worse today than it has ever been. The level of violence and cruelty, and the abuse of human rights are almost beyond imagination. Coalition forces have created a power-vacuum in Iraq in which the

worst elements of human behaviour have been unleashed. And it is going to be very hard to put that back in the box – it may well take generations. Iraq is fragmenting, the violence is out of control, and it is a vain hope that the Iraq military will ever be able to handle the situation. None of this has much to do with democracy, or, should we say, the conditions for sustainable democracy.

I don't think there is a direct equivalence between the insurgents and the forces of the coalition. But I do think that the way the war in Iraq has been handled has undermined whatever legitimacy the US and the UK had. I also deplore the state we are in now in Iraq – it is nothing to celebrate. What I do suggest is that a better understanding of global politics, Middle Eastern politics, the limits of unilateralism, and so on, would have led to a very different approach to the challenges of the 9/11 world.

Part 4: The Social Democratic Alternative

Johnson: *Let us now turn to your social democratic alternative to the Washington Consensus and the Washington Security Agenda. What do you mean by the phrase 'global covenant'? What structural reforms would it involve?*

Held: The language of 'global covenant' is about bringing the developing and developed world into a new dialogue about economic management and security. The West – especially the US and the UK – has been concerned with the threats emanating from terrorism, and some of these are serious concerns, of course. In being very critical about the way they have handled these issues, I don't deny that there are issues to handle. But if the security agenda is defined purely in terms of terrorism it excludes from the dialogue, and from the interpretive and political framework, the majority of the world's population, for whom security issues are everyday struggles for life – clean water, health, threats from Aids/HIV, poverty and malnutrition.

Britain and the United States led the war on terror after 9/11 because 3,000 people died that day. But everyday 30,000 children die of poverty-related diseases. Everyday there is a

little Holocaust in the world, a destruction of children's lives that is essentially avoidable and unnecessary. We cannot impose on the rest of the world our conception of security and expect their agreement. So the beginning of a global covenant is to create a dialogue between the developed world and the developing world on a common conception of security which embraces their pressing development concerns and our own. Unless that dialogue is undertaken, unless we build a new common platform of agreement, our security concerns will be weakened and theirs will barely be advanced. This is potentially a win-win situation.

On the issue of economic policy, if the current push continues for an increase in bilateral and preferential trading agreements, linked to a market fundamentalist approach, it will be harder to deliver many of the national and global public goods we need. To secure prosperity in the long run means not just new and more sophisticated conceptions of what works in the global economy, and what doesn't, but also recognising that unless there is political regulation of globalisation we will lack mechanisms to deal with global warming, pandemics and epidemics, new viruses, and so on, and we will only compound the problems already generated by market fundamentalism.

A global covenant means a dialogue to strengthen our rule-based multilateral order, that is sensitive to the dignity and the terms of reference of other cultures, and that seeks to learn from the failures of our dominant policy packages. By seeking a global covenant we recognise that the way forward is not *raison d'état* or market fundamentalism or unilateralism. Those old policy packages have failed us, sometimes with terrible consequences.

Let me put the way forward to you in simple terms. Realism is dead. Cosmopolitanism is the new realism! That may seem an extraordinary thing to say, but the realist policy packages have failed us. Cosmopolitanism is the new realism because unless there is a new agenda of cross-border collaboration, unless there are international solutions to global problems, unless we learn from the failures of the old policy packages, we will continue to make life worse for ourselves, not better.

Johnson: *Can you define 'cosmopolitanism' for readers who may be unsure of its meaning?*

Held: Cosmopolitanism is a way of thinking about what we each have in common across cultures and borders. It starts from a number of fundamental premises, including the equal moral worth of each and every human being, the fact that we are all endowed with the possibility of active agency and the capacity to make choices. Cosmopolitanism also claims that in order to exercise this dignity of choice, we all need access to certain capabilities. (There are other cosmopolitan principles and I set these out in *Global Covenant*.) These are not just the abstract principles of philosophers! They are the principles enshrined in many of our multilateral institutions since the late nineteenth century. The law of war and human rights law, the UN Charter and the UN charter system, embed many of these principles in their very foundation. The human rights regime, in particular, could not exist without these cosmopolitan principles. The 'global covenant' goes with the stream of history.

The problem is that these fundamental cosmopolitan or universal principles were spliced together in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century with state sovereignty, state politics and the priorities of the most powerful states. That agenda, in my view, has run its course, so now we are faced with a truly critical set of choices. We *either* build on the progressive stepping stones that we already have – the multilateral rule-based system, the human rights regime, the International Criminal Court, the soft power centres of the European Union, the germinal beginnings of multidimensional citizenship and the multilayered authority in the EU – or we will commit the same mistakes in the future, with increasing negative consequences.

The notion of a 'global covenant' is a complex way of thinking about how – sector by sector, area by area – one can embed the lessons of the twentieth century into our international institutions and practices. The same solutions will not work in trade, finance, pandemics, climate change. When we think in a new political frame, recognising that the old realist frameworks don't provide the goods, we will be free to move on.

Johnson: *What do you say to those that dismiss the 'global covenant' as a utopia incapable of realisation?*

Held: In *Global Covenant,* and in my defence of that book in *Debating Globalisation,*[8] I try and set out issues for the short-term and long-term. I am clear that we can't have the longer term tomorrow! The idea of a progressive cosmopolitan global covenant delivered all at once is not how the world works.

The example I always give, against my critics, is the formation of the modern state itself, from the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It took *centuries* to unfold. The idea of a secular political regime, separate from ruler and ruled and separate from the powerful Catholic Church in Europe, only took shape slowly. Also slow to emerge were the concepts of democratic sovereignty and citizenship – and not just in the Western world. We must never forget that democracy takes on one of its most extraordinary manifestations in India – the biggest democracy in the world. Democracy does not just belong to 'us,' and it isn't just practised by us. It is an achievement of other countries and regions as well.

We have to understand that small stepping stones to achieve a more secular modern nation-state – the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, and so on – pushed the process on in important ways. We now live in a moment that I call a 'global shift'. The imaginary of state-based politics is inadequate and we live, and will continue to live, in a world of overlapping communities of fate. In that new world, we must begin to think afresh and to be bold. My books are just one contribution to that new political imaginary.

Johnson: *To become the new common sense any global compact would need to animate key agents of social and political change. Which agencies are likely to endorse this program? How has the reconfiguration of political power associated with globalisation re-conditioned the capacity of the traditional agencies of the left? And what is the role for trade unions in the social democratic alternative? Is transnational union solidarity a prerequisite for the global covenant?*

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[8] Held et al 2005.

Held: Let me start by stressing that we need to avoid the myth of agency frequently found in centre-left thinking, dating back to Marx, which sees progressive change resting on an identifiable class and/or its representatives. The problem with Marxism is that it reads off from socio-economic class the story of politics. It failed, in other words, to treat politics *sui generis*. But it should be clear that politics cannot be reduced to the search for single agents.

The agents that might combine to push in the direction of a new global covenant will, concomitantly, be diverse and in all likelihood more diffuse. Progressive change depends on building coalitions – coalitions which already form and reform in different international and global contexts. At the very least, it is possible to envisage a coalition of progressive states and non-state actors coming together around the issues discussed. I have in mind leading European powers with some social democratic traditions, major developing countries seeking changes in the nature of trade, aid and development, non-governmental organisations, from Oxfam to Medecins sans Frontieres, and so on. Coalitions will always form around issues – as they always have done, from the struggle over the ICC to the struggle over the Doha round.

Of course, trade unions have a potentially very important role as pressure groups and as forces that can help enlighten their members on global issues that might not appear relevant to them at first glance. This is crucial, but I think one has to accept that trade unions are only one of several possible actors that need to combine to create transnational solidarity. Transnational solidarity is crucial between rich and poor countries, developed and developing countries, governmental and non-governmental agencies if, as Kofi Annan eloquently and directly put it, "millions of people are not to die prematurely and unnecessarily" as a result of our failure to meet pressing global challenges.

Blaming America First?

Johnson*: In assessing the obstacles to the global covenant some suggest you lay too much blame at the door of the USA. From the right, Roger Scruton claims that your argument*

proceeds quite 'as though the world would set itself to rights were it not for … the American government.' Scruton thinks this 'false emphasis' is dangerous as it 'entails refusing to view people outside the enclaves of Western capitalism as subject to judgement … refusing to recognise their full humanity'.[9] From the left, David Mepham also claims that you do not attend to the importance – as causes of absolute poverty, relative inequality, conflict and genocide – of autonomous national and regional political cultures, policies and structures, and this is in part due to the Washington-centred character of your analysis.[10] Mepham cites the nature and impact of the Mugabe dictatorship on Zimbabwe, but also asks us to consider the devastating critique of the Arab world and Arab governments contained in successive UN Arab Human Development Reports.[11] *How do you respond to these criticisms?*

Held: *Global Covenant* was an intervention at a particular point in time. I took the view (and still do) that many of the key decisions taken after 9/11 were the wrong ones to attain the objectives desired –security, accountability and an alliance of civilisations, not a war of civilisations. It was right to argue that decisions taken by the US government, and supported by the Blair government, were the wrong decisions. They *were* the obstacle. The Bush administration has weakened many aspects of multilateral governance – the Security Council, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Conventions, and so on. That is not to say that the Bush administration, supported by Blair, is responsible for globalisation in all its aspects. Not at all! In my academic books – such as *Global Transformations*[12] – I don't mention particular administrations because those are more serious works of research looking at historical change over the long run. *Global Covenant* and *Debating Globalisation* were political interventions written at a time when American administrations were making things worse.

There is nothing anti-American about what I have written. I

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[9] Scruton 2004.

[10] Mepham 2004.

[11] United Nations Development Programme 2005.

[12] Held 1999.

am a critic of some policy packages, and that has nothing to do with the USA, its history, democracy, culture or people. I am a critic of *policy*. If one can't separate, intellectually, the question of policy from that of country then debate is a complete non-starter. It's the same mistake the Israelis often make, when they say 'any criticism of policy is a criticism of us'. That is wrong. I am criticising a certain set of policies driven by an administration *not* a country. So I simply reject that charge.

Your question raises a bigger set of issues about the national and the regional levels. And the points that David Mepham makes are well taken. There can be no construction of a multilateral rule-based order without strong democracies and democratic cultures. And it is also true that the movement in this direction is handicapped by failing states, the resurgence of nationalism, and so forth. And it is true that many of these things have very complex independent dynamics from those that I have been discussing in this interview. And all I can say is that I understand that and I agree with you, but my arguments never aimed to touch on all these issues. They were just one cut at some of the questions. And I am quite happy with that cut.

As regards the wider suggestion, that some of the solutions lie locally and nationally, that's true too. Take climate change. There have to be international agreements to create a carbon trading system. A European carbon trading system is already in place, but rather weak. A global carbon trading system is a very important way to make the private sector part of the solution to the challenge of climate change. But to do that you need international agreement of various kinds. You need countries to accept targets and to make those targets their responsibility. Within those countries you need sector by sector targets – airline industry, transportation sector, agriculture, households, and so on. Without all those sectors taking responsibility for specific forms of adaptation to a less fossil-fuel oriented economy we just won't get solutions. My view is 'think globally, act locally,' *and* the reverse. There is no solution to climate change without global agreements. But, equally, there is no solution to climate change without changes in national and even individual behaviour.

The Future of Social Democracy

Johnson*: Much of the debate provoked by* Global Covenant *was hosted by the website openDemocracy and collected in the book* Debating Globalisation. *It might be useful to explore some challenges to the contemporary relevance of 'social democracy' and 'global social democracy'.*

Meghnad Desai, your predecessor as Director of the Centre for Global Governance, and the author of Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism, *argued that you assume social democracy is ready and waiting in the wings with the answers.[13] This is not a safe assumption, however, as 'social democracy has itself been in a deep crisis from which it has yet to re-emerge'. His argument is that while social democracy could flourish in the de-globalised world of 1919-1980s with its loosely connected national capitalisms, fordism, mass trade unions, and relative social uniformity, it has not been able to cope in a rapidly globalising world in which, crucially, the state had lost control over the economy. Restoring profitability demanded brutal restructuring, and the right got on with it. The left, to return to power, has had to fall in line. Social democratic parties can talk all they want about the 'third way' but in reality 'the most successful "social democratic" regimes like Britain's New Labour or Clinton's presidency, in effect, abandoned social democracy in all its essentials."[14] Why is Desai wrong?*

Held: I only want to make one point. Social democrats have, traditionally, sought to deploy the democratic institutions of individual countries on behalf of a particular national project: a compromise between the powers of capital, labour and the state which seeks to encourage the development of market institutions within a regulatory framework that guarantees not just the civil and political liberties of citizens, but also the social conditions necessary for people to enjoy their formal rights. It seems to me that this project is as relevant today as it has always been.

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[13] Desai 2002.
[14] Desai 2004.

Social democrats have rightly accepted that markets are central to generating economic well-being, but have recognised that in the absence of appropriate regulation they suffer serious flaws – especially the generation of unwanted risks for their citizens, an unequal distribution of those risks, and the creation of additional negative externalities and corrosive inequalities.

The bottom line is that unlike the standard liberal approach which emphasizes markets and more markets (ultimately Meghnad Desai is in this camp), social democrats emphasize social justice. And social justice can no longer be delivered on many critical issues today by states acting alone. From climate change to the problems of trade rules, coalitions are necessary to deliver the framework of justice. If anything, I think this programme is more important today than it has ever been – not less.

Johnson: *What are you working on now?*

Held: I am working on two books which I hope will help press this agenda further and also give it a more subtle set of inflections. The first is a volume re-casting Machiavelli's *Prince*. The advice Machiavelli gave may have been right for his moment, but the principles and rules of statecraft have to be radically rethought for a world of overlapping communities of fate. Goodbye Machiavelli's Prince and welcome to the tool book for cosmopolitan Princes and Princesses! The second and rather more sustained project is a systematic examination of the effectiveness and accountability of global policy – whether public, private or public/private – in crucial areas of human endeavour: finance, trade, global infectious diseases, among others. I hope this project will help show how we can plausibly defend the notions of a new global covenant while being attentive to the often significant differences between sectors of activity. This, plus the four kids, will keep me busy. The interview has to close!

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Chapter 6

A Politics of Inclusion: An Interview with Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Saad Eddin Ibrahim is Professor of Political Sociology at the American University in Cairo. He founded the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies and is one of the Arab world's most prominent spokespersons for democracy and human rights. An eminent and prolific social scientist, he is author, co-author, or editor of more than thirty-five books in Arabic and English. Arrested by the Mubarak regime in 2000 he was sentenced to seven years' hard labour for 'tarnishing' Egypt's image. After an international outcry, Egypt's High Court cleared him of all charges in 2003. The interview took place on February 11, 2007.

Personal and intellectual background

Alan Johnson: Can we begin with the most important personal and intellectual influences in your life?

Saad Eddin Ibrahim: As a youngster I was influenced by leaders from our national history and from the 'third world' – Gandhi, Nehru, Mao, Che and Nasser (whom I met at an early age but who later stripped me of my nationality and declared me persona non grata when I was in my twenties). Some shaped me positively and some became negative reference points. And my family was very influential. My uncles adhered to different political traditions, Communism and the Muslim Brotherhood, and in the 1940s and 1950s each sought to win me to his point of view. I found that fascinating!

I arrived in America in 1963 to attend University and became involved in the revolutions of that period. Herbert Marcuse, Martin Luther King, C. Wright Mills, Frantz Fanon – these were all influences. I became an activist along with my generation – the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, and the second wave women's movement were extremely important for me. I owe my activism to that period in the United States.

I became President of the Egyptian Students, then President of the Arab Students, and in that capacity I toured North America and Europe. These years truly impacted on my life and I can trace back some of the things I am doing now, towards the end of my sixties, to those years in my twenties and thirties.

I supported the Palestinians but defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967 convinced me that democracy was the missing piece of the jigsaw. The defeat agonised my generation. It caused us sleepless nights for so many years, actually until 1973. These years scarred our dignity, our psyche, our hearts, but were also years of rethinking and self-criticism. Until then democracy did not take up much of my attention as an Arab. It took 1967 for me to realise that so long as there was no transparency or accountability then we Arabs would suffer defeats. That was an eye-opener. I began to study the causes of the defeat and my first book was called *The Sociology of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. We began to question some sacred cows, and that created problems for me back home. My activist and intellectual lives have been intertwined ever since.

Part 1: Arrest, Trial, Imprisonment

Johnson: *Your home was raided in the middle of the night of June 30, 2000. You were arrested, imprisoned, vilified in the state press, and tried three times on the same charges, before Egypt's High Court of Cassation eventually acquitted you and your associates of all charges on March 18, 2003.[1] Why were you arrested?*

Ibrahim: They said I had accepted a grant from the European Union without state permission; that I was using this grant for voter registration, again without authorisation; that I had defamed Egypt in my writings; and that I embezzled this grant. But as a sociologist and political analyst I know that stated reasons at best overlap with real reasons.

I think the real reason for my arrest was my challenge to the

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[1] Ibn Khaldun Center 2003.

Mubarak family. On the day of my arrest I had published an article in *Al-Majalla*, a London-based magazine distributed across the Arab world. Let me tell you how that article came about. An Arab satellite station, Orbit, asked me to be an expert commentator during the funeral of the Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad, on June 13, 2000. The funeral was a protracted affair and I was live on air taking questions from callers. Two or three questions concerned the political future of Syria and who would succeed Assad. I began to develop an ad hoc theory about political succession in non-democratic regimes. I pointed out that it was easy to predict the future as we could see on our screens that Bashar al-Assad, the oldest surviving son of the deceased President, was meeting all the dignitaries quite as if he was already Head of State. A caller asked how the son could succeed the father without holding a formal position. I said 'Oh, I am sure the Ba'ath party will get together and fix that.' Another caller pointed out that his age, 34, would debar him. I said 'Well, even the constitution too can be fixed. They will lower the age-limit from 40 to 30.' (As it turned out they lowered it by constitutional amendment from 40 to 34 – they were not even subtle!)

One caller wondered if we were seeing a precedent being set in the Arab world, and asked where else this kind of familial succession might take place. I mentioned Iraq, Yemen and Libya, pointing out that what was common to all four cases was that (1) any President who remains in power for more than ten years develops a sense of ownership of the country; and (2) these are Muslim countries and, according to Sharia, the father bequeaths his wealth to the oldest son. I suggested this combination could foster a notion that the oldest son has the right to succeed the father in running the country or 'the family estate'. At this point a caller asked me why I had not included Egypt in this theory. I tried to deflect the question but the caller was persistent. In the end I gave in, acknowledging that it could happen in Egypt, observing that one of Mubarak's sons was interested in politics.

The next day I was called by the Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Majalla* who asked me to turn my remarks into an article. I did so and it was titled *Al Jumlikiya: The Arab Contribution to Politics in the 21st Century.* That is a hybrid word I made up which means 'Republican Monarchy'. The article appeared on the

streets on June 30, 2000. That morning all the copies were removed from the Egyptian markets, and that night I was arrested, perhaps because I had discussed the succession in an open way – naming names, so to speak. Other people offered different theories about my arrest. I had documented the rigging of earlier Egyptian elections and was about to train 1,000 monitors for the 2000 Parliamentary elections. The training was due to begin the next day, July 1, and they arrested all 27 people working in the Ibn Khaldun Center which was co-ordinating the training of the monitors. A third theory was that my arrest was due to my frequent defence of minorities, both in Egypt and across the Arab world.

Johnson: *You suffered several small strokes while in prison. How is your health today?*

Ibrahim: After I got out of prison I was in a wheelchair for a year and for a further year I used a cane. I have undergone surgery three times at John Hopkins since I was released, and I am due to have a fourth operation. With each operation my health improves a little and now I can walk, albeit with some difficulty. I have to be very conscious of my balance, I tire easily, and my handwriting leaves a lot to be desired!

It was not the decline in my health that upset me most, by the way. It was the destruction of the Ibn Khaldun Center a day or two before my release. Documents and libraries were looted, pictures were destroyed. I had not cried in the previous three years but when I saw what they had done to the Center I cried for the first time during the whole ordeal. It was so senseless and vindictive.

The Court of Cassation, Egypt's High Court, cleared me. It was created in 1923 – a legacy of the brief liberal age in Egypt. The High Court has survived Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, and is a saving grace in this miserable country of ours. Not only did the Court acquit me and my colleagues of all charges, it also reprimanded the regime, which was highly unusual. It made it clear that if anyone had tarnished Egypt's image it had been the executive, and that it was the job of the state to answer charges made by intellectuals, not to imprison them! This was so gratifying – it made the three year ordeal meaningful. The Court affirmed the legitimacy of everything the Ibn Khaldun

Center was doing, including receiving grants and publishing in foreign languages (the state had attacked me for writing in foreign languages and 'defaming' Egypt abroad). Indeed, you might say the manner of the acquittal was more important to me than the acquittal itself.

Johnson*: Can you describe the work of the Ibn Khaldun Center?*

Ibrahim: We created the Ibn Khaldun Center in 1988.[2] For the first three years we focused on research and built a knowledge base. We began to move into advocacy and then into action – the third leg of our work. When we began to step on the regime's toes we were attacked, arrested, and thrown behind bars.

We reopened the Ibn Khaldun Center on June 30, 2003 – the anniversary of my arrest. We declared it 'Ibn Khaldun Day' and affirmed that we were back in business with the same agenda: research, advocacy and action for development. We conceive 'development' in a broad sense: economic development, democratisation (which we consider to be political development), and the growth of civil society (which we consider the backbone of social development). We are also concerned with minority issues and women's rights. Today, we conduct research into development, civil society and democratisation in Egypt and the Arab world; issue annual reports and position papers on current issues; and encourage women into Parliament with programmes for micro-credit, literacy capability and reproductive health. We also support political empowerment through voter registration, and look to organise to become a political power.

We hold open forums at the Ibn Khaldun every Tuesday – Egypt's Hyde Park. Every week people come from all over Cairo and outside to listen to speakers and engage in debate. We issue a monthly online newsletter called *Civil Society and Democratisation of the Arab World*, in Arabic and English.

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[2] The Ibn Khaldun Center website is at http://www.eicds.org/

And now we are involved in a project to create an Arab Endowment of Democracy. We challenged wealthy Arabs to spare us the charge that when we accept grants from outside the Arab world we are 'Western agents'. A couple accepted the challenge and now we have seed-corn money to develop the idea of an *Arab* Democracy Foundation, a project I am very excited about. The inaugural conference will take place in April in Doha, in Qatar.

Part 2: Islam, Modernity, Democracy

Johnson*: You have studied the relationship of Islamic thought to modernity, liberalism, and democracy.[3] Can you say a little about the competing strains of Islamic thought, their contemporary political meaning, and the balance of forces between these strains today?*

Ibrahim: It is important to understand the development of Islamic thinking using an *historical* approach. I think this means grasping three things.

First, Islam came to societies that were very old indeed – Egypt and Persia had their own history, culture, and pre-monotheistic religions. So Islam – spread sometimes by the sword, sometimes by preachers – was bound to mix with existing cultures. By the second Islamic century we begin to detect a mainstream establishment Islam, an oppositionalist stream, and a third that rejected both. And that lasts all the way up to today, as represented by what we call Sunnis, Shiites and the Kharagites. Now, the Kharagites have withered away – they are a historical footnote, the remnants are in the Sultanate of Oman, and Algeria. But what did emerge as a real third alternative for people's hearts was the Sufi stream of Islam. Sufism did not go in for the heavy theological baggage – the clergy, literature, the strict body of belief and ritual – but offered to meet people's need for a religious anchor in a more spiritual mode, without the rituals used by the establishment to keep people under control.

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[3] Ibrahim 2002.

Second, in every generation, in every age, there is a yearning for the first century of Islam. Youngsters learn in the history books that this was the golden age when society was virtuous and just, and everybody was god-fearing. Piety, faith and justice are seen as having given rise to a strong Muslim civilisation and a powerful state. That is the image that our youngsters learn at school, so every generation dreams of going back to the 'paradise lost'. Al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brothers, Hezbollah, Hamas are all 21st century manifestations of that yearning for paradise lost and the idealisation of the first century of Islam.

Third, since the 19th century, Muslims have agonised over a question: why has the West progressed while we have remained behind? And there have been three kinds of answers. The first answer says we have strayed from the straight path of Islam. Sayyid Qutb, one of the main theoreticians of all the militant movements of the last 50 or 60 years, has a book with that very title – *Ma'alim fil Tariq,* or *Milestones.*[4] He means to direct his readers back to the straight path of the pure religion. The second answer says the West caught up and then conquered us because of its revolutions in science, technology, politics, and economic organisation, so we must *emulate* the West. Isma'il Pasha of Egypt was an emulator. President Sadat, in his late years, was another admirer of the West. A third answer has been offered by the synthesisers or reconcilers, who deny we have to either go back to the first century of Islam or emulate the West wholesale. They propose to combine the best of our heritage with modernity. These three answers have been translated into political ideologies and movements, and in today's Arab world we sometimes find them in lethal conflict with one another.

Johnson: You have argued that 'freedom is a central Koranic value' and from it can be elaborated other values 'like equality, gender equality, human rights, democracy [and] the separation between religion and the state.'[5] On the other hand, you have written that the violent reaction to the Danish cartoons reflected 'the degradation of the concept of freedom within the Muslim

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[4] Qutb 1991 [1964].

[5] Ibrahim 2005a.

value system.[6] *Can you talk a little about the struggles over the place of freedom in Islamic thought today, and the prospects for a reformation of Islam?*

Ibrahim: This is one of the projects we are working on in the Ibn Khaldun Center. On our Board of Trustees is Gamal al-Banna – the only surviving brother of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers. He is in his mid 80s, but lucid. He had been pressuring me to start an action research project on Islamic Reformation but, frankly, it wasn't on my agenda as a pressing issue. But then I was arrested in 2000 and while I was in prison, 9/11 happened. A few days later, Gamal al-Banna wrote to me to say that while he did not know who had committed the terrible acts, he would not rule out that they were young Muslim militants. Recall that the media in this part of the world spent weeks denying that the perpetrators were Arabs. Many people were in deep denial, saying they were CIA or Israeli agents creating a pretext to aggress against the Muslim or Arab world.

Al-Banna made me see the importance of the project for Islamic Reformation. His thesis is that Islam – as a heritage, as a theology, and as a system of rituals – has not experienced the kind of reformation that both Christianity and Judaism have. As a result our Sharia and our Islamic thought have not been critiqued in 1000 years. For ten centuries, ijtahad – the disciplined reinterpretation of the text to cope with and guide our development in changing contexts – has been banned by the religious authorities. For the first four centuries rethinking, critique and development were happening all the time. However, according to Gamal al-Banna, once the Muslim world began to be encroached on, the Ulema – the learned religious authorities – closed the gates of ijtihad, citing foreign pressure on the abode of Islam. Any reinterpretation, they said, would be construed as playing to the foreigners. Al-Banna believes that we forgot to re-open the doors of ijtihad and as a result we have not had a new idea in our theology in 1000 years. We must reopen the gates to deal with the 21st century rather than dream of recreating the first Islamic century.

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[6] Ibrahim 2006a.

The Islamic reformation project has been running for the last three years. We have invited Islamic thinkers from all over the Muslim world, from Tunisia to North America, and posed to them all the questions of the 21st century. We say, 'Please, as you read the Koran and the basic heritage of Islam, develop 21st century Islamic answers that will help our youngsters to be faithful to their religion and their heritage but also help them to live in the 21st century as full partners, not as enemies and not as warriors.'

Part 3: Questions of Political Strategy

Johnson: Can we discuss your idea of an alliance of sorts between democrats and 'moderate' Islamists? In August 2006 you wrote that 'Mainstream Islamists with broad support, developed civic dispositions and services to provide are the most likely actors in building a new Middle East.'[7] And in December 2006 you complained about an 'unjustified fear of modern Islamists' and called for a policy of dialogue, saying 'Hamas, Hezbollah, Muslim Brothers – these people you cannot get rid of; you have to deal with them ... the name of the game is inclusion.'[8] You have denied that these organisations are inimical to democracy, pointing out that Islamists have nowhere come to power via elections and then reneged on democracy. Indeed, you have warned that 'the Islamist scare is propagated and marketed by autocratic regimes to intimidate the middle class and the West, to ward off any serious democratic reforms.'[9] While you warn that 'no sober analyst would consider this a final commitment by Islamists to democracy,' you believe 'the process of transforming them into Muslim democrats is clearly under way.'[10] These views have raised some eyebrows. Can you set out your thinking?

