

Covering (up) Islam part III: terrorism and the US intervention in Iraq

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The situation in post-Saddam Iraq, where President Bush's grand experiment in his new brand of interventionism¹ is being played out, has raised some very serious questions concerning, in addition to the overall usefulness of attempting to *enforce* democratic transition, the effectiveness of using military intervention against terrorist threats in isolation of the political circumstances that motivate support for and the actions of the terrorists involved. The Bush Administration's pursuit of its War on Terror (WOT), in spite of attempts to give it a less military spin,² is flawed most obviously by the futility of declaring war on a concept – as opposed to a specific grouping or organisation of antagonists such as al Qaeda – but also by its simplistic labelling of all Arab and Muslim related attacks as the work of Islamic extremists motivated only by an evil hatred of Western democracy and values. Moreover, such a glib portrayal of these acts makes President Bush's WOT dangerously counter-productive because it neglects the underlying political issues that lie at the heart of anti-US sentiment among Arabs and Muslims while attempting to disguise the lack of US credibility in the Middle East with vague and unconvincing commitments to democracy and freedom in the region.

Thus, the US-led military intervention in Iraq was never going to be the 'cakewalk' predicted by some Bush supporters in the lead-up to the Iraq occupation; the goal of installing democracy was instead always going to be undermined by the great suspicion US policy invariably attracts in the region, particularly when it is pursued without broad international support and on the basis of extremely weak, and in some cases patently false, evidence.³ Rather than providing the landmark victory in the WOT anticipated by the Bush Administration, the Iraq intervention has instead become a quagmire for the US that is producing a number of unwelcome, and dangerously counter-productive, outcomes.

First among the problems generated by the 'new' intervention in Iraq is that it has actually bolstered support for terrorist groups like al Qaeda by

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appearing to confirm the grievances many Arabs and Muslims already held against US and UK policy in the region. Secondly, the Bush Administration's use of 'good vs. evil' and 'with us or against us' dichotomies to characterise transnational terrorist threats and distinguish between friends and foes has alienated some traditional US allies while encouraging others to justify internal repression of ethnic and nationalist groups as their contribution to fighting terrorism. Thirdly, the WOT – with its potential for helping extremists promote broadly anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East and elsewhere and igniting further terrorist attacks against the coalition countries – could ultimately produce a greater long-term threat to the US by making Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Ziad Asali has noted, the majority of Arabs were appalled by the 9/11 attacks and reject al Qaeda's goals, but they also fear that 'some forces in the United States share [Osama Bin Laden's] desire for a clash of civilisations and [are] afraid that they might prevail'.⁴

As I argue in this chapter, the problems being generated by the WOT approach result from the Bush Administration's refusal to recognise the need for the WOT also to include a political strategy that addresses long-standing political and historical grievances among Muslims, while also recognising the role these grievances play in providing support for stridently anti-US groups like al Qaeda. The serious credibility deficit US policy suffers from in promoting notions of democracy and freedom in the Middle East – a deficit that has grown significantly with the US-led occupation of Iraq – guarantees not only Arab and Muslim suspicion of and resistance to US governance initiatives, but also makes it highly unlikely that any popularly elected government in the region would be sympathetic to either the US or its interests. Therefore, in the absence of diplomatic efforts to improve US credibility in the Middle East, the new interventionism doctrine becomes illogical, since it is only likely to either a) fail to produce stable democratic government and instead inflame already existing anti-US sentiment as the situation in Iraq has demonstrated; or b) produce democratic governments that oppose US policy in response to domestic public opinion.