Ibrahim: After 9/11 – at the same time as I was being pressured by Gamal al-Banna to launch a project for an Islamic Reformation – I was engaging the Islamists in prison.

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[7] Ibrahim 2006b.

[8] Ibrahim 2006c.

[9] Ibrahim quoted in Moll 2004.

[10] Ibrahim 2006d.

Everyone was shaken up by 9/11 and open to discussion. On my release, the comrades of these Islamists contacted me and proposed we continue the dialogue. We did for a few months and then one Islamist asked me a question – why has the outside world raised such a fuss about you and not about our comrades, even though they have been rotting for 25 years? They asked why the BBC talked about my case but not theirs. I reminded them that I was perceived as sharing core values with human rights groups around the world. They asked what these core values were. I told them: belief in democracy, freedom, human rights, equality, tolerance, diversity. They claimed to share those values. I said, 'Have you guys forgotten that I studied you 25 years ago? You did not have those values then!' They claimed to have changed in prison, having rethought their ideas. I said: well, your image is still one of bloodthirsty, violent, intolerant fanatics. They asked how they could change their image. I told them: the same way you created it, by your actions and rhetoric and writings. They claimed to feel morally responsible for what happened on 9/11. I said: begin to write in a different way. They wrote four small volumes revisiting their beliefs, and these were smuggled out of prison and published. These were published under the name *El Moragiat* which in Arabic means the revisiting or the revising.

The Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brothers held a press conference on March 30, 2004, fully supporting democracy. Of course there remain doubts about whether they are really committed. But they do seem to have moved and I am optimistic. We should give Islamists a chance to show whether they are truly committed to these core values or not. There is nothing to lose; instead of a bloodbath every generation, let us see if they can evolve.

What helped me in this dialogue with the Islamists was the assumption of power by the Justice and Development Party in Turkey towards the end of 2002, and a similar development in Morocco. These developments gave the dialogue credence and reminded me that Islamists are not metaphysical abstractions but human beings in time and space – historic forces subject to change like everybody else.

Johnson*: But what of the danger of an Iranian development?*

Did the Iranian left not commit a grievous error in making that kind of alliance, literally digging its own grave? How can that be avoided?

Ibrahim: Well, this is the question that is raised all the time. Iran, Afghanistan, and Sudan are cases in which Islamists came to power not through the ballot box but through a coup or a revolution. But when Islamists were given the chance via the ballot box they have not reneged on the rules. In Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Turkey, and in other countries, Islamists who came to power through the ballot box left power through the ballot box. Look, I am as concerned as you are, being a secularist and a civil society advocate. I hear your question – if they come to power will it be 'one man, one vote, one time,' or will they leave office if voted out by the majority? But I would like to keep that question alive, *as an open question.* For instance, in April 2006 I took my students to Palestine to engage Hamas. They were studying social movements and had asked me whether the theory that an extremist movement elected to power becomes moderate over time would hold true for Hamas. I said, 'Well, let's go to Palestine and talk to Hamas!' We sat in the Parliament seats in Ramallah and the cabinet members who were in town – including the Deputy prime minister and the speaker – sat at the podium as if they were on trial, and we debated for six hours. The Hamas representatives said, 'Yes, we may change, but we have not had a chance to breathe. We were elected one month ago and from that day we have been under siege by the US, the EU and Israel.' They reminded us that it took Egypt 30 years to recognise Israel but they were being asked to make the same journey in 30 days. They said they needed to educate their constituents and it would take time. Some of us were convinced by that and some were not. The point is we kept the question open.

I have also met with Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, in his hideout. He claimed the only violence they have used has been against Israel – they do not use violence against the other Lebanese forces or the government but organise demonstrations and sit-ins instead. Nasrallah even quoted my earlier work at me, on the role of civil disobedience in democracies. I am encouraging people like Hassan Nasrallah,

like Mahdi Akef of the Muslim Brothers, and like Ismail Haniya in Palestine. These forces are quite aware of my writing, of what I am doing, and none decline to see me. As I say, I have more influence outside Egypt than inside at the moment.

Johnson: By drawing a distinction between different kinds of Islamism and suggesting that there are forms of Islamism that democrats can work with, do you have the strategic goal of redrawing the political map of your region by realigning the relationship between the democrats and the 'moderate' Islamists?

Ibrahim: Absolutely. I want to get the Islamists who are willing to play by the democratic rules into the mainstream.

I had an experience with King Hussein that is important in this regard. I happened to be the Secretary General of the Arab Forum, in Amman, between 1985 and 1990. In that capacity King Hussein would call on me occasionally to discuss, and to josh and joke. He felt more able to let his guard down with me as I was an outsider. When the food riots broke out in Jordan in 1988 he summoned me for my assessment. I asked him why he had lifted the food price subsidies. He said the Arab summit in Baghdad in 1978 had extended an aid package to Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon – the countries that surrounded Israel – to dissuade them from following Sadat by striking a peace agreement with Israel. It was a ten-year package and the ten years were up. And now the World Bank and the IMF were on his back to get his fiscal affairs in shape, so he had no choice but to remove the food price subsidies. I said, 'Your Majesty, why have you not gone on TV and explained all this to your people?' He asked what I meant. I beat around the bush, and talked about 'civil partnerships,' 'freedoms' and so on, but he interrupted and asked, 'Do you mean democracy?' I said, 'Yes, your Majesty, I do.'

But then he asked the same question you have asked: 'Saad, what do we do about the Islamists?' I advised him to bring them in, along with all other political forces, and make them sign a kind of Magna Carta – a National Charter detailing the rules of the game. A conference was called at which Islamists, Ba'athists, Nasserites, and Communists participated and

agreed a revised Charter. The first multiparty elections were duly held and the King's fear materialised: the Islamists won the biggest bloc of seats. By the way, note which portfolios they chose – social development, education, culture, media, and religious endowments (*Al Kauf*). These are the same type of portfolios as Hamas recently chose – the people-oriented ones. The Islamists understand the battle is for hearts and minds. But then the Islamic Front Ministers overplayed their hands. Education and Social Affairs were feminised ministries – a lot of women worked there. When an Islamist Minister dictated that all employees must veil, and another declared that none should go to a male hairdresser, the women got very upset and marched to the Royal Palace. The King called me and said, 'Saad, do you see what is happening?' I said, 'Yes, but that is democracy, your Majesty.' I advised him to say to the women that they had come to the wrong address, and they should march to Parliament or to the Cabinet instead. He met the women, expressed his sympathy, told the women that his wife and daughter were unveiled, and invited the women to redirect their marches. They did and kept marching for two weeks until they forced those Islamist cabinet members to resign. Everything was peaceful. In the following election the Islamists' vote fell.

Look, what is the alternative to engaging the Islamists? We can't engage in bloodbaths. Of course, I would not include people who do not agree to respect the rules of the game. But I would encourage those who say they do accept the rules.

__Johnson__: Some of your most important work has highlighted the symbiotic nature of the relationship between autocracy and theocracy. You wrote: 'So long as the entrenched autocrats of the Muslim world continue to deny their peoples equal rights of participation, there will always be disaffected dissidents who may resort to extreme ideologies and violent practices. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries excluded Muslims rallied to theocrats – bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and al-Zarqawi – to combat the autocrats – Mubarak, Assad, Fahd, and Musharraf. The autocrats and theocrats are mirror-images: both are exclusive.'[11] What are the political implications of this symbiosis between

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[11] Ibrahim 2006d.

autocrats and theocrats?

Ibrahim: The public space is absolutely dominated by autocrats who have been entrenched for 50 years, and theocrats who have been challenging the autocrats for the last 30 years – since the Iranian revolution. The small reviving constituency of the democrats is totally outmatched. Yes, I say the autocrats need the theocrats. How so? Well, the autocrats skillfully and cynically use the theocrats as a bogeyman to frighten not only the West but their own middle classes and non-Muslim minorities. The autocrats believe that if they can continue to confront the West and their own people with a stark choice – the theocrats or us – then their power is secure. In Egypt in 2005, 77 per cent of the registered voters abstained because they did not want either the autocrats or the theocrats. The regime had destroyed the democratic middle ground that could have galvanised the voters. Ayman Nour who leads a liberal democratic party called Al Ghad was arrested in 2005 and has just completed his two years in prison.

In 2006 the West got scared of democracy-promotion because of the election of Hamas in the Palestinian Authority and the Muslim Brothers winning 88 seats – one-fifth of the Parliament – in Egypt. Mubarak used this result to argue that democracy was being pushed too fast. We democrats must respond by pointing out that Islamists will get 20-25 per cent of the vote in free elections, at least for the foreseeable future. Fear of the Islamists can't be used to block democracy for the rest. And if the Islamists get 45 per cent of the vote and form a government then we democrats have to have confidence that they will discover the world is not black and white, and that they too can be pressured and will have to compromise. I am not worried about that. But I am worried when the West swallows uncritically what the autocrats say. The real antidote to the symbiotic relationship between autocracy and theocracy is a politics of inclusion and democratic governance. When Muslims join the third wave of democracy that started in Portugal in 1974, al-Qaeda will join al-Hashashin in the dustbin of history.

Johnson: When you were released from prison in 2003 you addressed a conference in Washington DC on the theme of US support for democracy-promotion and said, 'I hope the United

States will have the consistency to see it through, along with indigenous forces that will build their own democracy.' What should Western governments do?

Ibrahim: We don't want you to enforce things like you did in Iraq. Just withhold your support from the autocrats until they open up the system. You did that with economic reform but you did not do it with political reform. You imposed conditionalities to liberalise the economy but you hesitate to use conditionality to open up the political space.

First, tell the autocrats to open up the system. Second, tell the autocrats to end the use of 'emergency' laws (such as those that have been in place in Egypt since Sadat's death). Third, pressure the autocrats to free up the public space – we need freedom of association, expression, organisation, and access to the media and cyberspace. I can't reach the 77 per cent of Egyptians who didn't vote. Here, in the Ibn Khaldun Center, I can say anything I want to you. On Tuesday I can host the open forum, and everyone can speak their mind. But we can't organise a rally outside the building. I need a permit from the state security and I won't get one. And if I organise without a permit I get thrown in jail. Fourth, insist on free elections, internationally monitored. With these measures in place then in five years we would have a robust democratic life in Egypt. The 77 per cent would come out and participate. After all, the same middle class people who don't vote in elections vote heavily in their professional associations. My plea to those who live in democratic societies is this: pressure your own governments to abstain from supporting the autocrats until our political space is opened up. Use your liberty to help us obtain ours.

Part 4: The theory of 'Muslim and Arab Exceptionalism'

Johnson: *One objection to your optimism rests on the thesis of 'Muslim and Arab Exceptionalism' – the notion that something in Muslim and Arab culture is fundamentally incompatible with democracy, and that this 'something' explains why the third wave of democratisation broke on the Arab shores of the Mediterranean. I*s *the exceptionalist thesis wrong? If so, why has the Arab world – and I say Arab rather than Muslim – resisted democratisation thus far?*

Ibrahim: Well, here is my answer to the exceptionalist thesis. The world today has 1.4 billion Muslims. Two-thirds are living under democratically elected governments. One-third is not. Granted the two-thirds may not always be living under a Westminster-type system, but Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Senegal, Nigeria are not very different from the general state of the democracies in other areas that experienced third wave democratisation – Latin America, East Asia, Southern and Central Europe.

The one-third of Muslims who have been left behind are concentrated in the Arab world. OK, if there is no Muslim exceptionalism, is there an Arab exceptionalism? I have examined that proposition and here is what I concluded. According to Samuel Huntingdon's book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*,[12] there have been three great waves of democracy. He dates the first from 1828-1926, the second from 1942-1962, and the third from the Portuguese revolution of 1974. I examined the interaction of the Arab world with these three waves of democratisation.[13] To my delight I found that Egypt, the biggest Arab country, was part of that first wave. We had our first constitution in 1866 and our first election for a Parliament was held the same year. But that first liberal age in Egypt was aborted by your fellow compatriots! The British occupation of Egypt began in 1882, only 16 years after the experiment began. During the second wave of democratisation, in the inter-war period, Egypt was also represented. In 1919 we had a revolution against the British and enjoyed an independence of sorts. Egypt began a second liberal age – we created a constitution in 1923, as well as the very High Court that acquitted me in 2003, and there were elections. But this evolution was aborted by the creation of the state of Israel. After 1948, all of the countries around Palestine – which had had their own liberal age to varying degrees – suffered a series of coup d'etats. Syria in 1949, Egypt in 1952, Iraq in 1958. In each case the communiqués issued by the Coup Officers highlighted the defeat of 1948 and blamed it on the liberal governments. Since then, the issue of Palestine,

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[12] Huntingdon 1991.

[13] See also Ibrahim 2006e.

rightly or wrongly, has been cynically used by dictators to delay and obstruct any true democratic reforms.

A careful historical analysis of the interaction of the Arab world with the West during the three waves of democratisation is better suited to explaining why the one-third of Muslims concentrated in the Arab world have not yet undergone democratisation than the metaphysical thesis of Arab cultural exceptionalism. Look, I know we don't need such metaphysics because I grew up in a home that had a Member of Parliament!

Part 5: Whither Iraq?

Johnson: Can the continued presence of the coalition play a positive role in Iraq – with new policies as well as new force levels, perhaps – or is it now time to go?

Ibrahim: First, it is time to redeploy. The coalition should withdraw from all the major population centres, where the presence of coalition forces invites resistance automatically. Even if the occupiers were angels, occupation always calls forth resistance. The coalition forces should go to Kurdistan, where they are still perceived as liberators, and to Kuwait, where the people are still grateful to the coalition for their liberation from Saddam 17 years ago. The coalition would then remain in a few hours' flying time should the Iraqi government need to call on it.

Second, it is time to reconstitute the Iraqi army. Iraq needs a big strong army and time is of the essence. Across the long porous borders come the outside fighters and this must be stopped. It is taking longer than expected to train a new Iraqi army. Middle-rank officers and lower-rank privates from the old army were let go in the early weeks of the occupation – being unemployed they were attracted to the resistance. As many as possible should now be brought back into service (apart from a small group at the top) even if the majority were Ba'athists. If they come from the Sunni triangle then the people from that area will see that their brothers, sons and fathers are back in the army. They will feel more part of the new Iraq and be less hostile.

Third, it is time for a new neighbourhood policy in which you talk to every neighbour, including Iran. It is a luxury to pick whom to talk to when you have a complex problem like the one created by the coalition in Iraq.

Johnson: Can I probe you on that last point? You wrote that '[A] seasoned regional observer noted on the second anniversary of the Iraq war that the continued debacle of the US coalition forces was not just attributable to insurgent forces of all kinds, but was also a result of Middle Eastern autocratic regimes joining forces in hope that the Iraqi democratic experiment would fail spectacularly, thus giving them a new lease on life'.[14] Why do you now think these countries can be brought into the process of stabilising Iraq?

Ibrahim: Well, four of the neighbours – Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait and Turkey – are on good terms with the US. And Turkey is definitely interested in having a democratic society next door, as is Kuwait. Jordan would also benefit from having a democratic neighbour. Syria and Iran will involve hard bargaining, of course. But Syria is ready for a bargain if you can persuade Israel to engage in a serious negotiation to withdraw from the Golan Heights. Syria does not have the resources of Iraq, is being challenged by Lebanon, and could not withstand sanctions, so with a face-saving formula Syria may co-operate. Iran would probably be willing to cooperate if you can let Iran get away with the nuclear issue. Can you? That is where you have to make the decision yourself, as the West.

Johnson: President Mubarak stated in a recent interview on Al-Arabia that 'the Shiites only allegiance is to Iran, rather than to their own countries.'[15] You responded to that by publicly apologising to the Shiites.[16] The Sunni establishment in Saudi Arabia and Egypt have been making similar noises questioning the 'loyalty' of the Shiites. And we have this ghastly sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. To what extent is this elite hostility towards the Shiites

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[14] Ibrahim 2005b.
[15] See Wong 2006.
[16] Ibrahim 2006f.

shared at the Sunni grassroots?

Ibrahim: In the middle class and the working class there is a lot of marriage and co-habitation and mixed neighbourhoods. This kind of sectarian strife is new to the Iraqis. There was always resentment among the Shiites about discrimination and exclusion from power, but there were enough Shiites in power to mitigate that grudge. The sectarianism today is from people who had power and have lost it – the Sunni leadership. They are trying to persuade the entire Sunni community to share their fear and resentment. They seek to heighten the Sunnis' fear of the Shiites and the Kurds so that they fight.

I have written that the Shiites and the Kurds should be more accommodating – they should give the Sunnis *more* than their 'share'. You see, the Sunnis know deep in their hearts that the old situation can't be recreated. So, help them to come to an accommodation. There may well be a moment of opportunity here. There is a societal fatigue in Iraq because of the bloodshed, and that is usually when you can strike a deal – when everyone is tired and wants a way out. It is not yet a civil war, and I don't think it will become a civil war, but without Sunni support Iraq will suffer a series of bloody, random, sectarian explosions and eruptions of anger, making it difficult for any government to govern.

Johnson: What you are working on now?

Ibrahim: The creation of an Arab Endowment for Democracy, for which I am heading back to Beirut for more discussions. We are hoping to hold our inaugural meeting in the first week of April and I'd like to invite you to that meeting. At this time I am engaged more in activism than my scholarly work, but I hope that before too long I can turn back to the three or four books I have in me, including my own memoirs.

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Chapter 7

Human Rights and Democracy in Iran: An Interview with Ladan Boroumand

Ladan Boroumand is research director at The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran. A former visiting fellow at the International Forum for Democratic Studies, she studied history at Ecole des Hautes Etudes En Sciences Sociales in Paris with Claude Lefort, Mona Ozouf and François Furet. She is the author of *La Guerre des Principes*, and has written or co-written several articles on the French Revolution, the Islamic revolution of Iran, and the nature of Islamist terrorism.[1] The interview took place on May 15, 2007.

Personal and Intellectual Background

Alan Johnson: What have been the most important influences shaping your enduring political ideas and commitments?

Ladan Boroumand: My mother played a major role because she nurtured the importance of truth in our lives. When we did something wrong she would say 'if you tell me the truth you won't be punished' – which was in absolute contradiction with the outside world, where authority was more important than the truth. My father, Abdorrahman Boroumand, was a liberal opponent of the Shah. Amidst Iran's traditionalist and autocratic cultures he created a more democratic atmosphere within the family. He never tried to impose his will on us. And the fact that we were in the opposition was important. I saw that while many would show respect and obedience to the Shah, inside our family there was always a critical discourse, so we gained a sense of the importance of being critical and judging for ourselves.

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[1] Boroumand 1999, 2000a, 2000c, 2003, 2005, 2007; Boroumand and Boroumand 2002.

We learnt something else from our Father. He was a PhD, an ambitious young man, a lawyer, and he wanted to have a career in politics. But at some point he said 'no' to honours and power, in the name of beliefs. We witnessed him dedicate his life to a cause.

Johnson: Which books had a big influence on you?

Boroumand: It's a very interesting question and it takes us to the heart of the problem that we have in Iran. My father was a literate and well-educated man. Although he was familiar with classic texts in political philosophy he was not an intellectual in the sense we understand the word in the West. And that was the problem of the nationalists, whether liberals or socialists or authoritarians. So while our father would give us the classics of Persian literature, his younger friends would encourage us to read Frantz Fanon and Ali Shariati – third-worldist, leftist and anti-imperialist literature. We did not read the classical authors of democracy such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Montesquieu – they were out of fashion when we were growing up. We were protected from gravitating to the authoritarian ideologies not by books but the way of life inside our family – the way we talked, made decisions and lived.

I left Iran in 1975 and went to study political sociology in Paris. I never joined any exile group, though I knew my father's friend, Bani-Sadr, who was an exile in Paris, and also a student. Paris was a centre of student opposition to the Shah and I was approached by the Iranian Communists but I had already acquired a strong liberal culture from my family, so I was reluctant. Yet I took very seriously their argument that social justice would be attained only if we were ready to sacrifice our 'bourgeois freedoms'. I thought we shouldn't dismiss this point. And though I was very keen to keep the liberty I had discovered in Paris, I agreed it would be very selfish to sacrifice humanity's well-being to my individual freedoms.

But I had to make sure their argument was correct. I started to study both Marxism and the situation of workers and farmers in China, the USSR and Eastern European countries. The timing was good; many books were being published on these

topics by dissidents. The scope of devastation in China during the Great Leap Forward was unbelievable. And a book by a Hungarian dissident depicted the grim situation of factory workers in Eastern Europe. I was outraged that my Iranian comrades were refusing to see the reality and preferred to live in a fantasy land. By 1977/8, I had become a strong supporter of dissidents in communist countries.

Bani-Sadr's group had a more Islamic, semi-liberal atmosphere, so I hung around them. I was trying to figure out the meaning of abstract concepts such as 'nationhood' and 'freedom'. But I was studying at the University of Nanterre, a very leftist university, in the post-1968 years when being 'revolutionary' was still very cool. The Marxist and structuralist ideas that were in vogue were kind of alien to my concerns – what are human rights, what is liberty, what is a nation?

However, a few years later, after the Iranian revolution, I left Nanterre and went to the famous Ecole des Hautes Etudes En Sciences Sociales, where many influential French intellectuals were teaching. I studied with Claude Lefort, François Furet, Pierre Manent, and Mona Ozouf. Pierre Manent introduced me to the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As I read them I became outraged that in my early years of university there was never any mention of these authors! I thought I had been duped, and that I had wasted my time. Now my real education started.

Part 1: The Iranian Revolution

Boroumand: When Khomeini came to Paris in October 1978 I had the opportunity to meet him. My father was sent to Paris as an envoy of the National Front – he knew Khomeini and had helped him in exile. My father was a believer, you see, albeit an open-minded one. In the 1960s and 1970s he had sent his religious taxes to Khomeini through Bani-Sadr.

My father was sent to Paris by the National Front to figure out what Khomeini's plans were, but Khomeini said they would know about his plans in due time. My father returned to Tehran and informed his colleagues at the National Front that Khomeini was a dangerous man, acting as if the rest of

the opposition didn't exist. From then on my father backed Dr Bahktiar who argued that the opposition to the Shah should refuse to come under Khomeini's umbrella.

At about the same time in Paris, in a small printing house owned by Bani-Sadr, I stumbled upon Khomeini's book *The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurisprudent*. I realised that his programme was not democratic and that he believed in the sovereignty of the Jurisprudent – a religious man whose knowledge of the religious law gives him full authority over the nation. I approached Bani-Sadr and warned him. I said, 'This is dangerous.' He responded: 'Khomeini has evolved.' I said, 'Why don't we ask him?' So (laughs) I wrote out, in Paris, very childishly, a series of 13 questions for Khomeini. One was 'what is your message to Iranian youth?', but the other twelve concerned the foundations of the body politic and the state. We handed this to Khomeini's son-in-law who took it to Khomeini. The message came back: 'The Ayatollah won't respond to these questions – he says it's not the right time for this.' I said, 'When will the right time be?' He just smiled at me. This was a week or so before Khomeini returned to Iran, where he implemented, step-by-step, *exactly* what he wrote in that book. I learnt a lesson about the importance of ideology in politics. Always read with care what any leader to be has written, and never think it unimportant.

I was worried about what Khomeini intended for Iran, and I wanted to be a witness to the revolution. So, on the pretext of being a student engaged in a field research, I arrived in Iran one week after Khomeini, in the midst of the revolution. On February 11 I was at the Parliament when it was taken by the 'revolutionary forces'. I saw the invasion of the military barracks by the people and I saw the arms being distributed. I can still see a young man driving a tank and looking at me and asking, 'Would you like to drive the tank?' It was a surreal atmosphere. It was not a war because the army had retreated and left the city to the insurgents. Kids of 13 and 14 were taking arms.

In this tumult I interviewed teachers, labourers and people from the markets, trying to understand the dreams of each social group. The conclusion I reached was that none knew about Khomeini's *programme*. Their ideal future was a

representative parliamentary regime. I also discovered that there were two social groups who were not initially enthusiastic about the revolution or the Mullahs – workers and peasants. I interviewed workers in a cement factory in the city of Esfahan and I witnessed a tension between the engineers and the workers. At the time of the General Strike in October 1978 the workers had not wanted to go on strike so the engineers had paid the bus-drivers not to pick the workers up! And now the workers were afraid of being labelled 'counter-revolutionaries,' worried about the 'revolution' and worried for their livelihood. The same was true of the villagers, whose main memory of the Mullahs was that in 1960 they had opposed the Shah's agrarian reform. To them the Mullahs were a feudal force not to be trusted.

But very quickly Khomeini started to talk about the 'Downtrodden versus the Arrogants' – and about class differences between the rich and poor. The less privileged classes began to think there might be an opportunity in the Islamic revolution and began to join the movement. In a couple of months the social landscape changed totally as the middle classes that were the real support of the revolution became wary and some turned to opposition, while – I don't like to use this concept – 'the masses' became pro-Khomeini.

Johnson: *What explains the support of so many women for the Islamic revolution?*

Boroumand: Khomeini's official discourse was that he was uninterested in power, and only wanted to fight against corruption, and for freedom. Of course he would also use phrases such as 'within the limits of Islamic requirements' – this was the warning we did not understand. Women did not join the movement thinking these guys would radically restrict their social freedoms. When I interviewed women teachers, I found that they wanted more freedom, less corruption and to elect their representatives. But in revolutionary situations, each actor projects its fantasy onto the leadership. And because Khomeini was discreet about his real agenda each social actor could fantasise about what the Imam wanted for Iran, and joined the movement on the basis of that fantasy.

Johnson: *Soon enough a brutal reality replaced the fantasies. You have written that you witnessed scenes that left you 'overwhelmed by shame'. Can you tell me about that?*

Boroumand: I remember the first executions – of former regime officials. They published photographs of the corpses in the newspapers and plastered these images on the walls. It was horrible. I rang Bani-Sadr and asked, 'Why?' His response was very perturbing. He said 'They had to kill them because otherwise the *people* would have lynched them.' But I knew that was not true, because I had accompanied Bani-Sadr to the very places these former officials had been held. There was no popular mood against them – the society was peaceful. The revolution was peaceful, really. The hatred was nurtured after the revolution by the revolutionaries.

The shame I felt was due to the fact that I was one of millions of people who had wished for change and my heart was with the movement. I felt responsible for what had happened to these men, who had been denied all their rights as accused and summarily executed. I felt guilty and ashamed and at this moment I turned 'counter-revolutionary'. I did not vote for 'the Islamic Republic' and I became an opponent of the regime. We had overthrown the Shah but now we had another arbitrary regime killing people. We had wanted due process of law, and human rights, but with this wave of executions – and all those that followed – the regime showed that we had got only a totalitarian system.

I returned to Paris knowing I would not return to Iran for a very long time. The day I left there was a huge May 1st parade. Thousands of young Iranian communists were on their way to the demonstration, rather satisfied with the work of the revolutionary Courts, unaware that by approving these courts, they were becoming accomplices to their own persecution. As I looked at these young people I felt that the writing was already on the wall for them. And I have never been back to Iran since that day.

Part 2: An Encounter with Evil

Johnson: *You settled in Paris with your father, Abdorrahman Boroumand, a social democrat who was a leader of the National Movement of the Iranian Resistance. On April 18, 1991, he was stabbed to death in his apartment building, presumably by agents of the Iranian government. Can you tell me something about why your father, and his friend and leader Shapour Bakhtiar, were both assassinated? After all, they were elderly and without international support. Why were they viewed as a threat by the Mullahs?*

Boroumand: After the revolution degenerated, my father came to France, and Dr Bahktiar arrived six months later. They created the first active opposition to the regime and worked together for a decade. Why were they killed? Well, from the earliest days Khomeini's regime was killing its opponents outside the country, but in the early 1990s they started a campaign of liquidation of all opposition figures outside the country, and the killings of Bahktiar and my father were part of this wave of assassinations. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the regime had lost an important support on the international scene and it had to figure out what to do in the new world. And when Rafsanjani became president in 1989, there was an opening to the West. The regime feared this opening could encourage the pro-democracy movement *inside* Iran. And of course all totalitarian regimes are paranoid and insecure because they don't have genuine popular support.

There was nothing special about my father's beliefs. He thought Iran should have a representative regime based on human rights, and that those in the majority today should allow the minority to fight for its ideas and become a majority tomorrow. Internationally, they wanted Iran to be an independent country pursuing its own agenda. Bahktiar was getting old but he remained the most legitimate figure in the opposition because he had never been part of the Shah's regime, and he had never worked with the Khomeini regime. Moreover, he had warned the nation about the huge mistake of rallying around Khomeini – that is why, to this day, Bahktiar remains a revered figure. Because my father would be his successor, they killed him first. Then they killed Bahktiar. The strategy was to eliminate the national

democratic movement and in a way they succeeded.