In order for the US to avoid suffering an ignominious defeat in Iraq, which no doubt will only further encourage attacks against the US and its allies and increase the vulnerability of pro-Western governments in the region to insurrection, the Bush Administration must, therefore, begin taking a more sophisticated view of terrorism in general and of the role US policy in the Middle East has played in making the US and its coalition partners terrorist targets in particular. However, doing so will require the US government to abandon the simplistic abstraction of Islam-related terrorism it has so far used to justify the WOT and adopt instead a clear commitment to engage with political Islamic groups (for example, the Muslim Brotherhood

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and its affiliated political parties) and address the causes of Arab and Muslim discontent – such as its uncritical support of Israel and the impact this has on perceptions of the US – that have so far been obscured and hidden away under the hubris of the WOT rhetoric. Such a sea change in US policy, however, is extremely unlikely – at least under the current administration – given the strategic importance of the Middle East’s energy supplies, not to mention the probably fatal political backtracking that would be required for President Bush to move beyond the WOT paradigm his administration has created (and now so stubbornly defends).

The most likely outcome, for the short term at least, is for US policy to try and maintain US hegemony in the Middle East under the cover of the WOT rhetoric and the abstraction of ‘Islam’ that it relies upon. Continuing the WOT in its current form will lead to further terrorists attacks like those we already have seen in London, Madrid, and Bali, and possibly even another attack on the scale of 9/11. But the increasing risk of further attacks is something US policy makers seem prepared to live with in the course of attempting to maintain the current state of US hegemony in the Middle East. Adopting a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to combating terrorism, as I advocate in this chapter, is unlikely to completely eliminate the threat, at least in the short term; doing so will, however, reduce the potential for the WOT adding to the cachet of terrorist leaders like Osama Bin Laden and is an essential step in bringing about their eventual defeat.

GEORGE W. BUSH’S WAR OF ABSTRACTS

In an article published in *The Observer* shortly after the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, Edward Said warned that:

‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ are simply inadequate as banners to follow blindly. Some will run behind them, but for future generations to condemn themselves to prolonged war and suffering without so much as a critical pause, without looking at interdependent histories of injustice and oppression, without trying for common emancipation and mutual enlightenment seems far more willful than necessary.⁵

But, unfortunately, blind commitment to these two inherently flawed but immensely powerful abstractions – Islam and the West – is precisely what has shaped both US policy in Iraq and the ambiguous notion of a ‘War on Terror’. The result of attempting to understand the events of September 11 and other Islamic-related terrorist attacks in such uncompromising terms has been a blurring of the important differences in the motivation and aspirations that exist between the extremist leaders and those in the Middle East and elsewhere who support their attacks against the US and its allies.

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President Bush and his allies can continue to fight against terrorism on the basis that it is driven only by 'evil' and is therefore beyond any kind of political solution – other than installing democracies in so-called rogue states – but doing so will not end or even reduce the current surge of attacks. Further attacks will not, indeed cannot, be prevented by military responses carried out without any consideration of the important political and nationalist inspired motivations of those who support al Qaeda and related groups. Military action alone will instead continue to make Bin Laden's tirades against 'the West' both relevant and attractive to the many Muslims who, rather than opposing 'democracy and its freedoms', are angered and frustrated by the role they see the US playing in perpetuating both democracy's absence and instability in the Middle East.

There is no doubt that terrorist leaders like Osama Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are, in addition to rejecting US military engagement and influence in the Middle East, fundamentally opposed to Western values and notions of freedom. To tar all who currently support these attacks with the same brush, however, including many of the suicide bomber recruits, is a fundamental error in judgement stemming from the tendency or desire to treat Islamic-related militancy as a purely anti-Western and religiously inspired phenomenon. Said made this Western abstraction of Islam, and the Islam versus the West dichotomy it evokes, the subject of his 1981 book *Covering Islam* in which he portrays it as a grossly misleading and politically motivated, catch-all image of 'Islam' – highlighting only its associated negative traits (violence, atavism, resistance to modernity) – that is being perpetuated among governments, the media,⁶ and academia in the US, Israel and Europe. This image of Islam, according to Said, is founded on 'the tendency to reduce Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalisations about the faith, its founder and all of its people'.⁷

Characterising Islam in this way as an explanation of terrorist⁸ attacks against the US and its allies obscures and 'covers up' the impact of US foreign policy in the Middle East on Muslim/Arab peoples. President Bush, in his speech to a joint session of Congress shortly after the September 11 attacks, claimed only Muslim extremists (read fundamentalists) were responsible and attributed their motivation to their hatred of the West and its freedoms: 'Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.'⁹ Aside from the fact that this summary of what al Qaeda and other extremist Islamic groups find objectionable in the West could just as easily be applied to describe the attitudes towards democracy of US allies in

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the region such as the Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti governments, this assessment of the terrorist threat facing the US and its allies is based on nothing more than an ill-considered subscription to the spectre of the ‘green menace’ theory, which obscures alternative explanations for anti-US feeling in the Middle East, particularly those that link Arab and Muslim militancy and terrorism to US policy in the region.

What is driving popular support for al Qaeda, and participation in its activities by an increasing number of those supporters, is a widely held perception, justified or not, that US policy in the Middle East pursues US interests at the expense of Arab and Muslim freedoms and rights, a conviction that has long been reinforced by Washington’s unconditional support for Israel, America’s increased military presence in the Middle East since the first Gulf War, and also US support for oppressive regimes in the region such as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt.¹⁰ To argue that all or even most suicide bombers are willing to kill themselves and others purely because they are religious fanatics provides only a trite and superficial explanation that does little more than detract attention from the important political and historical circumstances involved. Indeed, recent surveys indicating strong support for democratic principles in the Middle East,¹¹ in addition to a growing body of evidence that contradicts the exclusively ‘religious fanatic’ profile of those perpetuating the current wave of terrorism, are strong indicators that the so called ‘War on Terror’ in Iraq and elsewhere is being fought on false premises and is, therefore, a doomed enterprise, as Brzezinski argued in 2002:

A victory in the war against terrorism can never be registered in a formal act of surrender. Instead, it will only be divined from the gradual waning of terrorist acts. Any further strikes against Americans will thus be a painful reminder that the war has not yet been won. Sadly, the main reason will be America’s reluctance to focus on the political roots of the terrorist atrocity of Sept. 11.¹²

Observations like Brzezinski’s illustrate Said’s point about how the creation of this ‘one size fits all’ image of this thing called ‘Islam’ has allowed media reporting and government policy to explain attacks against Israel, the US, and their allies by simply saying ‘that’s what Islam is’ and therefore does. Thus, the ‘covering of Islam’ (in terms of both media reporting on ‘Islam’ and the practice of reducing its considerable diversity to one, single generic abstraction) has become ‘a one-sided activity that obscures what “we” *do*, and highlights instead what Muslims by their very flawed nature *are*’.¹³ What Said refers to as ‘the local and concrete circumstances’ surrounding such attacks or other manifestations of anti-Western sentiment are, as a result, often completely ignored since there is seldom any need to look beyond the anti-modern, anti-democratic, and

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anti-Western elements that 'we' use to define the very core and essence of Islam. This 'covering' of Islam, as Said pointed out in 1997, has gained in credibility and appeal since the early 1980s, when the first edition of his critique appeared, thanks to both a sustained escalation of Muslim and Arab related militancy and attacks on Western targets, in addition to numerous predictions that the fall of the Soviet Union (the red menace) was to be followed by the arrival of a new threat to the West and its liberal democratic traditions and freedoms: Islam (the green menace).