Johnson*: You have argued that the failure of the French government to react properly to the assassination of Shapour Bakhtiar 'gave substance to the Islamist assumption.'[2] What did you mean by that?*

Boroumand: By killing their opponents outside the country, while negotiating commercial deals with the very states that had given asylum to these oppositionists (and which were responsible for their security) the regime in Tehran sent a message to the Iranian people. That message was: 'Look at these Western democracies to which you aspire, and whom you think are your friends. We go on their soil, violate their sovereignty, and kill our opponents, and these countries do nothing because they have commercial and financial interests with us.' The deeper philosophical message is that, for the Western countries, democracy and human rights are *not universal.* When Western democracies pursue commercial interests while ignoring their own ideological foundations they indirectly help the development of Islamism and terrorism. Totalitarian regimes always have a universal message, you see. The Islamists think that the whole world should convert to their ideology. What they fear most is a war of ideas with another universalist ideology that challenges their worldview. By tacitly accepting the elimination of Iranian dissidents on their soil Western democracies seem to endorse the *non-universal* character of democratic rights, since what is unacceptable for a French citizen is tolerated if it targets an Iranian refugee.

The French government did not even officially deplore the assassination of Iranian exiles taking place in France. Nothing. We received no word from any official. Bakhtiar died under the very nose of the French police but the state did nothing. For over 36 hours the body was not even found – yet several policemen were inside the house at the time of the assassination and afterward! It is not believable. The investigation was suspiciously inept and, later, rumours circulated that a bargain had been struck by the French

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[2] Boroumand 1997.

state: do what you want to your own people but leave French citizens alone. One day there must be a real investigation about the role of the French state in the case of Bahktiar's killing.

Johnson*: Giving testimony before the US Human Rights Caucus you described the day of your father's murder as 'an encounter with evil.' You said, 'we find ourselves with a mutilated soul. And this is precisely where the effectiveness of terror lies. It is not as much for the life it takes than for the faith in human beings that it shatters. How then is it possible to find the strength to believe again, and to fight for the human being who is capable of such an act?'* [3] *It may be of great value to many others if you could say something about how you have lived with those questions yourself and found the strength to believe again.*

Boroumand: When they killed my father I went there before he was taken away. When the doctor said there was no hope I thought: 'in the end they succeeded; they were here to kill us and we were here to be killed.' I had been living in fear for many years. Each time my father was out of the house I knew he might be killed, but the psychological impact was incommensurable with what one 'knows' or anticipates. It is an encounter with evil because it is irremediable, and because the moment the crime is committed there is an eclipse of humanity. The moment is transient but, paradoxically, those framing the unspeakable become eternal. There is nothing you can do. It is done. The day after I did not want to wake up and if I had the strength to put an end to my life I would have done it. The shame of living after that day was very strong and I survived out of sheer cowardice. There was nothing heroic about it.

One does not believe in life anymore. I recall that the day after I wanted to talk to Holocaust survivors and ask how they managed. I hoped that no one I knew would see me in the street. My work for a decade had been unconsciously seeking to prevent this crime. I had published reports on human rights violations in Iran while my studies on the French Revolution

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[3] Boroumand 1997.

sought to understand human rights, to figure out what politics is, and what the ideological response to authoritarianism and totalitarianism should be. But I could not do anything about the killing. So you ask yourself about the use of all that work – and about whether life is worth living. What helps one carry on is friendship and love – the sole antidotes to hatred and murder – and the sense of duty you have to the survivors. It is a long process to learn to live and to continue one's struggle. Slowly, very slowly, you try to figure out how you can remedy the irremediable. And that is, perhaps, why my sister and I created The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation.

Part 3: The Iranian Revolution and the Left

Johnson*: The Iranian left (and the Western left, with a few exceptions) catastrophically misjudged the Islamists by supporting the 'anti-imperialist Imam' – failing to see that along with human rights and democracy, their own survival was threatened. Before it was dispatched by the regime, the left had failed to defend the democratic rights of 'perfumed bourgeois women' and 'bourgeois liberals,' so intoxicated were they by their fantasies about 'the anti-imperialist revolution'.*

Fred Halliday argued that 'the central avoidable error of most of the Iranian left [was] its catastrophic stand on "liberalism."'' He claimed that 'the Left allied with Khomeini to break "liberalism" – that is, those moderate democratic forces that opposed the Shah but were against clerical dictatorship.' He went on: While '[i]n any historical materialist perspective, the "liberals" reflected a more progressive position than the reactionary ideas and policies of Khomeini, the Marxists viewed events through the prism of "anti-imperialism."'[4] For myself, I'd say the repudiation in theory and practice of this basic historical materialist truth by vast swathes of the post-1960s left, including the 'historical materialists,' is now left-wing common sense, and the result has been a catastrophic loss of political bearings.

Boroumand: Well, actually I don't think the left made a big

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[4] Halliday 1987, p. 37.

mistake. If they were to be true to their ideology, which was a totalitarian ideology, then they made the right choice. Yes, they got killed for it, but many Communists got killed for it in the Soviet Union as well. The fact is that between Dr Bahktiar – who represented the option for a liberal democracy – and the creation of a totalitarian system, the left supported the creation of a totalitarian system. Why? Because that system was much closer to what they wanted than what Bahktiar was offering.

Johnson: Perhaps I am revealing my own wishful thinking about what any left 'should' support?

Boroumand: So the real questions are: why did so many leftists have a totalitarian mind-set? Why were so many so easily absorbed by a totalitarian ideology instead of supporting liberal democracy? We were an autocratic nation lacking the cultural, philosophical and intellectual heritage of the West. Only ten chapters of John Locke were available in Farsi in 1979 in a book that had not been on the market for 20 years. Liberal ideas were almost non-existent while Lenin, Marx, Fanon were systematically translated. We just didn't have the liberal background that you had in the West that helped you resist and defeat your own totalitarian tendencies in the twentieth century.

Part 4: Revolutions and Virtuous Minorities

Johnson: In 1999 you published La Guerre des Principes*, an important study of the tensions between the 'rights of man' and the 'sovereignty of the nation' during the French Revolution.[5] Your central argument was that the revolutionaries created a metaphysical notion of 'the people' and substituted this for the flesh and blood people of France. The latter 'could not be admitted into the sphere of the nation's sovereignty' and were viewed by the revolutionaries as a 'metaphysical entity par excellence …an ideal being.' Had your experience of the Iranian revolution shaped your reading of the French revolution?*

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[5] Boroumand 1999. See also Boroumand 2000b.

Boroumand: Actually, when I started to work on the French Revolution I wanted to understand the West. Here was my question: if these countries are democratic polities based on the assumption that the individual is free and autonomous, then why, during the 19th and 20th centuries, have they denied this right to other countries? My question concerned colonialism and imperialism, but it was not the classical leftist question. Mine was a philosophical question – why a body politic based on democratic principles behaves undemocratically on the international scene. If these principles are really universal, then logically they should also inform the international behaviour of this entity. If these principles are not universal then what are 'human rights'?

I reached the conclusion that each time a Western democratic polity behaves undemocratically on the international scene it is by reference to 'the nation' and its 'glory,' 'honour,' 'security,' 'interest,' and 'stability'. There is a tension between 'the nation' as a concept and as a political form, and 'human rights' as a universal principle. You can see this in the UN Charter, by the way. On the one hand, you have the Declaration of Human Rights; on the other hand, you have the sovereignty of the nation state. The tension between the two principles is at the heart of the UN's inconsistency.

The only time in the history of Western politics that these two concepts were at play in the internal history of one nation was during the French Revolution – they were both included in the 1791 constitution. Both concepts – 'human rights' and 'the sovereignty of the nation' – formed the normative foundations of the state. So I studied how a polity based on human rights could lead to a Government of Terror. By studying everyday legislative debates during several years of the French revolution I discovered that the central category of 'the people' did not refer to real people but was a juridical category that had been filled-in by an ideological orthodoxy and which was embodied by a 'virtuous minority'.

And that is when I understood what I had been told by Mr Bani-Sadr. Do you recall, he said to me, justifying the first summary executions, that 'the people would have killed these former regime officials'? The people he referred to could not have been the real people (40 million individuals). He meant

that the orthodoxy of the new regime, led by the virtuous minority representing 'the people,' required the summary execution of these particular people, because the orthodoxy did not include human rights.

Johnson: You found a 'continuity of political reflexes and expedients before and after 1789,' as each regime was informed by the principle of the sovereignty of the nation interpreted as the sovereignty of a virtuous minority.[6] In Iran, before and after the Shah, virtuous minorities also claimed rights to interpret the meaning of this juridical category – 'the people'.

Boroumand: Yes, the definition of 'the people' applied only to those who espoused the new ideology, while those who opposed the new ideology became 'enemies of the people'. And this is how I came to understand that nationhood in the West is not necessarily a rational category made up of free and equal individuals endowed with inalienable natural rights and bound by a social contract. In the history of the West, up to World War Two, both democratic and undemocratic leaders have embodied the 'sovereignty of the nation'. The 'sovereignty of the nation', then, does not equal democracy. Nationhood in the West has not been individualistic – to put it simply, if citizens in the United States or Great Britain had democratic rights it was more because they were British or American than because they were human beings. That is why representative democracies such as the United Kingdom could, consistently, pursue undemocratic foreign policies.

Since the end of World War Two, Western polities have gone through a slow but steady trend of democratisation that can be measured both in their internal regime and their foreign policies. The most important of all is the introduction of human rights in their constitutional texts, which would have been unthinkable before World War Two.

Part 5: Reforming Iran

Johnson: Iran's theo-polity is based on the bedrock principle of valayet-e faqih *– the rule of the Islamic jurisprudent. Yet this*

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6 Boroumand 1999.

principle may be the regime's weakness. As you have noted, the notion of 'setting up the theologian as political guardian of the people was Khomeini's idea' and many orthodox clerics have always rejected it.[7] Moreover, there now is widespread cynicism about the clergy, especially among the young. And a civil society movement has emerged from 1997, opposed to the principle of velayat-e faqih, expressing, you say, a new 'philosophical and ideological consensus … without precedent in the country's modern history' in favour of 'the dignity or intrinsic worth of the human person.'[8] How can the reform movement exploit these contradictions politically? What are the levers? What are the agencies? What are the flash-point issues?

Boroumand: Many people say the constitution contains two contradictory principles. As you say, one is valayet-e faqih, which means the guardianship of the jurisprudent, i.e. the leader who knows the laws of God and has total control over society on that basis. Note, by the way, that this principle is a heresy, as in Abrahamic religions only God's power is absolute. Valayet-e faqih puts the Iranian regime at odds with religious orthodoxy and makes it a very modern totalitarian regime. Many go on to say that the principle of valayet-e faqih is flanked by a second principle, the sovereignty of the people, and during the reform era of Khatami many people tried to play one of these principles against the other. In my view, this was an optical illusion on the part of the reformists because the 'sovereignty of the people' in the constitution of the Islamic Republic refers only to a limited sovereignty in 'social life' – i.e. freedom to choose their spouses, their business, to own property, etc. It does not grant the people political power. The sovereignty of the people is defined in the constitution as subordinate to the absolute power of the jurisprudent, and that is why the constitution has functioned for 30 years.

So I would not put it, as you do, as a matter of exploiting 'contradictions'. The real problem the regime faces is that some of those who compose it have stopped believing in it and have defected. I will give you an example. The Office of Consolidating Unity was an umbrella organisation for Islamist student associations in the Universities. In the 1980s it was

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[7] Boroumand 2000c.

[8] Boroumand 2005, p. 61.

a terror organisation imposing orthodoxy, spying on students and denouncing dissidents to the authorities. Today, the Islamic Associations are virtually dissident organisations! People who were part of the regime have lost faith in its ideology and have defected with a chunk of the institutions which used to be part of the regime. *This* is the internal difficulty facing the regime. On the other hand the social movements you refer to, of women, and other civil society activists which mount a social resistance to the regime's orthodoxy, are the external difficulties the regime faces.

Johnson: Christopher Hitchens visited Iran in 2005 and wrote of 'two Irans': 'Iran today exists in a state of dual power and split personality. [H]uge billboards and murals proclaim it an Islamic republic, under the eternal guidance of the immortal memory of Ayatollah Khomeini ... But directly underneath those forbidding posters and right under the noses of the morals enforcers, Iranians are buying and selling videos, making and consuming alcohol, tuning in to satellite TV stations, producing subversive films and plays and books, and defying the dress code ... The country is an "as if" society. People live as if they were free, as if they were in the West, as if they had a right to an opinion, or a private life.'[9] And the Iranian lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Shirin Ebadi has written that 'Iran's young people remain cheerfully pro-American, the last pocket of such sentiment in an angry Middle East.'[10] Is Hitchens right? Is Ebadi right?

Boroumand: They are both right. The big challenge facing the regime is how to recuperate that part of the society which is totally resistant to the regime's ideology and over which it has no control. Each time the regime cracks down the opposition resurfaces in another way. For example, the women organised sit-ins at Universities, and they were beaten.[11] So they came up with the idea of a one-million signature campaign for women's equality under the law.[12] For example, when the regime arrested part of the leadership of

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[9] Hitchens 2005.

[10] Ebadi 2006, p. 213.

[11] Iran's Womens Rights Activists 2005.

[12] Khorasani 2007.

the student movement, another set of leaders emerged. The regime constantly tries to control civil society's resistance but it fails because it has lost its credibility.

Johnson: In May 1997 Khatami was elected President by a landslide on a reform ticket. The result, as you wrote, was that '[w]ithin a few weeks, the political discourse burst through the narrow framework of the official revolutionary language. Expressions like "freedom of thought", "pluralism", and "civil society" filled the air' and people hoped for a Tehran Spring.[13] But it was not to be. The hardliners panicked and clamped down. What was the political meaning of the Khatami reform movement?

Boroumand: Khatami wanted a more dynamic civil society, and more freedom, but he always believed in the absolute power of the jurisprudent. The reform *movement* happened because of two developments. First, supporters of the ruling elite in the 1980s were sidelined in the 1990s. These people had leftist leanings and were deeply shaken by the fall of the Soviet Union and the demise of Communism. After 1989 these former authoritarians became influenced by writers like Hannah Arendt and the Eastern European dissident literature – they were slowly converting to democracy. Akbar Gangi is representative of those 'insiders' who campaigned for Khatami and developed a new discourse of democracy, freedom of press, and so on.[14] Second, a young generation which had not witnessed the early days of the revolution, and had no memory of the Terror which had decimated our generation, were ecstatic about this new language. The old 'insider' leaders who had been converted to more democratic views allied with a younger generation of civil society activists – and that made possible a reform movement.

The reform *movement* frightened the hard-liners who launched a counter-attack: a crack down on pro-democracy figures, serial killings of writers and journalists and dissidents, and the banning of the burgeoning press. And although this crack-down consolidated the defection of many major figures from Khatami's movement – people like Gangi, Sazegara and

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[13] Boroumand 2000c.

[14] Gangi 2005.

others – the reform movement was not strong enough to push for constitutional change. But it did create a space for debate during which many people realised that *the constitution itself* is the main problem.

Johnson*: After the 2005 elections you wrote that Ahmadinejad had appealed to some extent to the poor, and this should have 'alerted the democratic opposition to the need to reach out to the less-educated and poorer strata of society.'[15] Are there any signs that this is happening?*

Boroumand: I was echoing the conclusions of the student movement which argued the debate should be popularised – taken beyond intellectuals and students. For example, the debate about the boycott of the elections was never properly translated into popular terminology. This is exactly what the women activists understood, and the genius of their one million signatures campaign is that it takes their cause to the wider society and creates a new conversation. The activists talk to people in the streets, encourage people to approach their family members, and talk about the laws, equality and rights. They have created a little booklet that explains what gender discrimination is, the impact it has, and why it is important for women to have equality and rights. Slowly the women have become the most subversive movement in Iran and the regime has now understood this, hence the latest crack-down.

Johnson*: Your view of the reform movement contrasts with that of Ray Tekeyh, writing in* Foreign Affairs *in Spring 2007. In urging the West to abandon regime change and pursue détente with Iran, Tekeyh proposed that the Iranian democratic opposition should be cut adrift on two (mutually contradictory, it seems to me) grounds: it is 'non-existent' and it is an obstacle to détente. Democratisation should be pursued instead by measures to bolster 'moderate' conservatives such as Larijani, and by the long-term benefits of 'integrating Iran into the world economy and global society.'[16] How do you respond to that argument?*

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[15] Boroumand 2005.

[16] Takeyh 2007.

Boroumand: There are several points to make here. First 'regime change' is an unfortunate expression. It really doesn't mean anything, and certainly does not tell you what will come *after*. I mean, there was a regime change in Iraq. When the West has diplomatic leverage it should use it only with reference to 'human rights' and 'democratic principles'. This would leave it less vulnerable to criticism.

Second, what people like Tekeyh are promoting is really just the old traditional realpolitik based on the absolute sovereignty of nation-states. His 'solution' has already been tried in the 1990s and it failed. At the time of Rafsanjani, the stance Tekeyh suggests was exactly the stance taken by all Western countries, including the United States, but they could not persuade the Islamic Republic to stop supporting terrorism in the region, or behave like a normal nation state. The plain fact is that the Iranian government is not a normal nation-state. Khomeini's people erased the notion of 'nation' from the name of the country's political institutions – the National Assembly was re-baptised 'Islamic Assembly.' There is no 'nation' in the constitutional text of Iran. It is a universalist Islamist regime that has an international agenda.

Third, we must return to the question of 'the West.' The Western polities are also a mutating phenomenon. They are in the midst of very profound changes – the sovereignty of the nation-state is giving way to new transnational political and economic forms. One of the reasons for inconsistency and contradiction – such a tragic paralysis with regard to pushing forward democratic agendas – is that foreign policy is pushed in contradictory directions due to this unfinished political mutation in the West itself.

We must also acknowledge the problems of 'interventions' from above. We have, thus far, a failed intervention in Iraq, and Afghanistan is not a real democracy. There are serious arguments about how to pursue pro-democracy policies and we human rights advocates and democrats should think of ways of organising at the level of international civil society to make us independent of the short-term political agendas of governments. We should organise a vast network of solidarity that could provide moral support, even material support to people struggling for democracy. It is vitally

important for the Iranian reform movement to know that it has supporters in the West beyond President Bush (who is quite popular in Iran).

Fourth, the West has an ideological stake here. To treat the Iranian reform movement in the way Tekeyh suggests would only weaken the West's own ideological foundations and encourage Islamist terrorists. And, anyway, why should the Islamic regime be allowed to support the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, or other groups in Iraq, while the democratic polities are not allowed to support their fellow democrats!

Johnson: *You have pointed out that Khatami's election victories were 'largely inconsequential' because 'while reform kept winning votes, the unelected organs of the state kept tightening the screws.' The election boycott movement emerged in the 1990s because high turnouts had only 'strengthened the regime's international position without bringing any increase in political freedom.'[17] But on the other hand, the tactic of boycott led to Ahmadinejad. (A turnout in 2003 of a mere 12 per cent in Tehran – an Islamist rump – gave us Mayor Ahmadinejad, and, in 2005, we got President Ahmadinejad.) Should progressives participate in elections in Iran?*

Boroumand: The Islamic Republic confiscates elections, empties them of their real meaning and turns them into their opposite. Genuinely free elections are an institution that crystallises, on the political level, the autonomy of the individual. But the Iranian regime uses elections to crystallise the *negation* of the autonomy of the individual. A Guardian decides who is apt to rule you, how they will rule you, and which laws they will impose on you. And the regime then calls on you to go and choose who is to do all this to you, from a range of people they have pre-selected! When you play this game you become an accomplice of the denial of your own autonomy. It has been a major ideological success of the regime to trick citizens to go and vote.

Many who have suffered terribly at the hands of the regime do vote, of course. I have a friend who voted for Rafsanjani,

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[17] Boroumand 2005.

knowing full well that Rafsanjani killed his uncle. Many people feel like prisoners, and look to voting to create a 'bigger window in the cell,' so to speak. I do not judge them – it's a moral and individual choice. But, as Havel says, you pay a price when you become an accomplice in your own persecution. We have to defend with all our strength the dignity of democratic institutions and recapture these institutions from the hands of the regime that has confiscated them.

Johnson: You have described the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as 'a man who stands squarely at the nexus of radical-Islamist ideology and terrorism.'[18] What is the political meaning of his rise to power, so soon after the high hopes of the reform movement? And how should we interpret the regime's recent actions – the pursuit of the nuclear bomb, the Holocaust denial conferences, the 'wipe Israel off the map' rhetoric, the kidnapping of the 15 British sailors? Are these actions the expressions of a newly confident Islamic Republic or desperate efforts to escape deep problems?

Boroumand: The election of Ahmadinejad is directly linked to the reformist episode. Khatami's new reformist language stimulated the opposition while his drive to modernise Iran's image on the international scene forced the regime to water down its radical ideological rhetoric and rein in, rhetorically at least, its violent agents. But this created new dangers for the regime – the alienation of its agents, the wavering of their loyalty as they began to fear their own arrest. The regime ran the risk of losing its own base, psychologically. Now, if elections and modernisation are bringing many electors to the polls, and the world is being given the impression of a 'popular' Iranian regime, well OK, that is a risk worth running to gain international recognition. But once the reform movement grew, and once the boycott began to bite, the regime said, 'Well, we must nurture our own base.'

Under Ahmadinejad, once again the police and security forces can shoot people with impunity and women can be harassed in the streets. His rhetoric about Israel is another expression of this strengthening of the regime's orthodoxy. (Actually, it is a less euphemistic expression of what the Islamic Republic

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[18] Boroumand 2005.

has always advocated.) His policies are aimed at remobilising the hard core supporters of the regime who had been disheartened by 8 years of Khatami's ambiguous rhetoric.

America's difficulties in Iraq have certainly boosted the regime self-confidence, but this is deceptive. Since the election of Ahmadinejad Iran has faced three major popular uprisings in Kurdistan, Azerbaijan and Khuzistan. And it has been challenged by student activists, the women's rights movement, teachers, and sporadic strikes and demonstrations by workers.

Part 6: Reforming Islam

Johnson*: Let's talk about the reform of Islam. Shirin Ebadi argues that 'an interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with equality and democracy is an authentic expression of faith.' Drafting a women's rights law she relied on the central texts of Islam taught in the seminaries of the holy city of Qom, and proved that 'a basic right for women could be guaranteed within an Islamic framework of government provided those in government were inclined to interpret the faith in the spirit of equality.' She defends the idea of reinterpretation, or 'ijtihad', to create a space for 'adapting Islamic values and traditions to our lives in the modern world.' However, she also warns that ijtihad is 'a tricky foundation on which to base inalienable, universal rights,' because 'patriarchal men and powerful authoritarian regimes who repress in the name of Islam can exploit ijtihad to reinterpret Islam in the regressive unforgiving manner that suits their sensibilities and political agendas.'[19] Is Islam compatible with democracy, equality and women's rights? How can the gates of ijtihad be opened?*

Boroumand: There are several questions here. First, is religious truth compatible with democracy? You can say 'yes' and 'no.' 'No,' because democracy is based on the assumption that truth is unattainable. Individuals are fallible – what they think is the truth might not be the truth. Democracies organise so each person can individually speak truth but not impose it on the society. But religions insist they know the truth and

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[19] Ebadi 2006.

represent it. So there is always tension between religious faith and democratic beliefs. On the other hand, 'yes,' because according to all Abrahamic religions God is transcendent and there is nothing sacred about the world, which is only the creation of God. Nature is just nature, and man is sovereign on earth. Now, once man is defined as a free-willed entity that will be accountable to God *after death*, we have the conceptual ingredients for democratic systems. I know from my own studies of the theological origins of human rights that monotheism has been a key element in the nurturing and development of democratic philosophy. A nature that is profane, and a man defined by reason, fallibility, and freewill – historically these elements have come from Abrahamic religions.

The difference between Islam and Christianity is the difference in the role of the Prophet. Muhammad ruled the political community whereas Christ thought his dominion was not in this world. And that is what allowed Christianity to *evolve*. In the space evacuated by Christ, men could make human-made laws and deal with their temporal lives. We have a problem in Islam with Sharia, and a profound reform is necessary and *possible*. In some areas, Islam is more progressive than Christianity, particularly in the area of gender, because ontologically, in Islam, men and women were created equal, from the same earth, whereas in Christianity woman was created from the spare rib of the man. In dignity and creation man and women are absolutely equal in Islam. You can argue from the ontology of Islam to a reform of Sharia.

But a reformation of Islam will require profound intellectual debate among theologians. And here is a problem: Christianity has a much stronger intellectual backbone than Islam – there have been thinkers of the stature of St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, the debates of the nominalists in the 13th and 14th centuries, the example of William of Ockham, and the controversies about the status of human beings on earth fought between the Papacy and the Empire. All of this intellectual tumult created elements for a philosophical debate that ended in the social contract. We just don't have this kind of background in the Islamic tradition. That's why it would be very fruitful for Muslim theologians and thinkers to know these debates. One of the projects we should support is the translation of the political and theological debates that

took place at the end of the Middle Ages, which were really the key to the birth of democratic ideologies.

Perhaps the Shiites are more open to ijtihad at the moment. They have the example of the imams who renounced political power. The tradition of the twelfth imam is that he did not go after power. The only person who waged war and has become a revolutionary hero for Muslims today is the third imam, Hussein. But if you read the traditional stories about Hussein and the war he waged in Karbala you can draw a totally opposite conclusion. The original texts tell that on the eve of the final battle Hussein conversed with God and was given two options: to win the war and rule the community of the faithful, or to be killed and join Him, God. Between the two options – temporal power and joining his friend, God – Hussein chose to be killed. And this could be the symbolic myth we need – the religious leader, the heir to the prophet, renounces political power for the love of God.

Johnson: *It seems likely that Tony Blair will set up a Foundation after he leaves office and one of its aims will be to stimulate inter-faith dialogue.*

Boroumand: There is a problem right now with traditional theological studies. They are really boring – how to wash your hands, and so on. They spend a lot of their time on nonsense. Intelligent elements of society are drawn to modern studies – engineering, law, and so on, while those who go to religious studies are not necessarily the brightest. It is important to create a space where bright minds will be drawn to the intellectual challenge of theological reform and have the opportunity to study Judaism and Christianity and the debates of these traditions. But we need to be careful, as those interested in the real debate are often in hiding, are not well known, or are scared. The space for inter-faith dialogue must not be confiscated by the well-funded Wahhabists, and other brands of totalitarian Islam, who will seek to stop an authentic dialogue.

Part 7: Islamism's European Roots

Johnson: *Let's talk about Islamism. Together with your sister,*

Roya Boroumand, you have described Sayyid Qutb's ideology as 'Leninism in Islamist dress.' You also noted the Western 'revolutionary' language in the writings of Sayyid Abu'l A Mawdudi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Pakistan (and a major influence on many British Islamists). Islamism, you insist, is heavily influenced by the modern Jacobin-totalitarian European ideology of the 'virtuous revolutionary minority' and there is a lineage running 'from the guillotine, and the Cheka to the suicide bomber.'[20] Can you please explain your thinking about the relation of the European Jacobin tradition to European totalitarianism and contemporary Islamism?

Boroumand: There are so many points of continuity. For instance, to read the Iranian newspapers in 1979 and 1980 was to read a 'Leninist' discourse, but instead of 'the communist ideal' we had 'the Islamist ideal.' In both cases you could detect a power that saw itself as God on earth, organised as an all-powerful state, denying the right to individual belief, and reserving the right to define truth about and for the individual. The Iranian regime would look into the eyes of a believer and say 'you are not a true believer, you are not a true Muslim, and you are at war with God.' This was straight out of the Moscow Trials. It was not enough for the person to say 'I am a Muslim, I do believe in God, but I don't believe in *you*.' That distinction was not allowed to exist, just as it was not possible, as Trotsky put it, to be right against the Party. Another point of continuity was the revolutionary tribunals of the Iranian regime, which were exactly like the Soviet trials and before them, the French Revolutionary tribunals. And of course the status of the leader in the Islamic Republic is very similar to the status of the Leader in fascist or communist systems.

And we have not paid enough attention to the role of 'sacrifice' in Islamism or its roots in the death-cults of the European totalitarian tradition. One of the major achievements of Abrahamic religion was to put an end to human sacrifice for Gods. The symbolic event, of course, is when the Angel stops Abraham from sacrificing his son for God. Suicide bombing is reinstituting human sacrifice. This would be outrageous to

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[20] Boroumand and Boroumand 2002.

the Prophet – we have no precedent for that kind of behaviour. It is heresy.

In all of this Islamism is more like the modern totalitarian death-cults than a religious faith.

Johnson: Since 9/11, the consequences of Islamism for the West have been plain. But you have written with passion of the tragic consequences of Islamism for Islamic societies, arguing that '[We have] lost the keys to our own culture,' as a 'degenerate Leninism … pass[es] itself off as the true expression of a great monotheistic religion.'[21]

Boroumand: Totalitarianism in the West did not arise from the confiscation of a religion. It did so in our culture for a number of reasons. First, Islam lacks a formal organised church as an authoritative institution. Second, we lacked the rich philosophical and intellectual inheritance enjoyed by the West. Third, we experienced a rapid modernisation and a turbulent shift from tribal monarchies to nation-states. Fourth, we inherited political institutions from the West and did not go through the intellectual, political and socio-cultural struggle of *inventing* them. Fifth, latterly we have been awash with forms of 'revolutionary' ideology, as the West was. So we were poorly equipped to defend ourselves against the ideological attack of the Islamists. Moreover, the traditional religious seminaries had been more or less deserted by intelligent people and became stultifying places. They could not resist Khomeini's assault. They were outraged by Khomeini but they could not respond intellectually.

Johnson: Is it your view that to defend and advance democracy we must defend Islam against Islamism? That we need to frame Islamism as having imported the worst of the West – the totalitarian idea – against which a reformed Islam and an internationalist democratic impulse must join forces? I'd like to talk about this as you strike me as one of the very few people who seeks to think strategically about the battle of ideas we need.

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[21] Boroumand and Boroumand 2002.

Boroumand: As a liberal and secularist I am not the best person to defend Islam against impostors. As a student of political ideas however, I believe deconstructing Islamism in the name of Islam would be a good strategy. There is now a new generation of theologians who are more learned, and deplore the manipulation of the faith by Islamists. Many have non-theological backgrounds in engineering and other modern disciplines. There are religious thinkers in Iran who have put forward alternatives. One is Mohammad Modjtahed Shabestari who is thinking religion in terms of human rights and believes there is no contradiction.[22] This movement is just emerging and should be nurtured. These thinkers are persecuted and the West should seek a protective role. For instance, a religious scholar in Iran who was a feminist spent years working on the texts, finding a basis for equality between men and women. In a blink of an eye they stormed into his house, arrested and defrocked him, and confiscated all his notes. We have not heard from him since 2000.

Johnson: How can we protect these reformist theologians?

Boroumand: In Europe protection came as a by-product of the tension between the Papacy and the Empire. The Imperial Court would protect those theologians who argued against the Pope's right to control temporal life and political power. If the worldly Princes had not protected these theologians they would have been burned at the stake. So what the West could do today is to create safe spaces for these debates to take place, free from the assaults of the revolutionary Islamists. We should have seminaries in the West to stimulate a real dialogue. I do *not* mean a culturally relativistic polite exchange of pleasantries, but challenging debate of the kind we witnessed in the 19th century between Ernest Renan and Jamal-al-Din Al-Afghani. Renan wrote a piece sharply criticising Islam, and instead of taking umbrage, burning embassies or beheading hostages, Afghani took his pen and responded to him.[23] We should be uncompromising about freedom of expression if we want a real debate to take place.

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[22] See Seidel 2004.

[23] Al-Afghani 1968 [1883/4].

Part 8: The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation

Johnson: You co-founded and help to run The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation. How did you come to set it up and what are its goals?

Boroumand: The Foundation was created in March 2001 by my sister, Roya Boroumand, and myself. We talked earlier about our father's assassination as an encounter with evil and how, slowly, we learned to live again. But the feeling of guilt never left us. The four children are all still dealing with this and we all believe that it is our duty to make sure that justice is done. When we saw the changes in Iran in the 1990s, and the rise of a new generation that wanted democracy, we decided the time was right to set up the Foundation.

Johnson: Please tell me about the Foundation's memory project for victims of the Islamic Republic – Omid.

Boroumand: In 1982 we published a report 'Iran: In Defence of Human Rights'. At that time we were outraged that each political party was defending the rights of its own 'martyrs' while supporting the execution of those outside their ranks. We realised the problem was not just persecution by the Islamists but the failure of much wider layers of Iranian society to understand that no one's rights could be protected unless everyone's rights were protected.

Omid is a bi-lingual virtual memorial, library and resource-centre. We seek to list every person killed by the Islamic Republic of Iran and create a file and a virtual memorial to them, telling the story of how and why he or she was killed. The only common denominator is that each victim is a human being who was killed while the due process of law was violated and his or her rights as a defendant were denied. It is our way of paying homage to the victims and to posthumously restore their rights.

Omid is our way to remedy the irremediable. Evil consists in the eclipse of humanity and in Omid we can acknowledge each victim's humanity and create a space for empathy. We provide their loved ones with a forum to talk about them and even to mount the defence that they were not allowed to

mount when they were alive. We are also sending a message to the killers: here are the people you wanted to erase from the surface of the earth and they live on in a virtual world and they are demanding justice.

We want justice for our father but we won't get it if we don't fight for the right to justice for all fathers, all brothers, all mothers, all sisters, and all children. There is no right for us if there is no right for them. Our individual interest will be protected only when theirs is too. We want to tell our fellow citizens that we understand this, and invite them to understand it. And we want to send a message to the world about the Islamic Republic of Iran: this regime pretends to be an 'Islamic' regime but has killed thousands and thousands of Muslims; it pretends to be popular but rests on violence.

Grief is profoundly unsettling. You can collapse, but you can also be overwhelmed by the need to understand and act. Your mind can become very open to learning. We want people to visit Omid and to learn – about human rights and how to argue for them. So we have also created a virtual library, and are translating the most important human rights instruments and classical texts on democracy. It is a work in progress. We have also dedicated a collection of the library to the memoirs of former prisoners. And we offer scholars and activists a resource bank of information about the Iranian pro-democracy movement.

We have had over 400 people completing online forms, telling the story of their loved ones, many from the Islamic Republic of Iran. We interact with these people without knowing them. They send pictures of their loved ones and we complete the case of each person slowly by interacting with the victims. Omid is the initiative of the Boroumand Foundation but we want it to be the project of the Iranian nation one day.

Johnson*: What are you working on now?*

Boroumand: At the Foundation we are working on the translation of democratic classics. Right now we are translating John Locke's *Second Treatise*, Václav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless*, and some of *The Federalist* papers. I am also working on an article for *The Journal of Democracy*

assessing the prospects for the civil society movement in Iran.[24] Later I would like to write a book based on our work at Omid, about the pattern of violence exerted by totalitarian regimes.

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[24] Boroumand 2007.

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Chapter 8

A Values Based Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World: An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

Anne-Marie Slaughter is Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and serves on the board of the Council on Foreign Relations. Her recent books include *A New World Order* (2004) and *The Idea That Is America: Preserving Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007). She was the convener and academic co-chair of the Princeton Project on National Security, an effort to develop a new, bipartisan national security strategy for the United States. In November 2006 she was picked to chair Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Democracy Promotion. The interview took place on June 12, 2007.

Family and Intellectual Influences

Alan Johnson: Can you tell me about the familial experiences and intellectual influences that have shaped your world-view?

Slaughter: I'm half Belgian and 100 per cent American, which means that I grew up between a fairly normal upper-middle-class suburban childhood in Charlottesville, Virginia and a more cosmopolitan Brussels urban experience – lunches in the middle of the day, wine and crystal with my francophone grandparents. Going back and forth between those two worlds shaped me deeply. I came to understand my own country better in relief, became acutely aware of cultural differences and learned to admire European culture. When I'm in Europe I defend America and when I'm in America I defend Europe. I feel deeply American; it is a country that I love. I grew up in Virginia and then spent 20 years in Massachusetts – the cradles of America. My latest book says, 'My country has been hijacked and I want it back.'

Johnson: How about books? What would you say were the most important books that shaped your mind?

Slaughter: I was deeply influenced by a small book called *The Cuban Missile Crisis* written by a man who became my mentor, Abram Chayes.[1] He was a great Harvard Law professor and was deeply committed to the power of the law. He had been the legal adviser for the Kennedy administration and had devised the idea of 'quarantine' rather than a 'blockade,' which was very important in terms of getting OAS support for the Kennedy administration during the crisis. He was committed to multilateralism even when it takes longer. And yet Chayes represented the Nicaraguan government when it sued the United States for mining its harbours, a case that I worked on with him in law school. After serving as his government's highest lawyer, he then represented another country against his government in an effort to hold his country to its own highest standards – a case that he eventually won.

Johnson: …so he is a model for the kind of patriotism you extol in your new book, The Idea That Is America*?*

Slaughter: Absolutely. I went to Harvard Law School to try to work with him. He became my mentor and I worked for him for 4 years after graduating. Later, at Oxford, I was influenced by Hedley Bull, as a thinker on international relations. I'm a pretty classic liberal, not in the European free market sense, but in the genuinely Lockean enlightenment sense.

Part 1: Global governance and transnational networks

Johnson: I would like to discuss three works that advance a progressive foreign policy: A New World Order *(2004),* Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century *(2006) and* The Idea That Is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World *(2007).[2]*

Your 2004 book, A New World Order*, claimed that intense*

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[1] Chayes 1974.

[2] Slaughter 2004a, 2007a; Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006a.

economic and security interdependence has outgrown 'command and control' models of governance. Fluid transnational networks – a dense yet decentralised global maze of judges, regulators, and legislators – are now vital to contemporary international relations. And as governments work together through these transnational networks in response to the challenges of interdependence, they transform governance itself. First, can you give the readers an example of a 'network'?

Slaughter: Networks take different forms. One would be the international competition network, which is a global network of anti-trust officials (or 'competition officials,' in Euro-speak). They come together to exchange best practices, harmonise policy and anticipate problems. Another would be the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (INECE), founded by the American EPA and the Dutch EPA. Perhaps the best known example is the Basle Committee of Central Bankers, which is a powerful and problematic 'network' – problematic exactly because it's so powerful! A lot of financial regulation is now done through the Basle Committee and networks such as the International Organisation of Securities Commission (IOSCO). Another network is The European Association of Constitutional Judges which meets on a regular basis. When we think about the EU legal system we tend to think of hierarchical structures – the European Court of Justice, the Court of First Instance, and so on. But much of the work of making EU and national law mesh is actually done through this network of constitutional court judges who know each other, exchange cases, and interact with the judges on the EU courts as well. In fact, there is even a *global* network of constitutional judges, but it's not formal.

Johnson: Let's explore the potential and the dangers of these kinds of networks. You claim globalisation has produced a 'governance trilemma' but that transnational networks can be part of the solution. Can you explain?

Slaughter: The problem is that on the one hand we need much more global capacity to solve problems that transcend any one nation, but on the other hand, we don't want a centralised world government. (I've *never* been in a country where people say, 'Yes, we'd like a world government.')

One response to that problem has been to create policy networks open to all. For example, if you're interested in global warming – whether as a scientist, activist, government official, foundation official, or an NGO – you can get together and work on the issue. The problems with that solution are two-fold. First, you can't figure out whom to hold to account. Second, the people who are most interested in something are not always terribly representative. You don't want the most ardent environmentalist making decisions for you because that person is much less willing to make compromises than the median voter. So we have a 'trilemma': (a) we need global capacity; (b) we don't want world government; but (c) neither do we want amorphous gatherings making decisions without being accountable.

Transnational networks are part of the solution to that trilemma because they give us global capacity and accountability. They are neither a centralised world government nor a loose policy network, but a network of government officials who can be held accountable and who can form the spine of a larger network bringing in NGOs. It's not that you don't want lots of other people to be involved but you need someone you can hold to account.

Johnson: You argue that these inter-governmental networks are under-supported and under-used when it comes to addressing the central problems of global governance. If we took counter-terrorism, or post-conflict transition, or nation-building – how would enhanced network capacity transform our ability to address the problem?

Slaughter: Let's take nation-building. What we are lacking globally is the kind of capacity the EU regionally uses to socialise a candidate member. The country is helped to meet EU standards through the engagement of all the country's officials, pretty low level ones included, in EU networks. That is the deluxe model, and not something you can replicate except on a regional basis. But imagine if we had had a working model we could have plugged into Iraq. Of course there is terrible violence and insecurity, but a lot of the problems involve lack of technocratic competence. The old officials who used to run the state are no longer there while the new are not trained. There would have been political and technocratic

benefits if we could have extended the EU networks, tacked on the US, Turkish officials, some Indian officials, some Jordanians, and so on. If we had these networks, properly funded and developed, we would have *a web* that we could then plug into any country that desperately needs ongoing help for a decade or more. But what we have instead is ad hoc help. The US or the UN parachutes in a bunch of officials and they work for six months and then go home. They can do useful things, but they can't support a fledgling government on an ongoing basis.

Johnson: *What are the main obstacles to the development of that kind of network capacity at the moment?*

Slaughter: A failure of conceptualisation. Imagine if after 9/11 George Bush had gone before the world and said this: 'After the cold war we face new kinds of global threats. Terrorism is a global networked crime, as is arms trafficking and nuclear proliferation. So, as we did after 1945, the United States is going to lead the way to create a new set of global institutions for this new era to meet these global threats. We will create the global justice network, the global health network, the global environmental network. Those new networks will work with existing international institutions to strengthen world order.' Networks are the institutions best fitted for the conditions of the 21st century because they're flexible, operate faster, and use national resources rather than international resources. But politicians still think 'institution' means a big building in Geneva or New York or Nairobi with a bureaucracy and a letterhead.

Johnson*: What of the danger of elite capture of transnational network power?*

Slaughter: When you're talking about regulators there is always the danger of elite capture. All liberal democracies struggle with that as a domestic matter – we empower our ministries, or, in our case, executive agencies, so they can operate quasi-autonomously, but we also hold them accountable. Global networks just amplify that same issue – regulators meet with their counterparts and shape policy, and each nation government has to decide what authority to give to representatives and networks – whether to give

instructions ex ante or let them do what they think they need to do and then come back and justify it. But these are second generation problems – right now we're not using these networks effectively.

Johnson: How do you see the relationship between those transnational networks that have been formed 'from above' and those that have emerged 'from below'?

Slaughter: Corporations, NGOs and criminals are all organised in networks because networks fit with the speed, decentralisation, and communications technology of the 21ˢᵗ century. Governments are the outliers. If you create government networks you will empower civil society networks because you will give them valuable interlocutors. Take the environmental arena. Right now, if you are an environmental NGO you can lobby the UN, the UN environmental programme in Nairobi, the WTO, or individual national governments, but you don't have one address where you know you are getting the key decision-makers. If you had a global environmental network of the environmental ministers and they met a couple of times every year, then civil society would know who is meeting, what decisions are on the agenda and how to influence them.

We need global norms about the transparency of these entities. For one thing, they must have a website! Networks become real when they become virtual. If they are not virtual they're just 'I know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody.' The minute you put them on the web you get specifics – we can see who the members are, when they meet, and what's on their agenda. It would *empower* civil society if you formalised these global networks enough to enhance their capacity and their accountability, but not so much that you turn them into big vertical bureaucracies.

Johnson: You have admired but, ultimately, been unpersuaded by David Held's cosmopolitan blueprint for a 'global covenant'.[3] Why?

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[3] Held 2004; Hale and Slaughter 2005.

Slaughter: I don't think there is the kind of global community that must exist to create a global covenant. He's really positing a global polity and we are very, very, very far from that. So his starting point is 'If we had this, then… .' Well, yes, but we don't have it, and talking about it will, in many countries, push us further from having it. In the United States when you start talking about a 'global covenant' you empower the sovereigntists – people who (for some legitimate liberal democratic reasons) already see their ability to shape their own futures being eroded. If you want to get to the place Held wants to get to you'd be better off working through national officials, and taking heed of people's fears at every step, rather than positing something that looks like world government.

Johnson: This suggests you think we are in a transitional era. A couple of contrasting phrases in a post you wrote at the foreign policy blog TPM Café struck me. The first was oriented to the future: 'the global community should create a capacity to be able to… .' while the second was oriented to the present: 'But absent that capacity… .'[4] Perhaps much of our present difficulty in formulating strategy and policy is because we know we need capacity, but we also know we lack it. How should political theory and political practice act on that transitional terrain?

Slaughter: There are two ways in which that terrain is very challenging. First is the conceptual challenge: we need new blueprints. Our situation is akin to that faced by the various framers of liberal democracies back in the 18th century. Today, once again, we need new forms because we're not going to get there with our current conceptual frameworks and intellectual technology. We're muddling through.

Second, the new terrain demands we do two-level game politics (to use political science terminology). In other words, we have to play on the domestic front and on the international front at once. And it is triply complicated because international players can see your domestic front and your domestic opponents can see the international front. That complexity can help you if, for instance, your foreign partners know your

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[4] Slaughter 2006a.

congress won't pass things so don't ask you to give them up. But it can also hurt you if your domestic opponents can take things that are happening in the international sphere and make them a domestic political issue. The new politics requires people who are much more politically attuned than the traditional diplomat or foreign minister. It used to be that the world of 'foreign policy' was a 'post-election' world. In other words, the elections were run on bread and butter issues and then when somebody came into office, he or she could appoint the foreign minister and that person would work with the diplomats. Well, no more. You *really* have got to be paying attention to what sells domestically, and at the same time know how to take that little political space you've got, intercept it with the political space of 191 other nations, or at least the nations of a region, and create something that will actually fly!

The Idea That Is America is aimed at the ordinary American voters rather than at the foreign policy community because, these days, we have to engage a much wider group of citizens in decisions about our foreign policy if we're going to be able to create the political space necessary to do what we need to do.

Part 2: Forging a World of Liberty Under Law

Johnson*: One effort to face up to those conceptual and political challenges was the Princeton Project on National Security.[5] You were the convener and academic co-chair of this ambitious undertaking, which involved experts working collaboratively over a long period to develop a bipartisan national security strategy for the United States. Your report, co-authored with G. John Ikenberry,* Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century*, was published in 2006.*

When the report was launched you said, 'We set out to write a collective 'X' article … We went looking for something like

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[5] See the Princeton Security Project website http://www.wws.princeton.edu/ppns/

containment … that one magic phrase that would capture American national security policy in the 21st century in the way that containment did, at least apocryphally, in the 20th century. About halfway through, we realised that was impossible.[6] *Why was that?*

Slaughter: In the 20th century it was easy to identify the one threat that, if you didn't get it right, it didn't matter what else you did. In the early part of the century it was the rising powers, then fascism, and then communism. What is different in the 21st century is that although we do face terrorism as *a* major threat, it is not the only one. No one could argue that terrorist networks are a greater threat than, say, nuclear proliferation. Of course there's an intersection between the two – nuclear-proliferation can result in the terrorists getting a nuclear weapon – but even absent that, the spectre of a nuclear Iran or a nuclear Saudi Arabia is a nightmare. Similarly with climate change – if we don't tackle this we're not going to have a planet, while in the shorter term there will be security issues as nations try to counter the effects of climate change. The Princeton Project participants realised that looking for an equivalent to containment presumed one overarching threat. But we are in a world of multiple threats, and at least 5 of them – terrorism, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, climate change, the implosion of the Middle East – are equal in gravity. And there are two major challenges: the rise of India and China and the challenge of managing globalisation. So you have to have a strategy that can respond in multiple directions at once.

Johnson: In response, some critics have said the Princeton Project did not offer a strategy so much as a laundry list of threats. One wrote, 'The point of a grand strategy is to prioritize, and [the Report] simply refuses to do that.'[7]

Slaughter: And that, as far as we're concerned, is old thinking. If that's your attitude you are not going to be able to shape a strategy that can work. And this was a *collective* conclusion, after a lot of thinking by a lot of great minds.

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[6] Slaughter 2006b.

[7] Drezner 2006.

A Grand Strategy group led by John Ikenberry and Frank Fukuyama came in and said, 'We're not paying nearly enough attention to the rise of India and China.' In classic geopolitics, where you're looking at relations between states, the issue of accommodating rising states is huge. America must focus on what's happening in Asia – the threats that are not being faced and the opportunities that are being lost. And the Princeton Project had other experts writing on nuclear proliferation, terrorism, bio-threats, climate change, and energy security. The demand that we prioritise is part of the problem. The Bush administration, for example, has decided the successor to Nazism and Communism is 'Islamofascism'. We think that's both counter-productive in its own terms and an example of 20th century thinking trying to cope with a 21st century world.

Johnson: Nonetheless, you and G. John Ikenberry did propose one overarching concept to sum up the strategic framework you proposed: 'liberty under law'. What does that concept seek to foreground?

Slaughter: A large part of what we are getting at with that concept has been American policy since Jefferson – that for moral and instrumental reasons a world of mature liberal democracies would be a better and safer place. That's Kant and Jefferson both. When he was national security adviser, Tony Lake developed the strategy of the 'enlargement' of the community of democracies.[8] But what we really sought to foreground, as you put it, is an end-state of liberty under law, meaning countries governed by the rule of law, where the law itself safeguards individual liberty consistent with the obligations of the community as a whole. Democracy, if by that you mean representative government, is one part of that end-state, but only one part. Our founders understood that – our history, like the history of any liberal democracy, is as much or more about building the institutions that create *accountable* governments and *rights-regarding* government as it is about popular government. The concept of liberty under law also signals that there must be rules at the international level as well as the domestic level. To call for a world of liberty

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[8] Lake 2000.

under the law is not the same as calling for a world of liberal democratic states, although that's part of it. We are calling for liberal democratic states to be subject to international law.

Johnson: What are the central differences, and what are the elements of continuity, if any exist, between 'the Bush doctrine' and the 'grand strategy of forging a world of liberty under law'?

Slaughter: Tell me what you mean by 'The Bush Doctrine'.

Johnson: Let's say a fairly aggressive strategy of promoting democracy, a willingness to use military force, and a refusal to be put off from using that force because you haven't been able to put an international alliance in place. Plus the idea that the root cause of the threat is the stagnation – politically, economically and culturally – of an entire region, so the only serious response is to promote political change in that region.

Slaughter: The Bush administration at its best looks long term at a lot of problems – terrorism is the most obvious. The Bush administration sees terrorists as a symptom and thinks their defeat requires social and economic and political change to empower individuals to make the most of their lives. And that's the concept of liberty – the liberty to flourish as human beings. And in *that* sense the Bush administration is continuing the policy of the Clinton administration, which continued the policy of the Reagan administration, which continued the policy of the Carter administration. You really have to go back to Kissinger before you get a break. A lot of what's happened since Kissinger was in reaction to a purely 'realist' foreign policy. So there is continuity there. We agree that *long term* democratisation is the best hope of creating a safer international environment for all of us. And yes, that does involve thinking about political change. Similarly, we also think there is great value in liberal democracies being able to bolster one another. So we propose a 'concert of democracies' – which has gotten a lot of heat – the Chinese and some Democrats are *equally* furious.

Johnson: Well, don't be put off.

Slaughter: Oh, we're not. But we differ from the 'Bush doctrine'

on a number of grounds. First, the biggest difference between the neo-cons and John and me concerns the willingness to use military force. We share a lot of ends but we really disagree on means. John and I are far more skeptical of the ability to achieve long term change with what inevitably has to be short term means. Throwing troops at a problem is a short-term solution. Second, John and I are far more humble about how pro-active a role the United States can really play. We see a huge role for a community of liberal democracies to support new democratic forces in different countries, we see a role for economic change, we talk a lot about PAR (popular, accountable, and rights-regarding governments) and we believe that getting accountable government means fighting corruption, making things more transparent, making it clear where the money goes, building courts, ensuring checks and balances. Third, John and I think we are involved in a much more *complex* and *longer term* process. The Bush administration thinks 'Gee, we can just set things in motion and they will take it from there.' In my new book I use this great quote from Jefferson where he says, 'The ball of liberty is now well in motion and will roll around the world.' Well, it's not that simple.

Johnson: Some critics argue the foreign policy proposed in the Princeton Report is too complex and will lose out at election time to the simpler policy of 'war on terror'. How do you respond?

Slaughter: I understand the problem of delivering a complex message, and I certainly don't think you engage median voters with the Princeton Report! *The Idea That Is America* has many of the same ideas as the Princeton Project but is written for a wider audience. The real question is: can we convince American voters that 'Islamofascism' is 20th century thinking and that they're now in a more complex and messy world? I think we can. The 'war on terror' frame is leaving us unprepared and individual voters can see with their own eyes the rise of China, the dangers of nuclear proliferation, climate change, and energy security. Even the Pentagon tried to change 'the GWOT' (the global war on terror) to 'the GSAVE' (the global struggle against violent extremism) recognising that it's not a war, that calling it a war is counterproductive, and that it really is a struggle against violent extremism. Of

course they got overruled by the White House, which refused to give up the political value of being 'at war.'

Muscular Wilsonianism

Johnson*: Let's turn to the underpinning philosophy of the Princeton Report. You are no Kissingerian realist, that's for sure. Indeed, you point out that it was the 'backlash against Kissingerian realism – against the very idea that U.S. foreign policy would not be guided in some way by American values … [that] fed the neoconservative movement in the first place.'*[9] *You have described yourself as a 'muscular Wilsonian' who seeks to 'break out of the corner that the neocons have boxed us into.' But you are also skeptical of the efficacy of an overly idealistic liberal internationalism, and so you end up calling for 'an intermediate position that is neither liberal internationalist (much less neo-colonialist) nor realist, but that integrates important elements of both.'*[10] *At the level of foundational ideas, can you tell me what are you seeking to preserve from liberal internationalism and from realism?*

Slaughter: What I take from liberal internationalism is what it had to begin with but then lost, and which the neo-cons helped bring back. Kant did not seek multilateralism for its own sake because he knew that what you could achieve internationally depended on what nations were like domestically. Yet today, in its weakest form, liberal internationalism has become the dogma that everything has to be done through international institutions without paying attention to the types of governments who are in those institutions. In fact there are very diverse governments in those institutions – autocracies, oligarchies, theocracies as well as democracies and they water down any effort to distinguish between governments based on domestic regime type – they'll treat a genocidal dictatorship the same way as they'll treat a liberal democracy. I reject that and so did Kant, who was the first to grapple with what we now call the 'trilemma'. He knew 'world government' was not going to work but he also knew you needed some kind of

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[9] Slaughter 2007b.

[10] Slaughter 2006b.

global governance capacity. His solution was a federation of free states. (He also imagined that relations among the states in this federation would be magically harmonious – I doubt that, but the issue is not absence of conflict, but absence of *violent* conflict.) Liberal internationalism is not just about multilateralism, but also about promoting (or 'standing for,' a better term) liberal democracy *as best you can* on a global level.

I take two things from realism. One, you have to deal with governments that don't look like you. Your vision of the world may be a world of liberal democratic states where all human beings have a roughly equal shot at governing themselves and determining their life chances, but nonetheless you are going to work with governments that have a very different vision. Two, the value of prudence. You can't for a minute believe that Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, was not deeply committed to liberal democracy, but he was fully aware of the dangers of missionary visions. I write a lot about the importance of tempering any vision with humility and a sober grasp of the realities of politics. And, in that sense, the way we now have to play two-level game politics is probably healthy – nothing brings you down to earth faster than thinking about how on earth you're going to sell something to the voters.

Johnson: *One critic has argued that far from integrating pre-existing perspectives the Princeton Project fails to resolve tensions between 'two very different approaches to US engagement with the world – global internationalism and democratic multinationalism.' He continues:*

> *The former aims above all to mute the strife of ideologies; to preserve and establish peace and international law; and to establish cooperative frameworks for addressing truly global problems of public health, population growth, resource management and environmental preservation and restoration. The latter is an inherently revolutionary program that seeks to place the United States at the head of a liberal democratic internationale bent on pursuing political transformation around the globe. While the authors seek to construct an intellectual framework in which these two agendas exist in harmony, and see these cooperative systems as embedded in concentric circles,*

*the two approaches are actually destined to collide. If we
pursue both at once, neither will succeed. It is necessary
to pick one.[11]*

How do you respond?

Slaughter: Frankly, it points to an almost willful denial of
what is actually happening in the world. And when it comes
from Europeans it drives me crazy, because the EU is both
a huge force in global politics and a community of liberal
democratic states. If you take aid from it you have to meet
standards designed to move you in a particular direction.
The EU is not a 'missionary' organization but it does stand
for a set of values and promotes them in various ways. But
the EU is also deeply engaged in the UN, which is a global
internationalist venture. The idea that these two things can't
co-exist seems to me willfully blind. And if we study what
liberal internationalism was in the past, we find it was both. It
was certainly both under Wilson and Roosevelt while Truman
created the UN on the one hand and NATO and the Marshall
Plan on the other.