CONSTRUCTING THE ISLAMIC THREAT

The threat posed by Islam in the post-Cold War world has been enthusiastically constructed and perpetuated in academia and the media by noted experts and commentators,¹⁴ in particular Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington among many others. Lewis's 1990 article 'The roots of Muslim rage' was among the first to advance the argument – adapted by Huntington for his 'clash of civilisations' thesis and embraced by the Bush Administration as the basis for its 'war on terror' – that Islamic militancy against the US and its allies exists only because of Islamic extremists or fundamentalists who abhor 'our' democracy and social freedoms. Lewis argues that:

Ultimately, the struggle of the fundamentalists is against two enemies, secularism and modernism. The war against secularism is conscious and explicit, and there is by now a whole literature denouncing secularism as an evil neo-pagan force in the modern world and attributing it mostly to the Jews, the West, and the United States. The war against modernity is for the most part neither conscious nor explicit, and is directed against the whole process of change that has taken place in the Islamic world . . . Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood.¹⁵

More than a decade later in 2002, Lewis continues this line of reasoning in 'What went wrong?'. In this controversial and highly generalised account of *Islam's* role in the continuing impoverishment of the Middle East, he argues that the Muslim world is divided between, on the one hand, the fundamentalists (bad Muslims) who blame Muslim/Arab problems on Western influence and the abandonment of 'authentic Islam' and, on the other, the modernists or reformers (good Muslims) who welcome Western influence and modernity. The essential problem 'that underlies so many of the troubles of the Muslim world', according to Lewis, is the lack of freedom

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(under Islamic fundamentalism) that afflicts most Muslims and is perpetuated by ‘the oppressive but ineffectual governments that rule much of the Middle East’.¹⁶ On this point, Lewis is right; but his reasoning is flawed by the contention that such governments are exclusively the result of Islamic extremism, which ignores the impact US support for those regimes has on Arab and Muslim perceptions of US policy. And while it is certainly unhelpful to simply blame all of the Middle East’s social and economic problems on US and UK policy, it is equally unhelpful to try, as Lewis and likeminded commentators have, to completely deny Arab and Muslim grievances by attributing all of the region’s ills to misleading representations of the Islamic faith and the role it plays in Muslim societies.

Lewis conveniently makes the lack of freedoms ‘their’ problem, thereby absolving the US and its allies of any responsibility for the ongoing dominance of authoritarian governments in the Middle East. Conservative journalist and commentator Paul Kelly, for example, writing in *The Australian* echoes the Lewis and Huntington line when he writes of a ‘global contest’ between the West and ‘the Islamist ideology’, before going on to explain the post-9/11 situation as one where ‘the West faces a terrorist threat that invokes God’s name and is driven by the contemporary humiliation of Islam, whose sense of religious superiority is mocked by its material failures’.¹⁷

The point that eludes proponents of the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy is that there are a great many Muslims who, rather than fitting neatly into either of these categories, fit into both. Many Muslims indeed blame US policy for their problems, but the majority of these people also want democracy and ‘freedom’ from authoritarian governments and Western intervention in their affairs; the problem for many Muslims, therefore, is not that America claims to stand for freedom and democracy, but its failure, in their view, to stand for these ideals in the case of Muslims. The silent, Arab majority, according to Asali, ‘holds some common and simple views: animosity towards Israel that occupies its neighbours’ lands, anger at the United States for its unconditional support of Israel, and disdain for unrepresentative and pliant Arab regimes’.¹⁸ The real significance of Lewis’s argument then is its usefulness in dismissing alternative policy approaches calling for political, rather than military, responses to Muslim and Arab militancy, since US policy makers remain unwilling to embrace political solutions, such as addressing policy imbalances and inconsistencies in the Middle East that they believe would lead to a reduction of existing US power and influence in the region.

On the basis of this perception of Islam as the generator of terrorism and anti-Western sentiment, the ‘green menace’ became a major focus of America’s post-Cold War security concerns. In a 1993 piece for *Foreign*

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Affairs, entitled 'What Green peril?', Leon Hadar made one of the relatively few arguments against the clash of civilisations perspectives that were fast gaining currency among Washington's 'frustrated Cold War Warriors' at the time. Like Said, and an increasing number of the current observations on terrorism and the situation in Iraq, Hadar dismisses the ideas of Lewis and Huntington et al., pointing instead to the political rather than religious and cultural circumstances of anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East. Arguing that 'a largely secular-nationalist drive'¹⁹ was responsible for much of the instability and militancy in the Middle East and Central Asia in the early 1990s – 'with Islamic groups [carrying] the banner of national independence, just as the Catholic Church did in Poland in the 1980s'²⁰ – Hadar offered the following warning to President Clinton:

Before leading America into a war against Islam, President Clinton would be well advised to take a bird's-eye view of the so-called Islamic crescent. Instead of a monolithic Islamistan, he would uncover a mosaic of many national, ethnic and religious groups competing for power and influence; a multi-national phenomenon ranging from Malaysia to France, in which Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is less a transnational political force and more a vital religion that provides spiritual support for a broad spectrum of people, some liberal, some orthodox. It is a kaleidoscope producing shifting balances of power and overlapping ideological configurations that neither Tehran – nor Washington – can control.²¹

But such nuanced assessments of Islam and its complex social role still receive short shrift in Western policy circles where images of Islam as an anti-Western political ideology with global ambitions continue to resonate.²² The US, under successive administrations, clearly has been unwilling to gamble its control over the Middle East and the vital oil supplies it provides, and this, in the eyes of Western policy hawks at least, is precisely what taking a more balanced approach towards the policies of its friends there would involve. Indeed, unwavering support for Israel and a blind eye to the behaviour of the region's pro-Western authoritarian regimes are prices that the US, the UK, Australia, and other allies have been happy to pay in return for reliable, cheap oil supplies and the continued prosperity of the global economy. As Yaphe notes,

US interests in the Persian Gulf under the Bush Administration remain much as they were under previous administrations. US policy has always been about having access to an unlimited supply of cheap oil, open seas and free trade, and doing no harm to Israel.²³

Any analysis linking what has now become transnational terrorism to the policies of the US and its allies in the Middle East, therefore, is unacceptable, both politically and strategically, since admitting any such link would inevitably lead to pressure for policy change and the risk of Middle Eastern

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countries independently developing a new set of regimes that, democratic or not, may not be as accommodating of Western interests as those currently in power. On this point in particular, the logic of the Bush Administration's 'commitment to the global expansion of democracy' as 'the alternative to instability and to hatred and terror'²⁴ is hard to fathom. The Bush vision of democracy is clearly one made up of Western liberal democratic values yet it is highly unlikely that, even if the neo-conservative experiment in interventionism were successful, Muslim-dominated democracies would adhere to the kinds of values and policies that his administration would approve of; nor is it likely, given the overwhelmingly negative perceptions of the US in the Middle East, that perceptions of national interest in such democracies would complement those of the US.

Again, the problem confronting the Bush paradigm, which seems to assume that democratic Islamic societies will somehow be less inclined to oppose US policy, is that Arabs and Muslims do not fit into the good/bad or 'with us or against us' categories that it uses to characterise Muslims and Arabs. There is an abundance of survey data demonstrating support for democracy in the Middle East,²⁵ but not necessarily democracy based on Western values and freedoms, particularly those that place individuality above the family or otherwise conflict with core Islamic values. What then would the Bush Administration make of a democratically elected government in the Middle East that was based on Shari'a law and opposed US policy (or supported groups that do) in the region? Would that government and the society that elected it represent 'bad Muslims' who were all against United States policy and qualify therefore as terrorist supporters, especially if they refused to recognise all Muslim/Arab-related militancy as 'terrorism'? And would this society then become a legitimate target for intervention? The president of Jordan's Islamic Action Front parliamentary bloc Azzam Huneidi summed up the cynicism surrounding Muslim attitudes towards US plans for democracy in the region, and the likely outcome of free elections, in Muslim eyes, by saying,

America is calling for reform. But would America be happy with the results of free and clean elections? No, they would not be happy. They want the results they want. A recent public opinion survey in Jordan indicated that 99% of the people hate America. If there were truly free elections, the result would be a parliament that hated America. What the U.S. wants is democracy according to American standards.²⁶