The failures of US foreign policy

Johnson: *Let's turn to US foreign policy. Nicholas Kristof
recently asked 'Why are we so lousy at foreign policy?' Thomas
E. Ricks' remarkable book,* Fiasco: The American Military
Adventure in Iraq*, is only the latest to catalogue the failures
– military, political, intelligence – of the US effort in Iraq.[12] And
Larry Diamond has suggested that 'The US is in a quagmire in
Iraq because it rushed to war, and then to occupation, without
a plan or even a realistic assessment.'[13] Is American foreign
policy-making dysfunctional?*

Slaughter: You can't underestimate the incredible hubris at
the top of the Bush team. They had complete certainty not
only that they knew what was right but that everything done

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[11] Dan K' 2006.
[12] Ricks 2007.
[13] Diamond 2006.

before them, or suggested by people who disagreed with them, was wrong. Remember, when Bush comes in the attitude is 'ABC, Anything But Clinton.' As regards Iraq, people who knew better got dismissed – from General Shinseki who told them they needed more troops, to the State Department planners. But there is a second reason and that is the decline in the quality of the people working in our government. John F. Kennedy inspired masses of people to go into the government but the Kennedy generation is retiring. And we have suffered three decades of wailing about government – the slogan 'government is the problem not the solution,' talk of 'wasteful bureaucracy,' attacks on 'Washington,' and all of that. Moreover, there has also been the development of really exciting civil society alternatives to government service. The result is that some of my smartest students who really want to change things, the savvy ones who speak multiple languages and have spent time abroad, are not going into the government. They are going into NGOs – they are more likely to go to Iraq with the Red Cross or CARE or Doctors without Borders than to the State Department or the Pentagon. Add in the Bush administration loyalty tests that go all the way down – resulting in these 23 years olds who know nothing but who have worked for the Heritage Foundation – and you get complete dysfunctionality.

New strategies for democracy-promotion

Johnson: *Democracy promotion has a bad name after Iraq.* Liberty Under Law *calls for a 'more sophisticated strategy of creating the deeper preconditions for successful liberal democracy – preconditions that extend far beyond the simple holding of elections.'[14] What are these 'deeper preconditions' of democracy? And what would a 'more sophisticated strategy' of democracy promotion look like?*

Slaughter: First, our world is interdependent and information-rich, so we need a global strategy, or at the very least a regional strategy. It's not as if each country just develops in its own way. What happens in other countries has a *huge* effect.

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[14] Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006a, p. 10.

Just think about the impact of the Orange revolution. Or look at the East Asian tigers: one country's successful move from a dictatorship to democracy had a big impact on other countries. Second, America's founders never thought that we were going be *exceptional* in being a liberal democracy. They thought we were blessed to be the *first* – to demonstrate that government by the consent of the governed was actually possible. They thought that America was just one example of a country putting universal values into practice and that there would be many other countries that would put those values into practice, each having a different trajectory and different institutions. Today, the US needs to be far more sensitive to the very many different ways these same values have been realised. We should neither insist on an American template nor wash our hands and say, 'let people develop on their own.' Third, I would love to see a concert of democracies able to support institutions and individuals that are pushing for liberal democracy by giving them aid and by creating networks of support. There is a tremendous amount to be done there. We've called for a Global PAR Index (an index of popular, accountable, rights-regarding government) which would be very helpful. Imagine if Freedom House came together with NGOs in twenty countries from different civilisations and developed such an index. Everybody reads Freedom House's Freedom Index as a 'US' affair – the US government deciding who's up to par or not. Well, let's have a genuine PAR index and we could all be rated.

Johnson*: Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, in their book* Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World,*[15] express skepticism about democracy-promotion. They favour instead the long-term promotion of the institutional and cultural conditions for the organic growth of democracy via social and economic transformation, institutional development and capacity building. Without this, they argue, we will only get more pseudo-democracies that will be even more dangerous than the openly non-democratic states they replace. Lieven has summed up this last concern by quoting Shakespeare: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.'[16] I am torn between*

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[15] Lieven and Hulsman 2006.

[16] Lieven / Slaughter 2006.

*thinking these kinds of warnings correct and thinking them a
recipe for passivity, when we don't really have the time to remain
passive. What did you make of Lieven's 'ethical realism'?*

Slaughter: One thing the Bush administration has gotten
right is to say that part of the problem was that in the Cold
War we said, 'if you are on our side we will just turn a blind
eye to whatever you do, you can imprison people, torture
people, fix elections, deny your political opposition any rights
at all and we will just not pay any attention.' And that was for
both geo-strategic and business reasons – the biggest lobby
against pushing for democracy or human rights is business.
In the Unites States there are already many forces that push
you in the direction of compromise. If you are not very clear
that, where possible, you are going to support pro-democratic
elements, and you are going to insist on adherence to a set
of universal human rights, then you are pushed back toward
inertia. Look, whatever your policy you will have to make trade-
offs at every turn. But if you start with that 'realist' policy, I
fear there's going to be a lot of realism and little ethics.

The Case for a Concert of Democacies

Johnson: *The Princeton report takes a refreshingly sober
approach to the system of international institutions that the
United States and its allies built after World War II. You say
that system is 'broken' and a new architecture of global
governance and security is needed. Your model is the Truman
administration's response to the Cold War – 'imagination and
leadership in creating institutions to lock in a set of shared goals
and values.'[17]* Liberty under Law *makes practical proposals to
lock in progressive values: Security Council Reform and a new
'Concert of Democracies'. The reform of the Security Council,
you write, is the 'single most important issue,' if the UN is to
live up to our hopes. Why?*

Slaughter: First, everything else is just nibbling around the
edges. The Security Council absorbed the biggest amount of
time and effort of the original negotiators because that's where

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[17] Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006c.

the power is – and it remains the most important institution in the UN. Second, no one can believe in 2025 that decisions about global security are going to be taken by *countries that won the Second World War*! It would be as if you'd said in 1945, 'OK, Concert of Europe time.' It's just not credible.

We've never tried to overhaul the Security Council when the US was really willing to put political capital behind it. We're the single largest contributor to the UN and we'd get a tremendous response if we said to the world, 'OK, we may be the first power in history to recognise we've got to cede power, but we recognise that for the Security Council to work in the 21st century we've got to make room at the table.' Countries like India and Brazil would be overjoyed, and we could insist there be a Muslim country and two African countries. The formulas exist to get there; what's been lacking is the political will. I honestly think you either do this or accept that you are condemning the UN to increasing irrelevance in large parts of the world.

Johnson: *How would you tackle the question of the veto on the Security Council?*

Slaughter: In expanding the Security Council we could develop a system of weighted voting. In the run up to the Iraq war, let's say the French had vetoed but nobody else had and the majority of votes had gone for the US. The view of the invasion would have been very, very different. We are likely to move to a world where even though you have the veto, the veto doesn't carry decisive weight if it's only one. More important will be the configuration of countries backing the policy.

Johnson: *And yet, rather than put all your eggs in the basket of UN reform, the Princeton report also proposed the creation of a 'Concert of Democracies'. Who would be the members of a Concert of Democracies, and what would its powers and purposes be? Would it be a pressure group to ensure UN Security Council reform or an alternative to the UN Security Council? And is there a danger it would become 'the West versus the Rest'?*

Slaughter: Well that last question is important. The concert of democracies must be *global* – if we can't do it with India

and Brazil and South Africa then I don't think we should do it, at least not now. It is critical to demonstrate that liberal democracy is not a *Western* but a universal construct and that many developing countries are equally capable of creating liberal democracies that work. That doesn't mean that every liberal democracy in the world has to be part of it but it does mean that some major non-Western powers have to be part of it from the beginning. Europe won't do it otherwise. To be honest, if it's seen as 'Made in Washington' *nobody* will join because it will be seen as a blind for US power.

Ideally, the concert of democracies will push UN reform. Once the UN is reformed I see the concert acting within the UN to support liberal democracy. The term 'concert' is carefully chosen. It's not a global NATO. It allows countries to concert their action in more organised form but it is not a formal alliance. Creating it should enhance the chances of UN reform because it signals that you can't wait forever. Right now, the Security Council powers have very little incentive to make room at the table. Only if they think that there could be alternatives – and this would by no means be the only alternative – do they have the incentive to do what's necessary.

As regards the question of who is a member of the concert of democracies, we tried to design a formula that would make it like the EU – every member would have to agree to sign a treaty with an incoming member, a non-aggression treaty that also commits you to upholding the values. That way you would have a lot of checks on who comes in.

Johnson*: Anatol Lieven has criticised the idea of a Concert of Democracies, arguing that in certain parts of the world it would 'turn into backing some nations against other nations which would actually make international relations and the promotion of democracy a great deal harder and even more violent.' [18] How do you respond?*

Slaughter: This idea that the concert of democracies is going to 'back' countries is not at all our conception. If it comes

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[18] Lieven / Slaughter 2006.

about at all the concert of democracies will be a loose untidy fractious organisation that nevertheless can offer incentives for governments to move towards liberal democracy (you can imagine having 'candidate members' as the EU does) and provide real support for fledgling democracies – not just financial support but technical support, the creation of networks to bolster transitional democracies, and so on. This is not about aggressively backing some nations but about supporting countries that are trying to become democracies and supporting groups within countries that are trying to achieve democracy via mechanisms that have a multilateral stamp of approval so they are not seen as puppets of the US or of any other country.

Countering Terrorism

Johnson: *You have written, 'We are losing the war on terror because we are treating the symptoms and not the cause.'[19] What in your view are the 'causes'?*

Slaughter: The deep causes of terrorism are a combination of lack of opportunity and cultural humiliation. There is a concentration of Muslims in the Middle East who are very conscious of their backwardness relative to many other parts of the world, while they are simultaneously aware of a great heritage. They are then easily manipulated to feel hatred of the Unites States and the West as responsible for that humiliation. Poverty is relevant but that's not what is driving the terrorism. It's much more about a sense of humiliation and inferiority and a desire to be able to fight back. So when Osama bin Laden gets support from people who would never actually do what he is advocating, they are saying, 'Here is someone who is standing up to America and the West.' We need to find ways to integrate these countries into the global system in ways that create opportunities and offer a very different account of what Islam was in the past and can be again. This is not something the West can do alone – it's a struggle within Islam.

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[19] Slaughter 2006c.

Johnson: You have argued that we should define terrorists as criminals, not soldiers, and you reject the idea that Islamism is an ideology similar to previous totalitarian pathologies-cum-ideologies-cum-political movements. Liberty Under Law states: 'In an effort to combat radicalization in Middle Eastern states, the United States should make every effort to work with Islamic governments and Islamic/Islamist movements, including fundamentalists, as long as they disavow terrorism.' It goes on: 'Framing the struggle against terrorism as a war similar to World War II or the Cold War lends legitimacy and respect to an enemy that deserves neither; the result is to strengthen, not degrade, our adversary.'[20] In rejecting 'the Paul Berman view' – if I can call it that – surely it can't be decisive that that view boosts the enemy (bracketing whether it actually does). Surely there must be reasons for believing 'the Berman view' untrue as opposed to merely unhelpful or dispiriting. What are those reasons?

Slaughter: I think it is untrue now. I worry that we could make it a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is possible for me to imagine the Muslim world roused, or controlled, on the scale that Fascist and Communist countries were. It's certainly not out of the question that we could face a group of radical Islamist states that defined themselves as an alternative to Western civilisation in much the way that the Soviet version of Marxism did. But that is very avoidable and I worry deeply that the way we are handling things strategically is making matters worse not better. But you are quite right to say that *as of now* this is a serious threat. No question. It is a hybrid between a military threat and a purely criminal threat. We call it a global insurgency in the Princeton Report and we say you need to fight it with law-enforcement, intelligence and special operations. I recognise there are situations in which traditional law-enforcement does not work. But the threat comes from what is still a relatively small sect among Muslims that completely rejects some very important Islamic tenets – the prohibition on the purposeful killing of civilians, most obviously.

We would do better to think about the enemy as a group of mass murderers or twisted criminals who need to be fought

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[20] Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006a, pp. 12, 13.

on a global basis, but by methods that are closer to the ways we take on arms and money trafficking than to those we use in all-out war. It just isn't war, in my view, and the consequences of calling it 'war' are counter-productive, and in the US it has led to some bad domestic political choices.

Johnson*: But we must be able to openly discuss Islam in relation to the terrorist threat. The Princeton Report argues that, 'Since 9/11 the Bush administration has sought to convince ordinary pious Muslims around the world that America seeks no quarrel with them. The best way to start is to take Islam itself out of the equation.'[21] However, in a Pew Opinion Poll six per cent of British Muslims said 7/7 was 'justified' (which translated into 100,000 British Muslims). Surely we have a cultural crisis within Islam-in-modernity, rather than a criminal conspiracy? In the failed Glasgow airport attacks in 2007, even when the terrorist (who has since died) was a ball of flame and the police were trying to apprehend him, he was still throwing punches, shouting 'Allah! Allah!'*

The challenge is to acknowledge that Islam is struggling to come to terms with modernity and individuality without framing that blunt truth in such a way that it sounds like we believe there is a 'war of civilisations' going on. It's a difficult political argument to make and some of the Bush administration struggle to make it.

Slaughter: Right. And one of the difficulties has been the 'war on terror' frame. You know, Bush's initial instincts were great. He went to a mosque and was very embracing of American Muslims. We need to rely more on inter-faith efforts. In the US we have had a separation of church and state in foreign policy on a global level. There have been meetings of global religious leaders but we have not sought to integrate these into how we make foreign policy. Yet we are going to have to do just that and for just the reasons you said. If you try to pretend it's not connected to Islam you get written off as a fool. You put it very well. But it is a fringe group, an extremist group, and our job is to keep it that way. Because if we don't do this right we may see a credible claim that there is a 'war

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[21] Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006a, p. 45.

against Islam' and in ten years it will look a lot more like the existential threat that the administration says we face today.

Rethinking Humanitarian Interventionism

Johnson*: Can I ask you about your views on humanitarian intervention? In 2004, writing in Foreign Affairs with Lee Feinstein, you proposed 'a collective "duty to prevent" nations run by rulers without internal checks on their power from acquiring or using WMD,' and you identified the existing rules governing the use of force, embodied in the UN Charter, as 'inadequate'.[22] However, in June 2006 you published an essay, 'Rethinking Darfur', in part after reading an article by David Rieff' in which he wrote:*

> *The idea that, after Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Iraq, intelligent activists can still speak of humanitarian intervention as if it were an uncomplicated act of rescue without grave implications is a testimony to the refusal of the best and brightest among us to think seriously about politics. Is this what the marriage of human rights and American exceptionalism has led us to? If so, God help us.[23]*

Have your views on intervention been reshaped by the experience of Iraq?

Slaughter: The responsibility to protect is the single most important shift in the definition of sovereignty since the Treaty of Westphalia itself. Remember, it took 300 years for us to fully identify and appreciate the importance of that Treaty. Today, we stand at the outset of a new era. The responsibility to protect is the first intellectually coherent account of sovereignty that integrates Westphalian sovereignty with universal human rights and I strongly support it. Governments have to be on notice that they have a duty to their people and if they become the enemies of their people, or of a significant group of their people, the international community has the right to intervene.

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[22] Feinstein and Slaughter 2004.
[23] Rieff 2006; Slaughter 2006a.

But the decision to intervene must be a multilateral one. That means a UN decision, or at least a decision supported by a broadly representative regional organisation. That is very hard to get, and it is good that it is hard to get – it means that we have to think through the consequences rather than just go in and stop the killing without a plan. And this is where I rethought Darfur. I still support intervention of various kinds but I no longer think that it is OK just to send a bunch of troops in to stop the killing without a plan for what next. We ought to have a no-fly zone, and ought to create a situation in which many Darfuris feel safe to go back to their homes, but we'd better have a plan after that. If you go in and then pull out – and publics get tired of supporting the troops – failing to leave people with some longer-term regional settlement, or at least a settlement within Darfur, you are just setting people up for another round.

I strongly support shifting the norms to allow for intervention, but I also think that you need a prudential brake through a multilateral decision-making process to avoid any one country from using the humanitarian justification as a disguise for its own power ambitions. Equally important, you need multilateral decision-making to ensure you have really thought through what you are doing so you don't make matters worse.

Johnson: *But isn't there a danger? Rieff's argument might become a recipe for inaction in the face of genocide. He was once one of the loudest advocates of humanitarian intervention, but I wonder if his rethink, while initially valuable, is not now in danger of tipping over into the careless rewriting of recent history. Rwanda, after all, teaches us nothing at all about the dangers of humanitarian intervention, though it teaches us much about the tragic costs of inaction. As for the interventions in the Balkans, flawed as they were, they were examples of US-European partnership, not 'US Exceptionalism' – and they ended Serb imperialism and ethnic cleansing to boot. There is a danger of over-reacting to Iraq, lurching from a naively optimistic interventionism to an absurdly pessimistic isolationism.*

Given that some intervention may be vetoed at the Security Council, while regional powers may resist action for all kinds

of self-interested reasons, can you envisage situations in which an ongoing genocide might have to be stopped unilaterally?

Slaughter: I can, but then you have to do what Abraham Lincoln did when he overrode habeas corpus. You do it, but then you go back and ask for approval. And knowing you are going to have to justify yourself later makes you plan more effectively. And because you know you will have to prove it was indeed a humanitarian intervention, you will shape what you do on the ground. But look, as regards Rwanda, *any* nation should have been able to go in if they could have stopped the killing, including my own. But then you have to be prepared to face international judgement and you should invite it.

Part 3: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World

Johnson: *President Adams said that the best thing America could do to promote democracy was to preserve the power and magnetic pull of the successful example. Would it be fair to say that your latest book –* The Idea that is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World *– is a post-Iraq book that seeks to understand why US power and magnetism has been so badly damaged and how it can be restored?*

Slaughter: I wrote the book because I felt strongly that we had lost our way in the world. Internationally, we have squandered a great deal of our moral authority and this is agonising for someone like myself who – while clear-eyed about America's many mistakes – grew up believing that at our best we use our power for good. I wrote the book to do what I could to help us find our way back.

I wanted to tell a very different story about American history and American values – patriotic, in the sense of cherishing the values and feeling proud of much of what America has achieved as a country while, at the same time, honest about our failings. I review many of the darker moments in our history, but also celebrate our willingness to identify the gap between our founding rhetoric and our current reality – and to force the government to close it – as an important

mechanism of social change. We talked about 'all men are created equal' but we had slaves. So abolitionist groups and freed slaves themselves such as Frederick Douglass said, 'You are complete hypocrites! You talk about equality but look at my world!' That insistence, over time, and at the cost of a great war, gradually forced the abolition of slavery. A hundred years later Martin Luther King, Jr. did the same thing with the absence of civil rights – not rejecting the Constitution, but calling on all Americans to make it real. It is because we are committed to a set of founding values that critics can get purchase; and those critics are the soul of patriotism.

Johnson: *So what is 'the idea that is America'?*

Slaughter: The title is taken from a letter sent by Capt. Ian Fishback, a West Point educated soldier who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, to Senator John McCain in 2005.[24] He begged that proper standards be enforced to govern interrogations in Iraq, arguing that a nation only shows what it is made of when it is tested. He said that for his part: 'I'd rather die fighting than lose even the smallest part of the idea that is America.' In other words, if we abandon our values to extract information from terrorists to provide for our security then we have destroyed ourselves. Here was one military man writing to another, denying there was a contradiction between our values and our power. I used his words in the title of the book because of the overwhelming importance of that message.

The idea that is America is the idea of a country that is bound together not by blood or geography, or even common experience, but by a commitment to a set of universal values: liberty, equality, democracy, justice. (Any American, woken up in the middle of the night and asked to name the values the country was founded on, will come up with those.) I add tolerance, humility and faith, and I argue that these are the seven values we were committed to at the founding and that have shaped our history. The book is organised as a set of stories about struggle: we have fallen short of those values, and Americans – from poets to clergymen to Presidents – have insisted that we do a better job of living up to them.

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[24] Fishback 2005.

Alan Johnson: *Reading the book, some seem to have heard George W. Bush while others hear John Locke. Who is right?*

Slaughter: It's John Locke! And I find it deeply depressing that Americans can't get that, particularly Americans on the left. I find it incredible that I am being criticised for making the case that our founders were motivated by universal values. Read Daniel Webster on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill. He says, 'We've done it! We've done it!' He meant we had shown it was possible to have a government based on the consent of the governed. We had proved the Enlightenment thinkers were right. The expectation was that many other countries would follow suit, and many did. Today, we have gotten into our heads that these are *American* values. This is wrong in terms of our own history and it is counterproductive. They are 'American' values in the same sense that they are 'French' or 'British' or 'Japanese': the citizens of any liberal democracy value this body of universal values.

Johnson: *Liberal intellectuals have made some very sharp criticisms of* The Idea That Is America. *Some oppose talk about 'progress' and others oppose talk about 'values'. Of the former, David Rieff is typical. He 'exploded in bitter laughter' at the book – which he thought an 'exceptionalist fantasy of America held by Americans,' and a 'progress narrative.' Indeed, the book was nothing less than 'a penumbral translation of the ur-Biblical progress narrative.' He rejected your 'romantic and self-loving vision of the political and moral essence of the US,' arguing it missed the real roots of US success, which he said lay in 'mineral and agricultural wealth, slavery, immigrant cheap labour and capital accumulation.'[25] Of course, that kind of criticism could be applied to Martin Luther King's famous Lincoln Memorial speech of 1963 when he spoke of 'a promissory note' which America (or the Idea of America) had extended and which the civil rights movement now sought to cash…*

Slaughter: …Absolutely.

Johnson: *Have you been disappointed by this reaction?*

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[25] Rieff 2007.

Slaughter: Well, I spent a long time at Harvard Law School and I am no stranger to critical left denunciations of progress narratives. I spent most of my academic career before I became a dean fighting that very fight. It is a nihilistic view that would convince any activist to stop fighting and to go and sit in a café, and I've not much use for it. I have use for critique of course – no one who has read me over the last ten years could think I don't know that America needs a lot of criticism – but not for a rejection of the very idea of progress. Look, I grew up in the American South in the time of segregation when the idea of an African-American Secretary of State would have been unthinkable. Yet we have just gone from a woman Secretary of State, to an African-American Secretary of State, to a woman who is also an African-American as Secretary of State! So don't tell me there is no progress. The American left – not all but some segments – has real difficulty talking in the language of patriotism. This is politically damaging as it is the language of American politics, but it is also worrisome in a deeper way. We must be able to reconcile a commitment to the values our founders espoused with an ongoing liberal progressive critique that is clear-eyed about what is wrong with us. Our greatest Presidents and activists have been able to do just that.

Johnson: *Ezra Klein criticised the book because it sought to base foreign policy on values. He called for a more prudential approach, worrying that values talk opens the door to a careless foreign policy. He wrote: 'It is the acceptance of idealism as a viable rhetorical basis for foreign policy that will allow [wars] to be wrapped in an agreeably gauzy cloud of paeans to democracy and calls for liberty.' The neoconservatives got away with Iraq, he argued, 'because Paul Wolfowitz was effectively allowed to keep the conversation based on values … rather than consequences.'* [26]

Slaughter: There is something in that, but look, 'values' should not be code for 'values of the right': *we are all values voters.* We should not counterpose values and pragmatism in this way. We need a synthesis – a far more sophisticated and serious effort to establish what our values are and how

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[26] Klein 2007.

they have been attained in the past and can be attained now. Don't cede values to one part of the political spectrum and don't assume that because values have been misapplied, or used to duck the hard work, that they don't still have a really important place – not just in your rhetoric, but in your goals.

I am convinced that there is a broad audience for this message in the United States and the world. One of the best things about publishing *The Idea That Is America* is the many emails I receive from people I do not know, from around the country, who tell me: "You have given me voice. This is exactly how I feel. We can love our country but come together to criticize it and hold it to account when necessary, from both the right and the left." Those messages convince me that values play an important role in the political choices of the majority of voters, voters who can tell the difference between fine speeches and concrete action. These citizens need to be heard. I wrote *The Idea That Is America* because I felt that I had to speak out; many Americans apparently agree.

Johnson: What are you working on now?

Slaughter: I am taking a ten-month sabbatical in Shanghai starting in August. My husband and I are taking our two little boys, who are 8 and 10, and we are putting them in school in Shanghai until May. In that time I am planning to do two things. First, read voraciously, and more widely and deeply than I have been able to do in recent years – I need to recharge my intellectual batteries. Second, take the message of *The Idea That Is America* to Asia. This book was written half for the domestic audience and half for a global audience. If it is published abroad I hope that the foreign title will be *The Idea That Is America: Reintroducing Ourselves to the World*.

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Chapter 9

New Wars and Human Security: An Interview with Mary Kaldor

Professor Mary Kaldor is Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is a founding member of European Nuclear Disarmament and founder and Co-Chair of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly. A prolific writer, she is author of *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (2003), *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (1999 and 2006) and edits the annual *Global Civil Society Yearbook*. Her most recent book is *Human Security: Reflections on Globalisation and Intervention* (2007). At the request of Javier Solana, The EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, she convened the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, which produced the influential report, *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*. A follow-on report, *The European Way of Security*, was presented to Javier Solana in Madrid on 8 November, 2007. The interview took place on July 3, 2007.

Personal and Intellectual Background

Alan Johnson: What were the most important familial and intellectual influences on your development?

Mary Kaldor: It is difficult to distinguish between familial and intellectual influences because I come from a very intellectual family. My mother was a democratic socialist and was very committed to the peace movement – I went on my first demonstration against nuclear weapons aged 9 – while my father was Hungarian and my uncle was a dissident who had been in prison from 1948 to 1956. I had to reconcile these two sides of my family. In 1957, my uncle, who had been released from prison just before the Hungarian revolution, visited us after it had been suppressed by the Russians. He said, 'Why didn't you come and save the revolution?' My mother said, 'Because we would all have been killed in a

nlear war.' I think that exchange was formative for me.

My first job was at The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. It was very exciting – I constructed the first statistics on the arms trade, before moving to Sussex University where I worked on the economics of the arms race and the social structure of military technology. In the 1980s I got involved in the new peace movement and was profoundly influenced by E.P. Thompson who introduced me to the idea of politics from below and history from below. He taught me that we were against the cold war, not just nuclear weapons. Given my family background this was tremendously appealing. I was privileged to be friends with Edward at that moment. He was a really great man.

As a result of these ideas, I became involved with the opposition in Eastern Europe. My uncle, who was then in his eighties, acted as my political adviser – he knew everybody! I had a privileged position because I could travel freely in and out of Hungary, though I did get arrested in Prague and I got stopped from entering East Germany. I was influenced by the tremendously exciting intellectual debates taking place among the opposition at that time. Because they were dissidents they could not demonstrate or get involved in public policy. They sat around, read what they could and talked. The Czechs in particular made a big effort to learn Greek and re-read all the classical authors. I felt they were articulating ideas that expressed what we were trying to do in the peace movement but which we hadn't got the language for – they gave us 'anti-politics,' 'civil society,' and even 'globalisation,' which György Konrád was talking about back in 1982. It was a terrific education for me.

Part 1: The Nature of the 'New Wars'

Johnson*: Let's turn to your book* New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era.[1] *You identify the background to the emergence of 'new wars' as a crisis in global institutions rooted in a global mismatch between the 'militarised unilateralist character of American power' and the new global socio-*

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[1] Kaldor 1999a.

economic reality ushered in by the shocks of globalisation and the end of the Cold War. What is the 'global mismatch' – why has it arisen and what are its consequences at domestic and international levels?

Kaldor: Well, I think this is how history moves. For a period of time a particular set of international arrangements gets embedded, usually after wars, and everybody believes in them – they are the dominant paradigm. Then, as reality changes, those ways of thinking about the world become more and more problematic. Today, our thinking is still based on the end of World War Two – the dominance of the US, the notion of a global struggle between good and evil – a way of thinking that was sustained throughout the cold war. We had a brief period in the 1990s when a new paradigm emerged around words like 'humanitarianism', 'civil society', and so on. With the arrival of the 'war on terror' we got two competing paradigms. On the one hand, the American notion of cosmic struggle between good (the West) and evil (Islam) and, on the other hand, an alternative notion based on the project of extending an internal rule of law, respect for human rights and global governance. Although the European Union tends towards the latter approach, it seems to be caught between the two paradigms.

Johnson: So a new type of organised violence – 'new war' – developed in the 1980s and 1990s as 'one aspect of the globalised era'. In what ways do new wars differ from old wars? What are the new wars about?