Attempting to *enforce* democratic transition in the Middle East, with little or no credibility in the eyes of the people who live there, makes President Bush's interventionism little more than an attempt to paper over the huge and still widening gap that exist between what US policy makers say and what

people in the Middle East believe. And by continuing to ignore its poor image in the Middle East among Arabs and Muslims, the Bush Administration is ensuring that any democratically elected government with real popular support that may emerge will be less than sympathetic to the needs and wishes of the US.²⁷

Many Islamist and secular opposition leaders in the region already have reacted very negatively to President Bush's democratic reform plans, in particular his so-called 'Greater Middle East Initiative', partly because they are seen as 'foreign intervention' into Arab affairs, but primarily because they are sponsored by the US.²⁸ Thus, waging a WOT in the name of democracy and freedom without addressing the problem of anti-US sentiment is ultimately both illogical and self-defeating, given the strategy's over-arching goal of homogenising state governance in order to safeguard US security and interests in the long term.

SUICIDE BOMBERS: IN THE NAME OF GOD OR REBELS WITH A CAUSE?

One of the few significant policy statements to come out of the 2005 United Nations World Summit was provided by President Bush connecting terrorism with poverty. Offering to remove all US trade barriers if other governments follow suit, the Bush Administration now appears to be trying to present a more thoughtful depiction of terrorism than its 'terrorism equals evil' position. Apart from the many criticisms already made concerning the ability of free trade and other liberal economic measures, such as fiscal frugality as per the so-called Washington Consensus vision for development, to foster socio-economic development, President Bush's pronouncement is also at odds with the widely held view²⁹ that there is no evidence to suggest that terrorism is a direct result of poverty.

Moreover, what this slightly more sophisticated attempt at dealing with terrorism represents, more than anything else, is confirmation that the Bush Administration remains unwilling to address the salient political issues behind anti-US feeling in the Middle East. US policy makers appear to have opted instead to adapt the WOT as a vehicle for pursuing further economic liberalisation by linking trade and terrorism together vis-à-vis poverty. This approach allows the rhetoric of the WOT to also be used to push for more free trade in World Trade Organisation negotiations, while also reinforcing the WOT's legitimacy by combining the two mainstays of neo-conservative thinking – political and economic liberalisation – under its single banner. Thus, by identifying poverty as an important contributing factor to terrorism,

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President Bush is framing terrorism in a way that makes his government's other policy goals (for example, free trade and economic liberalisation) appear as legitimate solutions to terrorism, in addition to creating important additional cover for the US administration's ongoing efforts to distract attention away from the role of US policy in generating popular support for Muslim and Arab terrorist attacks.

As I have argued here, conventional wisdom – stemming in large part from the contributions of Lewis, Huntington, and other likeminded commentators – has long maintained that Islamic-related terrorist attacks, in particular suicide bombings, are the work of religious fanatics who are beyond negotiation and whose motivations can be sufficiently explained as simply 'evil'. Presenting Islamic terrorism in this way is advantageous not only because it justifies direct military intervention (for example, we have to fight the terrorists over there, so we don't have to fight them here) and other war-time responses to terrorist threats (for example, new, wide-ranging anti-terrorism laws and the waiving of international legal constraints such as the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions), but primarily because it keeps attention away from what 'we' do, and focuses exclusively on what 'they' do. But more attention is beginning to be given to the issue of what 'we' do in the course of attempting to understand the nature and causes of terrorism, and this trend sits uncomfortably with the positions taken by President Bush and his two strongest supporters, Prime Ministers Tony Blair and John Howard.