Kaldor: An 'old war' was a war between states. The war was fought by opposing uniformed armed forces, and the decisive encounters of the war were battles between those forces. Soldiers were clearly distinct from civilians. No war conformed completely to that model, of course, but the model is drawn from the experience of twentieth century wars and from the cold war, which kept that model alive in our imagination.

A 'new war' is fought by combinations of state and non-state actors, and is usually fought not for reasons of state or ideology, but for identity. Battle is rare and most violence is directed against civilians – that is absolutely central to understanding new wars.

Old wars simply became too destructive to be fought. Does that mean there was now nothing to be gained by using violence? Well, there is nothing to be gained by using violence against a similarly armed opponent. But there is definitely something to be gained against an unarmed opponent – and that is a central characteristic of new wars.

The modern European state was really established through fighting old wars. Wars actually strengthened states – at least the winning states – by regularising administration, increasing taxation, and developing a national ideology. The culmination of this process was the enormously powerful states that developed after the end of the Second World War. New wars do the opposite. They are about state disintegration. Whereas old wars fostered a centralising, mobilising autarkic kind of economy, new wars involve open economies, transnational crime, disintegration of the state apparatus, and low taxation (they are not funded out of taxation, which falls even further). At the end of a new war the state is weaker than it was before the war. New wars are wars of state un-building rather than state-building.

Johnson: So the real 'revolution in military affairs' has been a revolution in the social relations of warfare, but we have not matched that revolution with a corresponding intellectual development?

Kaldor: That's exactly right. What Rumsfeld's 'revolution in military affairs' tried to do was to assimilate new information technology into old social relations of warfare.

Johnson: Why are new wars so difficult to contain and so difficult to end?

Kaldor: A number of reasons. For one thing, there are no decisive encounters in new wars – you dare not have battles. Also, new wars create a vested interest in war in all sorts of ways. New wars mobilise people around identity politics – and that sense of identity gets further consolidated in the war itself. There may not have been an idea of what it meant to be a 'Bosnian' before the Bosnian war – people were 'Yugoslavs', or whatever – but the war enormously strengthened sectarian identities.

Extremists go to war to win power – they could not win power peacefully because nobody supports extremism in peacetime. And they keep going to war to maintain an atmosphere of fear from which they benefit. New wars also create groups of people with an economic interest in the continuation of the war. Funds are acquired through loot and pillage, smuggling or the drugs trade, and war becomes necessary to maintain those sources of income. And if you are no longer able to present the diaspora with an emergency they might start withholding their support. I was in Nagorno-Karabakh after 9/11, and discovered the diaspora had started supporting the victims of 9/11, not the Nagorno-Karabakhians. These are all reasons why it is difficult to end new wars.

Why are they difficult to contain? Well, new wars are both global and local, and they spill over borders. A central characteristic of new wars, and a consequence of the violence against civilians at the heart of those wars, is population displacement. Not only is there a big increase in the ratio of civilian to military deaths in new wars but there is also a huge increase in the number of refugees and displaced people. And as the refugees move to other areas they bring with them the nationalist ideologies. New wars can also spread through transnational criminal networks. You can trace the origins of the conflict in Macedonia to smuggling networks with Kosovo – and the people who were smuggling were also the people in the KLA and the NRA.

Johnson: *So a new war can spread like a virus?*

Kaldor: Yes, the image of a virus is very good. You can trace circles around a new war and see the ways in which surrounding countries are affected. A group of us did a study for the EU on post-Dayton reconstruction and traced these radiating circles of influence. You also see this in West Africa. The conflict in Darfur is now spreading into Chad. You see it in the Horn of Africa and Central Asia. The war in Afghanistan is now spreading over the borders to Pakistan, and so on.

Johnson: *Humanitarian interventions, you say, have been*

*hamstrung by 'myopia about the character of the new warfare.'[2]
What do you mean?*

Kaldor: In the new edition of *New and Old Wars* (2006), I treat the Iraq War as a clash of old war and new war. The Americans had an old war conception of what they were doing. They thought they could defeat the Iraqi army and that would be the end of the war. But they found themselves instead in the middle of a new war.

The need for new thinking can be seen not just in relation to military intervention. Think about humanitarian assistance – the assumption in old wars was that you remain neutral between the sides and provide aid to the civilians. But in today's new wars you can't distinguish between civilians and combatants so very often the humanitarian aid goes into the pockets of the militias. Second, you can't be both neutral and impartial because usually one side is violating human rights and you end up tolerating those violations. Third, and this is becoming very clear in Iraq, humanitarian space is disappearing. The idea that there is an easily identifiable space between the two warring sides that is free of warfare does not hold when violence is directed against civilians. Humanitarian agencies become targets too.

'Talks' are the site of more old thinking. There is an assumption that the new wars can be solved by 'talks' between the sides but in new wars the two sides are often colluding in an extremist logic. They are not fighting against each other. They are both killing civilians. And 'talks' can legitimise both sides. We tend to think either you go to war and one side is defeated, or you have talks and reach an agreement. Actually, neither of these things is a solution any more. First of all, you can't 'win' a new war. All you do if you go to war is make the war much worse – which is what is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq. Second, talks legitimise the warlords. We have to think of another approach.

Johnson*: Why do you think the US has not understood the nature of the new wars? After all, the US has no interest in*

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[2] Kaldor 1999a, p. 10.

spectacularly failing to understand the nature of contemporary warfare.

Kaldor: First, generals always begin by fighting the last war and then in the midst of the war discover they have to change. Second, unlike Russia, America didn't have to go through a Perestroika after 1989. It behaved as though it had 'won' the cold war. Even though that was not true, nobody challenged that perception. Therefore, the strategy of the cold war – technology-driven weapons built up over a long period –was seen as a good strategy. Furthermore, the American way of thinking about war is tied to the American Military-Industrial Complex, so it is extremely difficult – not just intellectually but politically – to think outside the dominant framework. People like Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle and all these others, were deeply into this cold war framework. They missed the cold war! They wanted the world to be like their imagination.

Mind you, there are huge changes now going on in American thinking. I think General Petraeus is thinking quite differently. It is a tragedy that he is taking up a lot of new ideas at a time when the US has been discredited. I think it may discredit all those ideas.

Johnson: Although I was not in favour of the invasion, I am opposed to precipitate withdrawal. My submission to the 2007 Iraq Commission (organised by The Foreign Policy Centre and Channel 4) was titled 'Give Petraeus a Chance.'[3] General Petraeus, I think, does understand he is fighting a new war and his partial success is a mark of that understanding. His new strategy is very far from the old war combination of aerial bombardment at a long distance plus rapid offensive manoeuvres.

Kaldor: Petraeus was a PhD student of Richard Falk's. When we wrote the Barcelona Report for Solana we sent a copy to Petraeus and he sent a hand-written note back to us to say he thought it was 'spot on'.

Johnson: So what is your attitude to the 'surge'?

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[3] Johnson 2007.

Kaldor: The problem is the US is so discredited that it really can't 'do' human security. The approach depends on a sense of trust and legitimacy that the US just does not have. Something is happening on the ground but it is not paralleled by a political process. The ideal would be a political process, under international auspices, backed up be international intervention of a similar type, but that is not going to happen because nobody wants to send troops to Iraq. Maybe you are right to say 'give Petraeus a chance.' I think British troops should certainly withdraw.

Part 2: Global Terrorism

Johnson: *You wrote, 'It could be argued that if September 11 had not happened, the American military-industrial complex might have had to invent it. Indeed, what happened on September 11 could have come out of what seemed to be the wild fantasies of "asymmetric threats" that were developed by American strategic analysts as they sought a new military role for the United States after the end of the Cold War.'[4] What did you mean by that?*

Kaldor: Since the end of the Second World War there have been long development cycles in the military-industrial complex. Costs go down for a while, but then new weapons systems are developed and expenditure is increased to pay for them. If the military-industrial complex was not to be dismantled at the end of the cold war, it needed an excuse to produce the next generation of weapons. During the 1990s lots of people tried to develop new justifications and they invented all these amazing scenarios – that was what I meant. The military-industrial complex is a deep structure, in the UK as well as the US. British Aerospace (BAE) is a huge reason why we are purchasing Trident and are stuck in this difficult relationship with the US. This is not just about economics – it's not a vulgar Marxist point I am making. Why do we feel committed to BAE when we did not feel committed to the steel industry or the coal industry? Why do we feel the defence industry is the one industry we can't allow to be run-down? There you

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[4] Kaldor 2001.

touch not just on economics but on our deepest assumptions about security – assumptions that shape our political and economic structures.

Johnson: Let's talk about the nature of one threat to our security, then. Many commentators view Islamist terror as a new and uniquely dangerous threat. Some, such as Paul Berman, view it as a form of totalitarianism. But in your essay 'Global Terrorism' you refuse to do so. You treat Islamist terrorist groups alongside 'the Christian Right' in the USA, Serb paramilitaries, and Hutu genocidists as various expressions of a 'new kind of violence of our time, the "new global terrorism" of anti-modernist regressive globalisers.'[5] What do you feel is gained in analytical power by this framing of the nature of the threat – in effect, treating Frenki's Boys in Bosnia, Hutu genocidists in Rwanda, Christian fundamentalists in the USA and the 9/11 hijackers as linked phenomena?

Kaldor: Two things. First, I think totalitarianism is linked to the state. Yes, al-Qaeda may have a totalitarian ideology but it is not linked to the state in the way Nazism and Communism were, and is therefore not the same kind of threat. To present Islamic terrorism as a form of totalitarianism is really a way to legitimise the war on terror. If Islamic terrorism is indeed a uniquely totalitarian threat, then obviously the war on terror is legitimate as a way of dealing with it. I don't want to deny the seriousness of Islamic terrorism, but, I do think we should look again at the threat that we are experiencing. I was in Sarajevo after 9/11 and we had a moment of silence for 9/11. But you could see every Bosnian thinking, 'Why didn't the world have a moment of silence after Srebrenica, where 8,000 men and boys were killed?' And look at the grotesque violence that is going on in places like Rwanda. There is a sense that the special attention paid to Islamic terrorism is because it is a threat to *the West*. And that is my other objection – we don't take seriously these other terrible things that are happening in other parts of the world.

Johnson: You have argued that terrorists must be treated as criminals and not military enemies. But why? Let me play devil's

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[5] Kaldor 2003b.

advocate for a moment. Islamist terrorists are waging a war, have killed 3,000 people on one day by flying jet airliners into buildings, and seek to kill without limit. They issue ideological manifestos, forge political alliances, and act in light of both. They do not act for personal or 'criminal' gain. Why does it help to insist that such a threat is 'criminal'? Ed Husain's The Islamist – *an insider's account of UK Islamist and Jihadist networks[6] – depicts not criminal gangs but something akin to Leninist groups – an unremitting focus on ideas, recruitment, entryist work, and ceaseless education and propaganda work. If the threat is of this political and ideological character how can it possibly help us to treat it as 'criminal'?*

Kaldor: Well, I don't think criminals are only economic criminals. Hitler was a criminal. I think the problem about a 'war on terror' is that 'wars' are legitimate – that is the whole point about wars. And 'enemies' in a 'war' are treated in a certain way – very different from how you treat a criminal. By calling them 'criminals' I don't mean to make them any less important. On the contrary, I am pointing to the fact that they break every law in the book. They violate international humanitarian law, human rights law, and so on. I think al-Qaeda was enormously strengthened by being treated as an 'enemy' in a 'war on terror'. Osama bin Laden suddenly became an equal to George Bush. We should not give them that legitimacy.

Part 3: The Helsinki Idea and the birth of a new politics

Johnson: *Let's talk about the progressive alternative. You were deeply engaged in the debates between the West European peace movement and the East European opposition in the 1980s and these left a deep impression on your political understanding.[7] Can we start with what you call 'the Helsinki idea' – what was it and what was its impact on your thinking?*

Kaldor: It was an idea that came together by chance. In

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[6] Husain 2007.

[7] Kaldor 2003a. See also Kaldor 1999b.

1975, in the Helsinki Agreement, a compromise was reached between the two superpowers. The Russians wanted security guarantees and the borders to be made inviolable in Europe. And the Americans – for tactical reasons, not because they were committed – wanted human rights. So peace and human rights came together in that agreement. It was a path-breaking agreement in that sense. I gave a speech in Helsinki on the 25th anniversary of the agreement and I said that the agreement brought together the two halves of my family. I realised that if you have peace in Europe you can also have debate, whereas the Cold War suppressed freedom. When the Helsinki agreement was signed, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing said, 'Now we can all agree.' Olof Palme said, 'On the contrary, now we can begin to disagree.'

Helsinki stimulated both the opposition in Eastern Europe and the Peace movement in the West. I think in the Peace movement we were less aware of Helsinki, but we had gone through the détente years and when we saw this new generation of nuclear weapons – Cruise and Pershing – it seemed completely unacceptable to go back to the heights of the Cold War. In Eastern Europe, oppositionists saw that their governments had signed these agreements and that Helsinki was an instrument that could be used. So we saw the emergence of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) in Poland, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and so on.

What was new about the Helsinki idea? The conviction that peace was not just something between states and human rights were not just something that went on inside states. This challenged the tension between peace and human rights that was at the heart of the cold war.

Johnson: Can I suggest a way to complicate the story and see what your reaction is? The US Democratic Party Senator, Henry 'Scoop' Jackson, does not figure in your account of the end of the cold war. Yet Jackson was a hero to Natan Sharansky, Andrei Sakharov and other dissidents. Was it not the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment which first challenged détente by linking peace (in the sense of co-operative economic relations) to human rights (in the form of the human right to emigrate from Stalinist countries) at a time when both left and right – German Social Democrats as much as Kissengerian

republicans – sought co-existence with Stalinism, and were wary of even acknowledging the dissidents, let alone placing them at the heart of policy? I don't think Jackson was only 'tactically' for human rights, and nor was his staffer, Richard Perle. Is it not possible to see common ground, or subterranean connections, at least in terms of goals, between what became the 'neoconservative' impulse to democracy-promotion and the liberal internationalist impulse? Think of a figure like Bernard Kouchner, now Foreign Minister in Nicolas Sarkozy's government, for instance.

Kaldor: I agree with you completely. I think there is a link. I felt it in my own soul, as it were. All of us who started off as peace movement activists and became passionate about human rights found it hard not to flip over to the other side. The neocons started on the left and felt that the peace movement and the left had been apologetic about Communism, had been fellow travellers, and they had not been taking human rights seriously. And certainly, I accept, in the peace movement everybody would pay lip-service to human rights but thought the threat of nuclear war was the bigger thing. There was only a small minority of us in the peace movement who took human rights seriously. But at the same time I am very glad I have that peace movement and left background. It holds you back when it comes to things like bombing. And this is the real problem. The neocons on the one hand are passionate about human rights but on the other hand they think bombing is legitimate in support of human rights.

Johnson: *But it is legitimate to bomb sometimes, isn't it? What about bombing Serb positions to make them stop shelling ordinary Sarajevans as they shop in the market?*

Kaldor: I was very unhappy about it at the time, and I am even more so in retrospect. I was in favour of intervention in Kosovo but I was very unhappy with the use of air-strikes. I just think it's unacceptable. I mean, what happened at Nuremberg was victor's justice. We should have also addressed Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The problem with the liberal internationalists and their alliance with the neocons is that they believe in wars for human rights so they have flipped over to the human rights side instead of holding peace and human rights together.

Part 4: The Cosmopolitan Political Project

Johnson: Central to your notion of a progressive foreign policy is the cosmopolitan political project. You have summed up the cosmopolitan alternative in these terms:

> *[A] cosmopolitan political project ... would ... reconstruct legitimacy around an inclusive, democratic set of values ... counterposed against the politics of exclusivism ... [W]hat is needed is an alliance between local defenders of civility and transnational institutions which would guide a strategy aimed at controlling violence. Such a strategy would include political, military and economic components. It would operate within a framework of international law. Peacekeeping could be reconceptualised as cosmopolitan law-enforcement [and] a new strategy of reconstruction... should supplant the current dominant approaches of structural adjustment or humanitarianism. (..) The cosmopolitan project has to be a global project even if it is, as it must be, local or regional in application.[8]*

Some see the cosmopolitan alternative as utopian. But you argue that not only is cosmopolitanism morally persuasive – in today's world, it is the only realistic policy on offer. What reasons would you offer for thinking cosmopolitanism is the new realism, so to speak?

Kaldor: Well, let's start with why not being cosmopolitan is deeply unrealistic. The Iraq war has made this clear. The use of force in a classical way, and the idea of polarising ideologies between good and evil, has simply exacerbated a new war. You can't resolve new wars that way. The key to solving new wars is the restoration of legitimate authority. And you can't do that except with an inclusive ideology. Any attempt to introduce traditional realpolitik approaches simply exacerbates the problems. And that is what we are seeing in the Middle East, which is terribly dangerous and difficult. Nowadays, political authority depends on consent, so inclusive approaches to governance are the only approaches that work. We don't think that it's utopian to expect states to respect human rights within states so why do we insist that

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[8] Kaldor 1999a, pp. 10-11.

it is utopian in the international area?

Johnson: Central to your vision of a cosmopolitan political alternative is the rise of a global civil society as the centerpiece of global legitimacy speading the values of multi-culturalism and human rights. But after 1989 you discovered that global civil society included new nationalist and fundamentalist groups as well as human rights and peace groups.[9] So, does 'global civil society' describe a socio-political terrain, occupied by Osama bin Laden as surely as the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, or does it describe a delimited political project of the left? These two meanings seem to co-exist and to make the concept a bit slippery.

Kaldor: I think it definitely is both. But I'm not sure I'd call it a political project of 'the left' – maybe of 'liberals'. I've spent the last ten years trying to work out what global civil society is. Basically, before 1989 civil society was constituted within the framework of the state and you could not talk about a civil society without a state. They constitute each other – civil society needs a framework of law, and so on. After 1989 we saw global governance and civil society constituting each other. In a more complex intermeshed globalised world, civil society is not local or national but global. That's the first point.

The second point is that there exist different conceptions of civil society, each with an accompanying normative framework. In my book, *Global Civil Society*, I distinguish three. First, the neo-liberal conception, which is close to Robert Putnam's notion of 'social capital'. This is the idea that civil society *is* associationalism. It smoothes the path of capitalism, and is seen as 'what we have in the West.' It's a sort of American idea. The second conception of civil society came out of Eastern Europe – civil society is social movements, activism, and trying to influence the state. A third idea, which I call the postmodern idea, suggests both that 'civil society' is itself a part of a eurocentric narrative starting with the Enlightenment, and carried on by Hegel; and that this excludes other non-Western narratives.
My argument is that civil society is the arena where we debate different models of governance. It is the medium through which

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[9] Kaldor 2003a.

a social contract is negotiated. Today, we are in the process of establishing a global civil society alongside international law and global institutions. Yes, in this new arena there are horrible people as well as nice people, but I start from an Enlightenment assumption that if you debate these things with relative openness you are going to come up with better consequences than if you don't debate them. That is how I reconcile the normative and the descriptive.

Part 5: The Human Security Doctrine

Johnson: Let's talk about a viable security doctrine for the new global era. In 2004, you were asked by The High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to set up a study group on Europe's security capabilities. In the end the team developed a security doctrine for a European security policy – A Human Security Doctrine for Europe: the Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities *(2004).[10] Can you summarise the human security doctrine for the reader?*

Kaldor: Basically, it *is* the cosmopolitan alternative but the group that I put together with Solana and others thought the term rather intellectual, hence 'human security'. Actually, when we decided to use that term we didn't fully grasp what baggage it had.

In essence, the human security doctrine says Europe is a new kind of institution; it does not need an army in a traditional sense to defend borders, but, rather, needs to contribute to global human security. Human security means the protection of individuals and communities as opposed to states and borders.

'Doctrine' is about how you put that into practice. We call for a human security response force that would involve soldiers, policemen, and civilian experts. And we enunciate a set of principles of human security. Two of those principles are absolutely critical. One is human rights. The other is legitimate political authority. The job of the intervening force

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[10] Kaldor et al 2004.

is to establish legitimate political authority which, in the end, is the only thing that can guarantee human security.

The human security doctrine says we are for human security everywhere. There is a role for Europe in contributing to UN and international community interventions when states don't provide human security, or are non-existent and so can't provide human security. But the key task is to create institutions that can provide human security, and this has huge implications for the way in which we should use force. Bombing is unacceptable in a human security approach – 'collateral damage' is a violation of human rights. And you can't 'win'. The most you can do is to stabilise the situation so that there can be a political solution to underpin a legitimate authority.

Johnson*: Rather like Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty, there seem to be two concepts of human security. The narrow version is 'negative' (i.e. freedom from fear – security of territory from invasion, security of person from physical attack, security from arbitrary arrest, and so on) while the broad version is 'positive' (i.e. freedom from want – security of rights to health, education, economic prosperity, even socio-economic equality). Some favour the broad approach (as set out in the 1994 UNDP document[11]) while others, such as Norway and Canada, favour a narrower approach, defining human security as the protection of individuals and communities from violence, while handling the questions of economic development and social policy outside the conceptual framework of human security. How does the Barcelona Report engage with this debate?*

Kaldor: My version is narrow. Not in the sense of ignoring freedom from want but in the sense of focusing on situations in which human lives are threatened. The difference between 'human development' and 'human security' is really about the level of risk individuals are exposed to. 'Human development' is not just about freedom from want, but includes freedom from fear, too – feeling safe on the streets, being able to vote. The difference is that human security is about moments of extreme peril. Amartya Sen calls it the 'downside risks.'[12]

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[11] UNDP 1994.

[12] Sen 2000.

Taylor Owen talks of 'threshold vulnerabilities.'[13] And I believe we are facing extreme peril. Everyone talks about climate change, but nuclear proliferation is also a big risk. And the new wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and Palestine are becoming interconnected and the spectre of a new global conflagration is raised. I feel a narrow human security approach to all this is incredibly important.

Johnson: Let me raise a concern. Would you accept that 'human security' is an essentially contested concept unable to transcend the constitutive divisions of political philosophy about the good life, the role of the state, the question of rights, political responsibility, and so on? What I am getting at is this: is there any danger that a political philosophy and policy mix – global social democracy – will be introduced to Europe dressed as a non-political concept of 'human security,' behind the backs, so to speak, of the citizens, and placed beyond political debate by being framed as a matter of 'human rights'?

Kaldor: Well, I've been lobbying very hard for the EU to adopt a human security doctrine and what I am afraid of is that unless it is taken up in a very public way it will just become another word used to justify whatever it is that governments or the EU does. This, of course, was the critique made by Chomsky of 'humanitarianism'. While I don't agree with Chomsky, I think there is something in it – humanitarianism became something assimilated into cold war rhetoric. I worry about that – not about us smuggling in global social democracy!

There is also another problem – the problem raised by Carl Schmitt. If you turn enemies into criminals, you don't allow them space to be political opponents. He argued that the political was defined in terms of the friend-enemy distinction and that had to include the real physical possibility of killing. I am dubious about this argument. It is as totalitarian as you hint that human security could be. Within countries, the rule of law does not prevent political debate. On the contrary, it provides the conditions in which such debate can take place.

Johnson: Can I explore some problems that will be faced by a

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[13] Owen 2004.

human security doctrine? Let's take agencies and institutions first. Who has the responsibility to protect? Who is to define 'security'? Who is do the securing?

Kaldor: If the EU could only get things together I think it could be a very important agency – it is neither a classic intergovernmental organisation nor a nation-state. But, nowadays, institutions like the EU only operate within a broader framework of civil society pressure. Without a public sentiment that human security has to be done, nothing will ever happen. I think that is part of the problem with the traditional intellectual framework – it does not take into account the relationship between what the state does and domestic politics.

Johnson*: You have developed proposals for force projection that involve new configurations of military and civilian capacity. Is it possible that this is already happening, but on an ad hoc basis and under the control of the military?*

Kaldor: I think it is happening, yes, and particularly within the military, but it's not being led by the military. I found it fascinating when writing the Barcelona report that our biggest allies were in the military. We were asked to do a report for the European Space Agency and we had three French generals and they were all incredibly positive about human security. In the British military, the experience in Northern Ireland and Bosnia has been absolutely formative. NATO is also moving in this direction but it has so much ideological baggage that – this struck me at NATO meetings – it is not as developed as the EU when it comes to this kind of thinking.

The EU has undertaken some important missions in the last few years and for the new report for Javier Solana we've done case studies.[14] We found that on the ground the EU missions are acting in new ways. The mission in the Congo was holding meetings in schools and mobilising public sympathy. Defending the rights of the opposition candidate in the election made people realise the mission was not a tool of the President. In Lebanon and Palestine there are very good things happening on the ground, but they are thwarted by

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[14] Kaldor 2007b.

the fact that at a political level the EU is in the grip of the 'war on terror' and American policy.

Johnson: What about the problem of thresholds? Liotta and Owen have raised the question of 'how direct a link must be made between vulnerability abroad and EU security' to trigger an intervention.[15] When does a human security doctrine indicate it's the right time to intervene?

Kaldor: We put less emphasis on the 'why' of intervention than the 'how' of intervention – because we felt the 'how' had been neglected. What we did say is that we need a new legal framework to deal with conflicts between humanitarian law and human rights. We need rules of engagement. Of course we need to specify the conditions for intervention – we deliberately did not specify them ourselves.

Johnson: Can I push further on the question of legitimacy. You have written 'the use of military force should be approved through due process – for example the United Nations Security Council.'[16] But – I think I am right in saying this – you supported the war in Kosovo, even though it didn't have UN approval. Isn't there a great danger in granting the authority to confer legitimacy to a body like the UN Security Council, which is made up, in part, of authoritarian states?

Kaldor: I think it is definitely a problem and that is why we need other sets of criteria. In *The Kosovo Report*, we said that the NATO intervention was illegal but legitimate and that it is very dangerous when there is a gap between legality and legitimacy.[17] I think this was prophetic and that the gap may have made Iraq possible. But even if we had a set of criteria for intervention enshrined in law – the 'responsibility to protect,' for example – in the end the intervention has to have public support as well. What has been fascinating about the rise of cosmopolitan law – i.e. international law that applies to individuals – has been the role that global civil society has played. Even though international law

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[15] Liotta and Owen 2006.

[16] Kaldor 2003b, p. 196.

[17] Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000.

consists of treaties between states, and the states remain the responsible powers, it has been an enormous amount of public pressure that has changed the nature of the legal arrangements in treaties like the Land Mines Convention or the International Criminal Court or in the attitudes to humanitarian intervention. Nevertheless, it remains the case that in the end states sign the treaties and I am not sure that I would want to tamper with that.

Johnson: *Are you sympathetic to the proposal made by The Princeton Project to create a 'concert of democracies,' involving Western and non-Western democracies?[18]*

Kaldor: I'm not. There have been a series of projects to bring the democracies together and they all fail because they are all statist projects. If you look at the cosmopolitan treaties – Land Mines, International Criminal Court, and so on – what you have is a network of states and civil society. I'm also unhappy with the idea of a 'concert of democracies' because, well, what is to count as a 'democracy'? Democracy is just so varied at the moment. I think formal democratisation has been a method of integrating countries into the global system rather than a method of increasing accountability to citizens. And I fear that is also what a 'concert of democracies' would do.

Part 6: Answering the Critics

Johnson: *You have suggested that the contemporary 'anti-war' movement has the potential to pick up where the 1980s Helsinki moment left off. Some of us believe that large parts (not all, of course) of the 'anti-war' movement are better characterised as a form of 'reactionary anti-imperialism'…*

Kaldor: I agree!
Johnson: *…We think much of it resembles the fake 'peace movements' and 'peace conferences' of the official East rather than, say END. It is led by Stalinists like Andrew Murray, who sends his greetings to 'socialist North Korea', apologists for Saddam like George Galloway, Hamas supporters, and a hard*

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[18] Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006.

left-Islamist alliance which talks not of peace in Iraq but victory for the so-called 'insurgents'. These leaders have attacked the Iraq unions, sung the praises of Hassan Nasrallah, and hosted official apologists for the Iranian regime – while keeping Iranian oppositionists off their platforms. It's a long way from E.P.Thompson's vision of a 'transcontinental movement of citizens' isn't it?

Kaldor: It really depresses me. It's one reason why I simply haven't been active in it, although the protests against Trident in Scotland have been different and I joined the blockade of the Trident base for a day in July.

Johnson: So why has there not been more of a challenge from within the 'anti-war' movement?

Kaldor: Movements come and go. The bulk of the movement are ordinary people and they drift away. Those who stay active and so are the people in a position to organise and lead things next time round are often the hard left. So a big part of the END experience was fighting against the old hardliners in CND. We argued about style, participation, and democracy. But in the 1980s we broke through, maybe because we had Edward, I don't know. This time it has not happened. It seems that these old guys, mostly from 1968, along with the Islamists, have blocked a similar breakthrough. It's very worrying.

Johnson: Some see a dangerous relativism in your arguments. You said in an interview, 'I'm very happy that we have left behind the black-white world of the Cold War. My grand vision is a vision where people debate and where a million visions operate.'[19] Kenan Malik was unpersuaded, finding in this an open door to relativism. 'This vision of a thousand flowers blooming rather than just two is, of course, very appealing. But there's also something a bit too neat about this concept of pluralism-as-grand-vision. A vision cannot be a process. By definition it requires an end goal. As a pragmatist, I might want to say that all visions of the future are equally valid (though even for a pragmatist there have to be limits to such tolerance). As an idealist, I have to believe that my vision is better than yours;

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[19] Kaldor 2002.

that cosmopolitanism, say, is better than imperialism; and that the world would be a better place if it looked like my ideal.'[20] *Isn't there just a flat contradiction between cosmopolitan universalism and the blooming of 'a million visions'?*

Kaldor: Well, I think cosmopolitanism is about many visions blooming. The reason we talk about cosmopolitanism rather than humanism is precisely because of a respect for human diversity. There are some universals such as not killing each other and not committing genocide, but there are also very different cultural ways in which those things are realised. I used to take the view that there were universal values, European in origin but no less attractive to other countries for that. I now realise that this view is completely and utterly wrong. The more you study Islam, the more you study Sanskrit history, the more you find that these ideas were in all those cultures. There is a struggle between a black and white world which believes in good and evil and a world which believes in debate and reason. When I started to get involved in all these Islamic debates I realised that so many of the Enlightenment ideas actually came from Classical Islam. So I don't think it is culturally relativist at all, but the binary world doesn't admit of any plurality. I experienced this in the cold war which was a very difficult time for anyone who was against nuclear weapons – you were outside what was the orthodox debate.

Johnson: But let's make this concrete. If we are talking about gay and lesbian rights and someone says, 'Well, my vision tells me these so-called rights are evil, so it is right and proper that I discriminate,' then, to argue against that view, rather than simply shrugging, we would have to go beyond 'plurality'.

Kaldor: Yes, of course, but I do reach beyond plurality. A cosmopolitan is plural about culture but has certain fundamental, universal core beliefs. And of course there is always going to be a problem about the borders of those core beliefs.

Johnson: Don't your views add up to a de facto if not de jure pacifism? You are reluctant to distinguish between the deliberate

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[20] Malik 2002.

killing of combatants and the accidental killing of civilians. In your view, as the equality of human beings has become more widely accepted, then the difference between killing in war and other kinds of killing has become harder to sustain. You seem to doubt that killing large numbers of conscripts from the air is morally different to a massacre of civilians. But what about, for example, the allied use of air superiority over Europe in 1944-5 to kill large numbers of defenceless German conscripts whenever they could? That speeded the allied advance across Europe – it confined the movement of German armoured columns to the night for one thing – and so the liberation of the death camps and the end of the war came more quickly. Isn't it important we retain the intellectual tools to make exactly these kinds of agonising discriminations – distinguishing, like Reinhold Niebuhr, between moral man and immoral society?[21] How could one retake a city occupied by people carrying out crimes against humanity, or use force against enemy positions that are part and parcel of that crime, without something like the just war theory distinction between combatants and civilians?

Kaldor: Well, in domestic law you are allowed to kill somebody who is threatening you or a third party. I support that. But in just war theory if the victory is 'proportional' to the number of civilians you kill by accident the war is legitimate. I reject that. I don't think it's ever justifiable to kill civilians. Sometimes you have to accept that you simply can't defeat insurgents, and that you will either have to negotiate with them or try some other method. If killing insurgents means killing a large number of civilians, it is simply unacceptable.

Am I a pacifist? This is something I have thought about a lot. I always assumed that I wasn't a pacifist and I knew that I would have supported the war against Hitler. I now think about the war against Hitler and do wonder to myself in the light of hindsight. The war was really terrible, and the Holocaust happened *after* the war began not before. I think of how Slobodan Milošević used the NATO intervention to ethnically cleanse the Albanians. Would I still, in hindsight, support World War Two? Should we not have tried to undermine Hitler from below? I definitely think that we

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[21] Niebuhr 1932.

should have tried to attack the concentration camps or the trains going to the camps and we should not have bombed Dresden or Tokyo. But I am not a pacifist – I think you can use force to stop genocide. And I do think sometimes you have to go after insurgents. For instance, in Gora□de, when General Riley shelled the Serbs for two hours, I think that was a human security operation.

Johnson*: What are you working on now?*

Kaldor: I am preparing an exhibition on war and peace for the municipality of Barcelona. A castle where many Republicans were executed in the civil war has been given to the municipality by the Spanish state. The municipality decided it wanted a permanent exhibition of war and peace titled 'The Long Journey from War to Human Security', and asked me to help design it. The first part of the exhibition is 'from war to new forms of violence' tracing the move from the defeat of uniformed enemies in battle to the killing of civilians, and that part of the exhibition starts with Picasso's Guernica. The second part is titled 'From peace to human security.'

We hope to use a Velázquez portrait from the Prado as the symbol of the exhibition. It is of the god Mars. His affair with Venus has been uncovered and we see Mars naked, sitting on a bed, dejected, his weapons on the floor. I discovered it was painted in 1640, about eight years before Westphalia, so at the same time Grotius is writing about international law and facing some of the same dilemmas we are facing today. Has Mars given up his weapons for ever or is he about to get dressed and go back to war?

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Chapter 10

The Neoconservative Persuasion and Foreign Policy: An Interview with Joshua Muravchik

Joshua Muravchik is a resident scholar at The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the author of *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism* (Encounter, 2002). He has written extensively about democracy, human rights, and American foreign policy in *Commentary*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Weekly Standard* and *The Wall Street Journal*. His books include *The Future of the United Nations: Understanding the Past to Chart a War Forward* (2005], *Covering the Intifada: How the Media Reported the Palestinian Uprising (2005), The Imperative of American Leadership* (1996), *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (1991), and *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (1986). He serves as an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute on Near East Policy and is an adjunct professor at the Institute of World Politics. The interview took place on July 11 and 15, 2007.

Personal and Intellectual History

Alan Johnson*: You were raised in a devoutly socialist family in the 1950s, and spent your adolescence running the US young socialist movement in the 1960s and early 1970s. As an adult you have been a leading figure in the neoconservative movement. People will assume a single rupture was involved in that journey but I suspect that it was not experienced like that.*

Joshua Muravchik: I was raised in a home in which ideology was everything. As I wrote, 'Socialism was the faith in which I was raised. It was my father's faith and his father's before him.'[1] My grandparents on my father's side had been

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[1] Muravchik 2002a, p. 1.

devoted socialists and my parents' lives revolved around their dedication to socialism and the New York Socialist party. Political activism was something I was exposed to from a very early age. I participated in my first presidential campaign in 1952 when I was five years old and my mother was campaigning for Adlai Stevenson. I remember she had a big sack of leaflets and took me to the subway station to hand them out. The station had two exits so she divided the sack of leaflets in half and placed me at the top of the stairs at one exit, telling me to hand one to every person who came out. I first visited Washington in 1958 when my parents packed me and my younger brother in the car to participate in the youth march for integrated schools. Over the next few years I went to lots of civil rights demonstrations until, by the time of the famous 1963 March on Washington, at which Martin Luther King gave his 'I have a Dream' speech, I was quite a veteran. I was the organiser and captain of two bus loads of marchers from New York that day. I became active in my college years in the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the Socialist Party's youth section, and after two years I became the Chairman.

The transition in my beliefs to neoconservatism was a gradual one. There were no abrupt shifts, and it felt like a fairly natural progression. It started right at the beginning when I was active as a young socialist in the 1960s. It was a time of great radicalism on American campuses and everyone was on the left – most further to the left than I was. (There was no such thing as conservatism.) Even though I was very devoted to my idea of socialism and regarded myself as a Marxist, I spent the greater part of my political energies arguing with people further to my left. And I was really quite repelled by the student left of the sixties.

Johnson*: What repelled you?*

Muravchik: Two things. One was the attitude towards various Communist regimes and movements which were anathema to me. The student left did not usually identify with the Soviet regime but it did support all kind of third-world Communist regimes – Mao's, Fidel's, Ho's, and I looked on all of these as monstrous totalitarian regimes. Second, the New Left was contemptuous of civil liberties, and regularly silenced

speakers whose political affiliations were disliked. Generally, I found nothing to like and much to dislike. That was the first push rightward.

The second push was this. I'd had a 'third camp' position – there were these two bad systems, capitalism and communism, and I stood for democratic socialism, which in my eyes was much more humane. But I came to realise that this was juvenile in the sense that, while I still thought both systems were bad, I realised they were not *equally* bad. Communism was infinitely and appallingly worse – much crueler and taking a much higher toll of human life. That realisation did not weaken my belief in socialism but it made me look at the world around me very differently.

There was something of an epiphany, I guess. I remember sitting up all night reading *Tell the West*, the memoirs of Jerzy Gliksman.[2] He was a Pole, active in the Jewish Labour Bund, who had ended up in a Soviet camp. He survived because as the Red Army pushed the Germans back towards the Polish border they entered the camps, liberated a bunch of Polish prisoners and took them to the front and gave them guns to help fight the Germans in Poland. In the camp Gliksman had befriended the wife of one of the Old Bolsheviks who had been executed by Stalin. He said to her, 'I'm going to get out here. They have given me a notice to go to the Front. What can I do for you?' She laughed and said 'There is nothing you can do for me.' Gliksman said 'Well, maybe you can try to escape. I was raised on tales from my older brother about how he escaped from Siberia.' She asks, 'When was that?' Gliksman answers 'Under the Tsar.' So she laughs again and says, 'Ah, those sentimental Tsarist times. There is only one thing you can do for me. If you survive, tell the West.' And that phrase – 'those sentimental Tsarist times' – really hit me like a hammer. After all, Tsarism was regarded as the very epitome of reaction and repression. Realising that Communism was so much more terrible than Tsarism was an important moment.

In the 1970s, because of Vietnam, the intellectual class completely abandoned anti-Communism (all the way up

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[2] Glicksman 1948.

to the President of the United States when it was Jimmy Carter). It was felt that it was our obsessive, excessive anti-Communism that had gotten us into a terrible mess in Vietnam. In Carter's first major foreign policy speech he spoke of getting over 'our inordinate fear of Communism.' This was all appalling to me. I thought the fight against Communism was the essential task in defence of civilisation. That classified me as a 'neocon' – even though at that point I still thought of myself as a socialist.

I had spent my twenties as an activist and so had not had much education. I had a bachelor's degree, but I had spent most of my time on demos and had not studied much. In the end I got disgusted with myself so in my thirties I went to graduate school. In my first semester at Georgetown I took a course in Marxism taught by a good Professor who was a Marxist and who was very demanding – we read an important work every single week. But having this intense exposure to Marxist theory in a systematic way, presented by a very rigorous Marxist thinker, only led me to the realisation that it was all a crock of shit!

There was one other thing that encouraged me to move rightwards. An important political anchor for me and for many others had been the labour movement. My great heroes were the labour leaders George Meany and Lane Kirkland, and I thought of myself as standing in this wonderful tradition of American labour internationalism, anti-Communism and anti-Fascism. But that began to be eroded in the 1980s. The labour movement's internationalism and anti-Communism faded. Today, it has gone entirely, and the American labour movement is now ideologically akin to the British – kind of leftist. So what had anchored me to the left, and been central to my identity on the left, just vanished.

Through the 1970s virtually all 'neocons' were still to the left of centre. There was a change in the 1980s because of Reagan. I and all of my 'neocon' comrades liked Reagan so much we became more open to his conservative views on other issues.

Part 1: The Fall of Socialism

Johnson: *Let's talk about your book on socialism, which was made into a TV series by PBS. You are not ashamed of your socialist past. You point out that the Socialist Party 'had no blood on our hands' and 'fought communists tooth and nail, often when few others would.' But you admit to a feeling of embarrassment at having been 'enthralled by a seductive but false idea that has done a lot of harm to the world.'[3] The totalitarian impulse, you argue, was 'there from the beginning' in 'socialism's role as a redemptive creed, a substitute religion.' Marx's idea of a leap from a realm of necessity to a realm of freedom, for example, was 'utterly messianic', and 'set the stage for the twentieth century's great experiments in mass murder by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and Hitler.' This is your argument:*

> *Monotheism had linked cosmology – the understanding of which is a universal human craving – to an ethical system. The establishment of that linkage constituted the single most important step in the progress of mankind. Socialism severed that link. Socialism denied that the path to the kingdom of heaven lay in individual righteousness. Rather it was to be found in political outcomes. The individual could reach it not by striving for moral goodness but by planting himself on the right side of history or of the barricades.[4]*

Muravchik: I kept wrestling with the central mystery of socialism. How could something that desired to make things better have instead made things so much worse? Was it that socialists were bad people? From my own experience I am still convinced that most people who embraced the idea of socialism did so from a humane feeling – they wanted the world to be kinder and gentler. Yet socialism's most important results were quite the opposite. Of course, social democrats did things to humanise society when they were in government, but the overall record of socialism, when you add up both sides of the ledger, is quite appalling.

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[3] Muravchik 2002c.
[4] Muravchik 1999.

I concluded that the central problem is asking politics to do something it can't do – to provide the 'leap' that Marx wrote about. This ambition departs entirely from the realities of human existence, which is imperfect and tragic. Life may not be nasty and brutish but it is short and it will always have its share of sadness and disappointment. Religion offers answers to both the shortness of life and the disappointments it contains – whether or not you accept the truth of any particular religion or religion per se. Politics can't do that. If you understand that, you feel a certain constraint on what you seek to achieve in politics, which at the most can offer amelioration. But the socialist thinks that through politics you can transform human life itself. Michael Harrington – a leader of mine back then whom I admired – once wrote that socialism would create 'an utterly new society in which some of the fundamental limitations of human existence have been transcended.'[5] But no political system can do that. Worse, once you say it can you have a logically sound utilitarian argument for killing some people in order to get there. If those people are standing in the way of the new, higher, happier level of human existence, well… Someone who wrote about this and whose insights influenced me was Milovan Djilas – not in *The New Class* but in his later book *The Unperfect Society*.[6]

History tells us of people with supernatural beliefs doing very terrible things – human sacrifice, and so on. But, beginning with the Old Testament, the cardinal feature of the monotheistic religions is that there is a power greater than us, and the way to make out best in the face of this power is to behave according to a moral law. As I think about it now, I think that's the seminal transformation in human history. Socialism – certainly Marxist socialism – sought to cancel that. It offered this whole mystical narrative (it was never 'scientific'!) absent any moral instruction or law. In fact it ridiculed the very idea of a moral law, insisting that all the outcomes that would affect human happiness had to do with class struggle and who came out ahead in the political arena.

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[5] Harrington 1973, p. 421.

[6] Djilas 1972.

Johnson: And the flip-side to that excessive hope about the transcendent 'socialist' future is an excessively, even morbidly, critical attitude to the 'bourgeois' present? In a speech you argued that socialism created a European culture in which 'bourgeois society had been systematically discredited … doomed to be replaced by a new and glorious epoch.' This world view, you suggested, served as 'the incubator that hatched Italian and German Fascism just as it hatched Russian and Chinese Communism.'[7] Is this anti-bourgeois sensibility also to blame for socialism's failures and crimes?

Muravchik: I think that's right, but the other factor at stake in radical politics of all kinds is narcissism. Perhaps the most important motivation among radicals is thinking of themselves as better than other people. It is often wrapped up in love of humanity or love of nature, but I think it's mostly love of self. This denigration of and hatred for the ordinary imperfect society around us is really just a way of saying 'I am better than other people, the world is stupid and clumsy and fat and homely and I am so much better than all of this. I dream of a world that is worthy of me.' We get the term 'bourgeois' from Marx, so there is a pretence that it is to do with class or economics. But really it's just a stand-in for ordinary people, ordinary life, ordinary problems and ordinary imperfections.

Johnson: Let me put a case for remaining a social democrat. Towards the end of Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism, *you write 'The parties of the mainstream Left may pour the cream that lightens the coffee of capitalism, but they are not offering any other beverage.'[8] I think that's true, but it leaves a vital role for social democracy. Liberal capitalist democracies are the best societies the planet has ever seen in terms of their combination of freedom and prosperity, but they tend to erode their own foundations – i.e. they breed ecological crises, gross and destabilising social inequalities, and a cultural breakdown involving narcissistic individualism, the collapse of civility, the retreat to infantilism and fantasy, and a cult of violence. Because of that, the public philosophy that liberal capitalist democracies need to survive is still something*

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[7] Muravchik 1999.

[8] Muravchik 2002a, pp. 319-20.

like social democracy. Your late father, I think, was right when he said 'the one thing that our poor battered world needs right now is a vigorous and creative social democratic movement.'[9]

Muravchik: I would say two things. One is that your last phrase about 'the survival' of the system requiring social democracy is a needless leap to apocalyptism. The survival of the system is not in any uncertainty. Look, I guess I prefer empiricism. I do not hold with, and have no use at all for, libertarians who believe that the income or inheritances that people have are something that they own by sacrosanct right and that any time the government taxes them and takes their wealth and income for social purposes it is a violation of their rights and morally dubious. I don't believe that. But neither do I believe that economic inequality, in and of itself, is something that needs to be corrected. And neither do I believe that it is good or useful to create government programmes or social services or wealth transfers just because there are some people in wealth and some people in poverty. I guess my attitude is that I am happy to see those government activities that will be genuinely helpful to people supported by taxation, but let's be empirical about it – some are and some are not.

Part 2: Neoconservatism – the rebellion against the rebellion

Johnson*: Irving Kristol famously quipped that neoconservatives were 'liberals who had been mugged by reality.'[10] What did he mean?*

Muravchik: I've never liked that quip because it ruined a good joke, told perhaps by Johnny Carson, at a time of a rise in violent crime. Question: What is the definition of a conservative? Answer: A liberal who has been mugged. That's quite funny. 'Mugged by reality' is not funny. It's sanctimonious, as if we have experienced reality and other people have not.

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[9] Muravchik (Manny) 2002.
[10] Kristol 1983.

Irving is taken as the 'godfather' of neoconservatism, and there is one really important truth to that. In his generation of left intellectuals who moved rightwards it was he who went the furthest the fastest. So he was a real leader – the first to vote Republican, to defend capitalism, and so on.[11] But his focus was almost always on domestic issues. When Irving talked of being 'mugged by reality' he was referring to the domestic root of neoconservatism, not the other, foreign policy root.

The domestic root of neoconservatism began with a wide-ranging critique of the Great Society programs and the War on Poverty of President Johnson from the mid-1960s. These were programs that had been designed by liberal intellectuals, but which seemed to work out very badly. On the one hand, they did not achieve the goals they aimed at. On the other hand, they produced side-effects that were harmful, and which people were very surprised by. I don't think it's true that the War on Poverty was a complete failure – the poverty rate was reduced a little – but on the whole it was disappointing. So Irving, in his journal *The Public Interest*, began publishing a lot of critiques of the War on Poverty showing that it had failed, analysing why it had failed, and so on. That's what the phrase 'mugged by reality' alluded to – the discovery that government welfare programmes don't work in practice as they do on paper. Now all that is important but it's not very important in considering the neoconservatism that people are talking about – and loathing and fearing – today.

The second root of neoconservatism concerns foreign policy and can be called a rebellion against the rebellion. The neocons were those people who rebelled against the Sixties rebellion against anti-Communism. Here Norman Podhoretz was probably the single most important figure, although Jeane Kirkpatrick was also very important.[12] The neocons were a group of the liberal or radical intellectuals who believed that despite what had happened in Vietnam, anti-Communism was still a noble cause and the most important cause of our era. That's where the idea of neoconservatism started.

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[11] See Kristol 1995.

[12] See Podhoretz 1996, 2003; Kirkpatrick 1983.

Johnson: *At this point it's a battle inside the Democratic Party?*

Muravchik: Yes, in the political world it was *entirely* within the Democratic Party. The most important organisation in the formative development of neoconservatism was the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), a Democratic Party group that argued that Democrats would lose elections if we moved too far to the left. Senator Henry Jackson was the main stalwart of CDM, although Senator Hubert Humphrey was also involved and later Senator Daniel Moynihan. For several years there was a great battle for control of the Democratic Party. And CDM lost, very badly!

Johnson: *The McGovernites become dominant?*

Muravchik: Yes. McGovern's nomination in 1972 was a big triumph for the anti-anti-Communists. But he lost so badly to Nixon that we were hopeful that we could fight back. And when Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976 he was not a McGovernite. He was a centrist and we were not terribly unhappy. But when this Georgia Governor who had been a party centrist embraced the McGovern wing lock, stock and barrel and gave us the complete cold-shoulder, we realised that the victory of the McGovernites in the Democratic Party had been much more profound than we had understood.

Then, in the 1980s, there was a very happy marriage with Ronald Reagan and that tended to pull the neocons rightward. We liked Reagan so much we were susceptible to being influenced by him.

Johnson: *Reagan was a demonised figure in Europe. What was so attractive about Reagan to the neocons?*

Muravchik: That he was a deeply committed and serious anti-Communist. More attractive than anything else was his rhetoric. When he called communism an 'evil empire' it was the truth and something that desperately needed to be said. The word 'evil' is very important, by the way. There was a brilliant essay, published in 1982 in *Encounter* by two Irish scholars that argued the overarching meaning of George Orwell's work was to rehabilitate the category of evil as a concept in political

discourse.[13] And when Reagan used that term – the validity of which no one could dispute – he returned political discourse to the essential realities: the Soviet Union was (a) evil (b) an empire. And when he said that communism is a 'sad, bizarre chapter in human history, whose last pages are even now being written,' this was wonderful to us neocons. He was mounting a challenge – the first at this level – to the historicist claims of communism. And then, of course, Reagan brought us to the most perfect possible triumph in the cold war – victory without shedding blood. I might add without shedding the blood of those Europeans who hated him! Had the Cold War developed into a hot war it would have been Europeans who would have done the largest part of the dying. (By the way, in the US there is now a big effort by liberals to claim Reagan's mantle. Turns out he was a hero, but also a wise liberal who can be contrasted to the benighted conservatism of George W. Bush.)

Neoconservatism after the Cold War

Johnson: *In 1996, with the Cold War won, Norman Podhoretz – whom you have called 'the conductor of the neocon orchestra' – asked if neoconservatism had lost its distinctive identity and merged into plain old conservatism. Well, it didn't turn out that way – foreign policy reunited the neocons as a distinctive tendency in the 1990s, the war in Bosnia serving to 'crystallise a post Cold War approach to foreign policy that might fairly be described as neoconservative.' You found that 'almost everyone who had been a neocon supported US military intervention in Bosnia. We were reunited, not by a fixed platform but by a mindset distinct from that of traditional conservatives or liberals.'[14] Why did the Bosnian conflict have that effect? What were the defining characteristics of this neoconservative 'mindset'?*

Muravchik: Well, imagine a triangle. At its three points are traditional conservatives, traditional liberals, and neoconservatives. The dividing line between neoconservatism

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[13] McNamara and O'Keeffe 1982.
[14] Muravchik 2003.

and traditional conservatism is Wilsonianism. 'Wilsonian' is a term usually taken to mean 'utopian' or 'fuzzy-headed' and I would certainly grant that some of President Wilson's ideas were misconceived – in particular the League of Nations. But I think a deeper insight, and the real essence of Wilsonianism, was that America could not separate its destiny from the rest of the world. We had a long history of isolationism, or at least of restricting our focus to our own hemisphere. But around the turn of the century the United States emerged as the greatest industrial power and therefore had to reconsider its place in the scheme of things. Wilson had campaigned for President on the promise of keeping America out of the war, and had done so for three years. But then he decided he simply had to lead the US into the war in Europe. And then he generalised from that experience, concluding that given the new position we occupied as the potentially mightiest country, we had to play a new role on the world stage. As conflict and turmoil in other countries *was going to draw us in eventually*, it was better to get ahead of the curve by using our power to shape the world and make it a safer place for everyone, including ourselves.

The traditional or 'realist' way of looking at American interests had been to establish, for any given part of the world, what natural resources lay there or passed through there, and what geography was relevant to the deployment of military force. From that you made a kind of mechanical assessment about the size of our 'stake' in that area. In contrast, the essence of Wilsonianism is that we try to shape the world to make it a more harmonious place. This is morally good but it is also essential to our self-interest. And it means looking at American interests in a much more contingent way

In terms of Bosnia the traditional conservative view was set out by two successive secretaries of state. First by the Republican James Baker who famously said 'we have no dog in that fight', and, later, by the Democrat Warren Christopher, who, when he announced the abandonment of our lift-and-strike proposal, said, 'we are doing the most we can consistent with our interests' – meaning we did not have many interests there.

I can't speak for all neocons, but it was my view that when President Bush took the US to war against Iraq in Kuwait in

1991, and proclaimed a 'new world order,' he meant that in this new unipolar world the US would use its preponderant power to try to enforce article 2.4 of the UN Charter – the law against aggression. The overwhelming issue in the case of Iraq's absorption by force of Kuwait was not oil but the principle that raw aggression of one state against its neighbour should not be allowed – and that as the most powerful state we would take the lead in disallowing it. To my mind the same principle arose in Bosnia. To some extent it was a civil war but it was also a war of Serbian aggression against Bosnia. I had applauded the principle that Bush articulated in regard to Iraq's aggression against Kuwait and I thought it urgent and important that the same principle be applied in the Bosnian case. I think most neocons agreed or came to agree with that assessment. So, neoconservatives are Wilsonian, and believe US fate is bound up with the fate of the rest of the world. That distinguishes us from traditional conservatives.

What distinguishes neoconservatives from traditional liberals is that we're more ready to resort to the use of hard power and we are less trusting in the UN. So on the question of ends you might say we are more at one with the traditional liberals, but on the means we are more at one with the traditional conservatives.

Neoconservatism after 9/11

Johnson: *Neoconservatism played a decisive role in shaping Bush's foreign policy after 9/11. Most Europeans seem to think this was the result of a 'plot' by a 'cabal'. So what did happen?*

Muravchik: Well, keep the triangle that I just described in mind. When 9/11 happened it was not something entirely new. There had been a previous attack on the WTC by Islamists and lots of terrorist attacks had targeted Americans. But 9/11 established a consensus among Americans that something serious had to be done to put an end to this. Once they were killing thousands of us in a single day we had to rally ourselves to confront the threat. The question was *how*?

On the one hand it seemed clear to many, including President

Bush, that it would require the use of hard power – force – by the United States. But the outlook of traditional conservatives, known in the foreign policy jargon as 'realism', is rooted in a model of the state system that comes from the 19th century. Whatever true value it had then, realism had almost nothing to say about tackling non-state actors, or ideological or religious movements. Traditional realism had helped *produce* 9/11!

On the other hand traditional liberals had no answers, or poor answers, such as the '911' response to 9/11. And, in any case, George Bush was not a liberal.

So Bush came up with a two pronged idea. One prong was the necessity of hard power – 'we are going to fight these bastards as hard as we can.' We will call it a war, and treat it as a war, and are prepared to use whatever means are necessary to fight and to win. The other prong was the understanding that we could not defeat this enemy by military means alone. There were so many young Muslims willing to sacrifice their lives as long as they could kill a lot of us in the process, and so many millions who sympathised and regarded them as heroes, that we had to face the broader question of our relations with the Muslim world and the pathologies of the region.

The phrase 'root causes' was used by *The New York Times* in the first week after 9/11, and by Kofi Annan and some European leaders. But they all took the root cause to be poverty. This was silly (as recent events at Glasgow Airport where the terrorists were middle class professionals have shown yet again). You could see the killers were not poor. And even if poverty had something to do with 9/11, we did not need terrorism to make us aware that governments should seek to make their countries better off. This was not a goal that had eluded us up to that point! The neoconservatives offered an alternative analysis of the root causes, and Bush embraced it. We said that the question was not what the terrorists' grievances were (after all, there will always be grievances). It was why, when they have grievances, do they think a good solution is the mass murder of innocent civilians? What was unique was not the existence of grievances or poverty but the belief that mass murder was a legitimate way to seek redress. In our analysis the problem lay in *the political culture of the Middle East*. The question was how to change it. One of the defining features of

that political culture was tyrannical government. We argued that if we can spread democracy as a form of government in that region, then the process of socialisation that occurs in democracies will lead people away from thinking murder and suicide are the way to carry on an argument, and foster more political and peaceful ways.

Bush adopted this argument after 9/11, and from that came the idea that 'the neocons have taken over'. But there were very few neocons *inside* the Administration – maybe a handful. I've never thought of Wolfowitz as a neocon by the way – he was a government person all his career, not primarily an intellectual. I knew him perfectly well, and my pigeon-hole for him was that he was the person in the foreign policy establishment who was most open to neocon ideas, but was not himself a neocon. There were a few people at lower levels who were neocons, but they didn't make policy. Policy was made by Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Condi, maybe Colin Powell, and George Tenet. None of these people were neocons by any stretch. It was not that the neocons took over but that Bush adopted policies that were neocon policies. And I don't think anyone on the outside really knows how it is that Bush hit upon those policies. I suspect that what conditioned his decision was that there was no other approach on offer. And, by the way, there still isn't. That's why those expecting the imminent demise of 'neoconservatism' are in for a disappointment.[15] Whether we should have gone into Iraq or not, the fact is we have a very violent enemy who has to be fought first with hard power, and second by trying to influence how the Middle East and the Muslim world looks upon the rest of us, and that means, in part, promoting the spread of democracy in the region.

Neoconservatism and Democracy-Promotion

Johnson*: Let's talk about democracy promotion. You have been writing about this issue for a long time –* Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny *was published back in 1991.[16] I*

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[15] See Muravchik 2007b.

[16] Muravchik 1991.

want to ask about three dilemmas of democracy-promotion: means, consequences and agencies.

Many argue that implanting democracy by the means of US military force has inflamed the region, acted as a recruiting sergeant for the terrorists, tarnished for a generation the US image overseas (diminishing its ability to project soft power), while weakening the deterrent effect of US military force (diminishing its ability to project hard power). How do you respond to that view?

Muravchik: Well, there is a lot of truth there. I don't believe that military power is the way to spread democracy in the region. I certainly don't believe there is a right to use military power just to change the political system of another country. In the case of Iraq, I think there was a legal and moral basis for using military power because of the aggression of 1990 and Iraq's defiance of the disarmament terms set at the end of hostilities in 1991.

There are cases – Germany and Japan being the most obvious – in which we did quite successfully democratise countries though military occupation. However, in those cases the *rationale* for going to war was not to democratise, so I'd like to separate two things. First, the project of spreading democracy should be carried out by peaceful means, not by war. Second, if there *is* a cause for war based on security reasons or a threat, and we are going to get into another country, then the question arises of how we are to leave that country. In that instance, and Iraq is a case in point, seeking to democratise the country – as far as we are able to do so – is a sensible idea.

Now, I'm not sure that it was a good idea to attack Iraq. I supported it and I oppose drawing down US forces at this point. I enthusiastically supported the idea of a war against terror with military and political components. But it was not obvious to me that Iraq should have been our second target after Afghanistan – it's possible we would have been wiser to focus our attention on Iran, rather than Iraq. But I was not making that decision and since I supported the war as a whole I supported the action. It's hard to say whether if we'd done it differently we could have had a more successful

outcome. If we had sent many more troops could we have averted what has happened? I just don't know.

I am prepared to concede error on Iraq, certainly in the execution and perhaps even in the decision to do it. And I think there is a partial truth in the litany of bad consequences that you presented – certainly there are more people angry at us in the Middle East than there were before, and there is a lot of turmoil in the region. It remains to be seen how this will turn out. In terms of the goal of promoting democratisation there is cause for hope – democracy may not be marching forward but it is on the agenda for the states of the region much more than it was before.

As for the argument that says 'there are more terrorists now, so we were wrong to fight back,' well, that is really poor. If people attack you, and you fight back, they are likely to get enraged and fight harder. That is normal and I'm not sure that it has any meaning in and of itself. It's how the war *ends* that matters. When the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbour, we fought back, and because we did so they attacked us more. As we started defeating them they got more desperate and used suicide bombers. But if we see it through and win the broader war against terror then we will be much safer, and so will the people of the Middle East.

Johnson: Should democracy be promoted when the likely consequence is the election of Islamists? When you debated Martin Kramer of the Washington Institute you argued for 'democratic universalism' while he took the view that free voting among Arabs only stokes up radicalism. Kramer coined the term 'consensual authoritarianism' to sum up what he thought was the most we could aim for in the Middle East, for now at least.[17] How should democrats deal with what we might term 'the Hamas problem'?

Muravchik: The essential question is whether there are material and psychological forces in place that would prevent Islamists who win an election from making that the last election. It's the same issue that we faced with the

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[17] Muravchik 2007a.

Communists. The phrase now widely repeated – 'one man, one vote, one time' – was coined in South Africa in fear at the consequences of an ANC election victory. Well, I am not afraid of Islamists winning an election if there will be another election. We can hypothesise a situation – say in Egypt – where after a long struggle for genuine free elections the Islamists come to govern. But it would be extremely difficult for them to prevent the next election. I am inclined to take more risks in this regards than some people, including Martin Kramer.

Johnson: When you debated Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke about how democrats should relate to the Muslim Brotherhood they argued for engagement on the grounds that 'jihadists loathe the Muslim Brotherhood … for rejecting global jihad and embracing democracy.'[18] When I interviewed the Egyptian reformer Saad Eddin Ibrahim he said something similar. You are unconvinced, I think. Why?

Muravchik: It's important to distinguish between two positions. One is the position that Saad Eddin used to espouse, and which I believe he has gone back to, and which Amr Hamzawy espouses, which is that we should have dialogue with the Brotherhood. The other is the position which Leiken espouses, which is 'I just had a dialogue with the Brotherhood and they told me they are all moderates so I am wiling to vouch for that.' The first seems to me a reasonable and even necessary step. This is a movement that has a lot of followers in the Arab world, and it has grown up under conditions of the absence of political freedom and open discourse – we can only gain by talking to them. The Leiken position seems to me to be foolish. We should not take what they say at face value.

The 'initiative' launched in 2004 by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood could be constituted as a shift on their part in a more liberal direction. They certainly want it to be thought that they now believe in democracy, human rights for non-Muslims, and rights for women. But it is still not all that clear *which* rights they believe in. For starters, I greet with extreme scepticism any movement that proclaims democracy

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[18] Leiken and Brooke 2007; Muravchik 2007c.

but is not itself democratic. The Communist parties practised 'democratic centralism' and called themselves democratic but they weren't. The Iranian Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK) proclaims itself 'democratic' but everyone obeys Mr and Mrs Rajavi. Well, the Muslim Brotherhood also has a completely top-down structure, just like the Communists. Rank and file members don't get to elect anyone above them – an inner committee of 15 elects a Supreme Guide (and that name tells you a lot in itself!) Mahdi Akef, the current Supreme Guide, is neither a democrat of any kind nor a man of peace. It is true that the Muslim Brotherhood has renounced violence within Egypt, but whether this was a genuine change of heart we have no way of knowing. Their renunciation of violence occurred in the 1970s in a deal with Anwar Sadat to get their leaders out of jail. And they vehemently endorse violence, including suicide bombings, in other places, including by Islamist groups in Iraq and Israel.

In one interview, according to the Egyptian newspapers, Mahdi Akef was asked, if there were democracy in Egypt, would he be prepared to be ruled by a Christian. He said he'd rather be ruled by a Muslim from any other country than by a Christian Egyptian. When the interviewer pressed the question, Akef replied 'Fuck Egypt!'

So, I talk to leaders of the Brotherhood and I plan to continue to do so. But to accept their bone fides as democrats on their own say-so is to toss away one's critical judgement.

Johnson: Do we need a grassroots democracy-promotion organisation able to act independently of the parties? The late Penn Kemble was the driving force behind the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, also serving as deputy director of the United States Information Agency under Bill Clinton. When he died in 2005, your tribute noted that he rejected the label 'neoconservative' because 'he doubted that Republicans and conservatives could constitute a reliable base for the kind of internationalist and idealist foreign policy he espoused.'[19] And in 2006 – when the imprisonment of Egyptian democracy activist Ayman Nour was met with only a 'half-hearted' response from

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[19] Muravchik 2005b.

Washington – you complained in The Washington Post *that 'the Bush administration has begun to pull its punches on Middle East democracy.' You went on: 'It's not only in Egypt that the administration is giving this impression. In Iraq, it has acted to shut down dozens of projects designed to nurture the seedlings of democracy: civil society, political parties, women's and human rights organisations, and the like.'[20] We have no equivalent, for instance, to the Congress of Cultural Freedom that battled Stalinism. We certainly have nothing to compare to MoveOn.org and the netroots which can dictate political terms to the Democratic Party.*

Muravchik: That's a really good question and I have not thought about it a lot. The terrible problem we have on the American side is that the anchor for a left-of-centre position that was militantly pro-democratic and militantly in favour of standing up in defence of the democracies was the AFL-CIO. It was the AFL-CIO to a great extent that made 'Scoop' Jackson possible. It provided a powerful base within the Democratic Party that was unyielding in its defence of democratic values on the international scene while being to the left of centre. But that very noble tradition in the US labour movement, which had its analogues in the British labour movement, is now completely gone. There is not a shred of it left. The labour movement in the US is in the hands of old Communists, ex-Communists, and New Leftists. So the hopes of building the kind of force you want inside the Democratic party are all but nil. The last person in that tradition was Senator Joe Lieberman, but the netroots in effect kicked him out of the party!

On the other hand because of President Bush the Republican Party has been embracing policies that are big departures from its own tradition and history (much to the chagrin of the elder President Bush and his entourage). To my surprise, Republicans have backed the policy rather strongly, but I don't know how deep that goes. Is it new thinking or are they just embracing their President? When he has left office the Republicans may revert to more 'realist' policies that are more akin to the elder Bush.

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[20] Muravchik 2006a.

It would be extremely useful to have a non-party international organisation for people who believe in the dual cause of defending the existing democracies and encouraging democracies elsewhere. And there is one natural leader for this – Tony Blair. That is something important and wonderful he could do, and it would be much more likely to have an impact than the job he has just taken on. He is better than anyone here at articulating the case.

Part 3: Neoconservatism's Critics

Johnson: It's nigh on impossible to have a grown up conversation about neoconservatism in Europe. Let's talk about three typical kinds of 'criticism' of the neoconservatives: that you are warmongers, lying Straussians, and a Jewish cabal.

Many people – and not only the crazies – think neocons are warmongers. It's not difficult to see why. You wrote in 2006 that neoconservatives hold 'a broader definition of US security, believing aggression and mayhem anywhere could eventually reach America's doorstep.'[21] Furthermore, you say a key tenet of neoconservatism is that 'world peace is indivisible.'[22] Add in the fact that neocons are more open to the idea of force projection than other foreign policy schools, and even reasonable people can put all this together – the expansive definition of security, the universalist outlook, and the preference for force projection and pre-emption – and, well, they get frightened! They think you are offering a recipe for wars everywhere. And, after Iraq, they think that means quagmires everywhere. What would you say to people who hold these kinds of fears?

Muravchik: I think it's fair for people to be critical of neocons about Iraq. Iraq is a mess and we bear a share of responsibility for that. At the very least there was some glibness about Iraq – mostly on the part of Donald Rumsfeld, but some neocons were party to that. We should be chastened by Iraq.

But if we step back and take a longer view of American power,

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[21] Muravchik 2006b.
[22] Muravchik 2006c.

we see that the willingness of the US to project power has helped prevent wars, while the reluctance of the US to project power has often caused wars. Most clearly, the Second World War was in large part a result of the reluctance of the US to project power. So was the Korean War – we encouraged the North to invade when we allowed it to be thought that we would not fight for South Korea. We encouraged the first Iraq war when the US Ambassador gave the false impression to Saddam Hussein that we would not react to a takeover of Kuwait. And, in an indirect way, our failure to project US power caused the second Iraq war – if we had toppled Saddam in 1991 we would not have had this second war. Of course, the biggest example of the projection of American power keeping the peace was the policy of containment during the cold war – the overall strategy of putting military bases around the world, fighting some wars along the way, and duelling on the political and military and intelligence planes with the Soviets. People then were also very afraid of American military power and feared that American belligerency was risking war. In fact American power kept the peace, prevented the cold war turning hot, and eventually won the cold war.

Johnson: Another criticism runs thus: neoconservatives are disciples of a dastardly political philosopher called Leo Strauss whose main teaching was that political elites must always lie to the masses to achieve their ends. The Iraq war is then presented as a grand Straussian lie foisted on us by the neocons. A very silly BBC documentary, 'The Power of Nightmares', ran with this notion. This is the common sense of most European broadsheets about the neocons – a political elite deliberately spinning lies to the masses to achieve their nefarious ends.

Muravchik: (laughs) It's so absurd it leaves me speechless! The main point of Strauss's thinking is that the world went to hell with Machiavelli.[23] The ancient political philosophers asked the question 'what is the good?' The modern political philosophers, starting with Machiavelli, asked the question

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[23] See Strauss 1958, in which he writes, 'We profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil.'

'what is?' To Strauss this was a horrible mistake. He thought the proper role of political philosophy is to enquire into the good, not to do – as he used to say, sneeringly – 'value-free social science'.

You know, Strauss was not really interested in politics. When I started hearing all this stuff about Strauss I went to an old friend, Walter Berns, who is 88 years old, works at the AEI and really is a Straussian. 'Walter,' I asked, 'was Strauss interested in politics?' He said, 'Well, we were both at the University of Chicago together during the Presidential election year [it was 1952 or 1956]. Strauss came to me and said, "Now we are residents of the state of Illinois I think it behoves us to vote for Illinois's native son, Adlai Stevenson. But I have never voted, so can you tell me how to register?"' So, this was Strauss's involvement in contemporary American politics – voting for the liberal Adlai Stevenson! [if he could figure out how to go about voting.]

This business of Strauss being for the elite telling lies is just a garbled reading of Strauss, who had a theory that when we read political philosophy we must realise we are reading people who lived under dictatorial or intolerant governments and who, therefore, were not free to write exactly what they believed. He thought we must try to tease out meanings that aren't there on the surface. But he was not advocating that *we* write like that! That's an absurd misunderstanding of Strauss.

But look, the real point is simpler. Neoconservatism *has nothing to do with Strauss*. The very term 'neoconservatism' was coined by Michael Harrington as part of an intramural fight *on the left*. Every one of us was either a liberal or a socialist of some kind who had come to be at odds with the majority of liberals over the issue of anti-Communism. Among those people there was not a single one who was Straussian to my knowledge. I do meet people who would call themselves Straussians or who studied with Strauss but not one of them was among the founding figures of neoconservatism.

Johnson: In today's Sunday Telegraph (July 15, 2007) the historian Alistair Horne, author of Algeria, A Savage War of Peace *describes meeting President Bush: 'Bush, an honourable*

man, might have made a good President without Iraq. His fault was to heed too often the voices of the Zionist lobby in Washington. Never before has the Israeli tail wagged the American dog quite so vigorously.' John le Carré claimed his novel Absolute Friends *demonstrated 'what would happen if we allow present trends to continue to the point where corporate media are absolutely at the beck and call in the US of a neo-conservative group which is commanding the political high ground, calling the shots and appointing the state of Israel as the purpose of all Middle Eastern and practically all global policy.' (What would the great George Smiley have made of this Bill Hayden-style rant, I wonder?)[24] Anyway, the charge is that the neoconservatives are shills for Israel sending Gentile boys to fight and die for the Likud.*

Muravchik: This is just raw anti-Semitism, and absurd. Israel – though keen for the US to win once it had attacked Iraq – was not happy that the US attacked Iraq in the first place. Israelis felt the greater danger was from Iran. I remember listening to Benjamin Netanyahu at the AEI just after the war in Afghanistan talking with a marked lack of enthusiasm about an invasion of Iraq. Believe me, the invasion was the opposite of an Israeli idea!

There are a lot of neoconservatives who are Jews. That's true for two reasons, I think. One, neoconservatives come from the left, and a lot of leftists are Jews. The Communist and socialist movements were all dominated by Jews, so a lot of the people who are renegades from those movements will be Jews. I think that explains most of it. But there may be an additional factor. The combination of idealism and toughness in the neoconservative position is something that is congenial to a certain Jewish mentality. Support for idealism flows from the Jewish tradition of good deeds, while the preference for toughness flows from a certain Jewish sense of vulnerability.

Johnson*: Can I pursue this notion of 'toughness'? Paul Berman argues that neoconservatism is 'a clique with a style and that style is marked by ruthlessness.' He sees in neoconservatism a dangerous 'romance of the ruthless,' for instance in*

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[24] Le Carré quoted in Jeffries 2005.

Central America during the Reagan administration, when the expectation was that 'a small number of people could be very effective if they acted ruthlessly enough.' And today, Berman argues, this ruthless style 'has contributed to the gigantic errors that have been committed in Iraq.' He said: 'When you believe that if a small number of people act ruthlessly then a larger force is not necessary, it leads you to say, "let's not send a large number of troops but let's not tie the hands of those we do send." That is, you send too few troops on the one hand and practice torture on the other.'[25] How do you respond?

Muravchik: It's poetry, not analysis. I don't know what he's talking about in Central America. The signature neocon policy in Central America was support for the Contras. Were the Contras a small ruthless group? Well, first of all they were not a small group. They were the biggest guerrilla movement there ever was in Latin America. There has been a lot of romance down the years about Latin American guerrillas fighting for the liberation – well, the biggest example was the Nicaraguan Contras. They were victimised by a totalitarian regime and they fought for their land and their freedom. So much for the small group business! As for ruthlessness, they were less ruthless than the people they were fighting against, and they were in the midst of a guerrilla war. And in 1989, as soon as the regime agreed to hold an election they stopped fighting, participated in the election, and won it! So I just don't know what Berman is talking about. He has a piece of poetry and he is intoxicated with it.

Berman says 'they' sent too few soldiers to Iraq. I guess he means the neocons. But it was Rumsfeld that sent too few soldiers. And that decision had nothing to do with a 'romance of the ruthless' but had lots to do with a romance of technology. The notion of a 'revolution in military affairs' revolves around changes in military technology – it used to take 1000 projectiles to strike the target and now you needed 2 projectiles, and so on. Rumsfeld and the people around him became intoxicated with this sort of thing, with bad consequences. They should be chastised for it, including some neocons. But to speak of a 'neocon romance of the ruthless' is nothing more than

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[25] Berman 2006.

poetic mudslinging. And I defy Berman to explain the causal connection between the beliefs of neocons and Abu Ghraib.

Part 4: Neoconservative Futures?

The Iraq War

Johnson*: In 2006, after the Republicans were defeated in the mid-terms, you concluded 'It is the war in Iraq that has made "neocon" a dirty word, either because President George Bush's team woefully mismanaged the war or because the war (which neocons supported) was misconceived.'[26] Was the intervention in Iraq mismanaged or misconceived?*

Muravchik: It was obviously horribly mismanaged, starting with the decision on troop levels. General Shinseki said he would need 350,000 troops or thereabouts, and according to the books, Rumsfeld said 'nonsense' and insisted on 125,000 troops. If that is true it was criminally negligent on Rumsfeld's part. Then you have the disbanding of the Iraqi army, and so on. It was badly mismanaged, no doubt.

Was it misconceived? Well, at the risk of seeming that I really am part of the 'Zionist lobby' (laughs) we must ask in hindsight, what was the sense of making Iraq the second focus in the war on terror, rather than Iran, which was always a bigger player in terrorism? And that was a question that some people asked at the time. It seems now that that was a big mistake. But that still leaves the question of whether the war in Iraq was a mistake *per se*. If we had gone with a bigger force could we have achieved a different outcome? I'm just not sure.

Johnson*: When we try to understand why those mistakes were made, I think something you wrote in your book on the UN is very useful. You have written that American idealism has sometimes gone off the rails and drifted into 'building dream castles' rather than face the world as it is.[27] Do you think that*

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[26] Muravchik 2006d.
[27] Muravchik 2005a, p. 1.

was going on in 2002, and that it explains at least some of the astonishing failure to prepare for the day after the end of major combat operations?

Muravchik: There were people who believed that creating democracy in Iraq was going to be much easier than it has proved to be. I wanted to do it – so if it was a dream castle it was mine too – but I didn't think it would be easy. I thought it would take a much more thorough occupation than we were able to do with the small force we sent. In *Exporting Democracy* I have a chapter on the occupation of Japan and noted that temporarily we took complete ownership of the country and helped put in place democratic institutions. In 2003 that's what I thought we ought to do in Iraq. I remember participating in a seminar with some Americans and Israelis. The Americans were talking about bringing democracy to Iraq. The Israelis were very cynical, saying, 'that's insane, you Americans don't know the area, and this is a ridiculous idea.' I recall that one of the two American speakers (not me!) quoted from the inscription of the Statue of Liberty, saying the Iraqis were also 'huddled masses yearning to breathe free.' I thought that was off the wall even then. There was some terrible glibness on the part of some neocons about what was involved in this project. But I am not of the view that the project was or is hopeless per se. The folly was in not appreciating what an immensely difficult project it would be.

Johnson: The Democratic Party leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, recently said 'the war is lost.' Most people in the US and UK probably agree with him. Why is he wrong?

Muravchik: We are not defeated. It is within our power to keep fighting, or we can surrender as Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi propose. The terrorists and resistance fighters can prevent us from achieving our goals for a long time but they do not have it within their capacity to defeat us. If we surrender we will not 'cut our losses,' we will multiply them. To the global jihadist movement it will be as a massive dose of steroids. That movement grew out of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan – it is fuelled not by grievances but by successes. The Jihadists say over and over again 'we defeated one superpower when no one thought we could, and now we are going to defeat the other superpower.' On the back

of these promises of success they offer a global jihad for a new caliphate. And there is a tremendous amount of support for this in the Muslim world – not a majority but not an insignificant minority. If Reid and Pelosi have their way and we surrender, there will be untold thousands of new recruits to the ranks of the suicide bombers attacking the US and Britain and Spain. It's right there in all their documents. They believe, as a minimum, in reconquering for Islam every piece of land that was ever conquered by Muslims. This land is regarded as sanctified by that fact, as 'Waqf' – holy Muslim territory. If we surrender we will face much bigger wars over the coming decades because they won't stop until we subdue them.

The question of 'national faint-heartedness'

Johnson: You wrote as early as 2003 that the war in Iraq might be lost because of 'a recurrence of national faint-heartedness.'[28] Is it possible that 21st century capitalist democracies combine (a) unparalleled superiority in economic, technological and military power with (b) a culture (i.e. a mass media, a popular culture, an intellectual class and, above all, a sensibility) that makes it almost impossible to project that power, even for progressive ends? Does that culture fold when it meets a resistance – even a fascistic one – capable of fighting and inflicting losses upon us over a sustained period? Are the Jihadis and 'insurgents' right in their belief that if they can kill enough Americans or Brits then the home front will collapse? If they are, is the West now starting fights that it literally cannot finish?

Muravchik: No, the Jihadis are not right. Yes, in both the US and the UK there is a real problem – in the US an underlying isolationism, in the UK an underlying pacifism. Both consistently make our enemies underestimate us, and that is dangerous. But in the end, the English-speaking peoples will have enough self-regard, and enough love for our way of life, that we will stand up and fight for it. In the end we pay any price to defend it. But most of the wars of the last century were started because we gave our enemies a very different impression. And I think that may be what we are doing today

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[28] Muravchik 2003.

– I think it likely that all this will end in some kind of bigger war. But I don't have any doubt that we will win it. We won't surrender in the end.

The Threat from Iran

Johnson*: Iran is obviously determined to acquire a nuclear bomb. Why should we not seek to accommodate a nuclear Iran as we have other nuclear powers?*

Muravchik: First, because it is a revolutionary and messianic regime engaged in terrorist violence around the world in a way that even the communists weren't to the same extent. I don't think there is any reliable way to 'deter' Iran. It is possible that Iran will give the bomb to terrorists, or just drop it on Israel, as even the so-called moderate Rafsanjani has proposed to do. Second, it would be the end of the non-proliferation regime. If Iran breaks out, other states would follow quickly. We will end up with 20 or 30 nuclear armed states. That would be very dangerous. Third, it would energise the Iranian drive for regional hegemony and that would in all likelihood result in some big wars in the region.

Look, when people say we succeeded in deterring the Soviets, well, yes, we did, but let's not forget the cold war was a terrible harrowing period, and victory was due only in part to wise Western policies. In part it was just luck that it ended without horrible fighting. By 'luck' I mean Gorbachev got elected Secretary General in the Politburo in a contested situation in which he might not have won. If we had had the chance to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming a nuclear power, would that have been an option worth seizing? Yes! Because if you run the cold war scenario over several times, sooner or later it ends in World War Three. The peaceful end we achieved in 1989 was not guaranteed. And today we do have the option of stopping Iran gaining the nuclear bomb.

Johnson*: Many commentators judge that the bad consequences of trying to stop Iran by force – radicalisation in the region, retaliatory strikes – are likely to be so great that we should desist.*

Muravchik: I don't believe radicalisation flows mostly from defeat. It flows from victories. I understand that people will be angry – though don't forget a lot of people would be relieved. I understand Iran will retaliate and will redouble its terrorist acts against Americans. It may unleash Hezbollah, maybe do some things in the Gulf. And some of these things could be painful and we have to deal with them as best we can. But they won't be as painful as having a nuclear armed Iran.

The United Nations

Johnson: *Your last answer would horrify those who we might call cosmopolitans – people who seek the rule of international law, a strengthened United Nations, transnational networks, global civil society, and so on. Cosmopolitaniosm is offered as an alternative strategic framework for doing foreign policy, and you have been pretty scathing about it. Your book on the UN, for example, rejects the cosmopolitan's vision of a pax UN not just as 'an illusion' but potentially 'the source of much harm'.[29] What is wrong with a 'pax UN'?*

Muravchik: Unlike most neocons I am a believer in international law. Eugene V. Rostow – a neocon much more prominent and infinitely more knowledgeable than I – was a big advocate of international law. I believe in it because there is a big problem in managing American power. That power, as you were implying in some of the earlier questions, is inevitably frightening to people who aren't American, because it is unbalanced by any other power. International law offers a broad code of conduct for states. By emphasising our respect for international law, we can reassure others that we do not believe that our power entitles us to act as a law unto ourselves. At the same time, virtually every aggressive action by other states to which we object is also a violation of international law, and therefore the law gives us a basis for framing our objections and for taking action against the miscreant.

But the UN is simply a failed institution. It was created in

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[29] Muravchik 2005a, p. 5.

1945 to 'spare future generations from the scourge of war.' There has not been another world war but the reason for that owes nothing to the UN – the UN completely failed to create the institutions of peace-enforcement which are spelled out in the Charter. It has everything to do with the use of US power, together with that of its allies, to keep the peace. Therefore, it is my view that the US, with its allies, should continue to keep the peace. The UN is unable to do this.

There was a belief that the UN was hamstrung by the cold war and would come into its own and play the role that was foreseen for it in 1945 once the cold war ended. But right away, in Bosnia and Rwanda, that was proven false. We have had three different experiences: the League of Nations, the UN during the Cold War, and the UN after the Cold War. Every time the result has been the same: utter impotence. It is mad to look to the UN as the bulwark of peace, and doubly mad to look to the UN at the expense of the US, because the US has been very effective at keeping the peace. It has kept the peace of Europe since 1945 and while it has not completely succeeded in keeping the peace in Asia, it has succeeded in putting to rest the central threat of war in Asia, which is the competition between China and Japan.

Johnson: *So what role should the UN play in international affairs?*

Muravchik: People criticise the UN on the ground that 'it's nothing but a talk shop.' But the idea of a talk shop doesn't sound at all bad to me! If the nations of the world can talk in big groups and small groups that is good. Having an international forum where issues can be raised and representatives can talk, formally and informally, is good. The problem is not the talking. The problem is that the UN is dysfunctional as an *action* organisation.

Johnson: *What do you think of the idea of creating a 'concert of democracies'? This notion, in different forms, can be heard from John McCain, Madeleine Albright, the Princeton Project, Ivo Dalder and James Lindsey, and it is implied in Tony Blair's 1999 Chicago speech.*

Muravchik: I like it, but it is going to be very hard to achieve.

I think it would be wiser to seek to create a separate stand-alone organisation than to create a force within the UN – the atmosphere of the UN is poisonous. But as a stand-alone organisation of democracies that has more substance to it than the current 'community of democracies' it is an excellent idea. For instance, it's possible to envisage a Human Rights Committee of a Concert of Democracies becoming an alternative to the discredited UN Human Rights Committee.

Johnson*: What are you working on now?*

Muravchik: I'm writing a book of profiles of half a dozen Arab democrats. These people are trying to bring democracy to their countries and I admire them. And they are too little known to us.

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