The biggest blow in recent times to Bernard Lewis-based perceptions of Islamic terrorists and their motivations, as presented by the US government and its allies, has come from University of Chicago academic Robert Pape, who, after compiling and analysing a database on every suicide attack around the world – including 9/11 – from 1980 to early 2004, argues that:

The central fact [in explaining suicide bombing] is that overwhelmingly suicide-terrorist attacks are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland Since suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation and not Islamic fundamentalism, the use of heavy military force to transform Muslim societies over there . . . is only likely to increase the number of suicide terrorists coming at us.³⁰

Pape received funding from several sources, including the Pentagon's Defence Threat Reduction Agency and Carnegie Corporation, to further develop his research after releasing his initial findings in 2003,³¹ and has since published his findings in a 2005 book entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. Pape's analysis has resonated with some US Senators and terrorism experts³² while also attracting criticism

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from other analysts, such as Marc Sageman, who maintain that al Qaeda's motivations are primarily about 'establishing an Islamic state in a core Arab region'.³³ Such criticisms, however, fail to recognise that the suicide bombers and others who support al Qaeda's attacks do not necessarily support the group's religious goals. Many are, as Pape argues, becoming involved because of issues related to nationalism, occupation, and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict; al Qaeda and other groups using violence are simply the vehicles through which people express their opposition to US policy. Thus, isolating terrorist groups like al Qaeda from avenues of popular support should be a major priority in the WOT, and the best way to do so is through political initiatives that address the imbalances many Arabs and Muslims see in US policy in the Middle East.

Pape's findings are corroborated by other analyses and opinions on the causes and nature of the transnational terrorist threat the US and its allies now face. An 'international expert meeting' on the causes of terrorism held in Oslo in June 2003 (prior to the publication of Pape's preliminary findings), for example, also noted – in addition to rejecting claims that terrorists are irrational actors or that poverty is a major cause of terrorism – the often secular nature of suicide terrorists. The Oslo meeting's more than twenty participants from Europe, the Middle East, the US, and India all concluded that:

Suicide terrorism is not caused by religion (or more specifically Islam) as such Many suicide terrorists around the world are secular, or belong to other religions than Islam. Suicide terrorists are motivated mainly by political goals – usually to end foreign occupation or domestic domination by a different ethnic group. Their 'martyrdom' is, however, frequently legitimized and glorified with reference to religious ideas and values.³⁴

Pape's identification of Arab and Muslim perceptions of a US-led military occupation of the Arabian Peninsula, rather than any religiously inspired hatred of the West, as the primary motivation for suicide bombers received further support from statements made by one of the London bombers, UK citizen Mohammad Sidique Khan, and al Qaeda number two and former al Jihad leader Ayman al Zawahiri, which was broadcast by Al Jazeera after the July attacks. In the video statement explaining the reasons behind the attack, Sidique blamed Western governments for the deaths and oppression of Muslims saying, 'your democratically elected governments continue to commit atrocities against my people over the world Until we feel security you will be our targets. Until you stop the bombing, the gassing, the imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.' Al Zawahiri warned of further retribution for Western led or supported 'aggression' in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine before then saying 'People

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of the crusader alliance, behold the disasters the policies of (US President George W.) Bush and Blair bring upon you'.³⁵

Other Western commentators and analysts, however, continue to cling to the WOT rhetoric and its portrayal of terrorism as simply 'evil' and suicide bombers as disillusioned people under the spell of Islamic fundamentalism. Former Clinton ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, writing in the *Washington Post* just prior to the 2005 anniversary of the 9/11 attacks,³⁶ entirely missed the point made by Pape and others concerning political motivation behind suicide bombings when he stated: '[S]uicide bombers are merely the expendable deluded cannon fodder of ruthless ideologues. This has been true with terrorists throughout history. The long-term battle is against the underlying ideas and leaders behind these specific groups of terrorists.' Holbrooke's assessment is typical of the WOT paradigm in that it fails to grasp that the motivations of the 'ideologues' and those of the suicide bombers and other supporters are often very different. The challenge, therefore, is not about liberating people from the irrationality of Islamic fundamentalism, but is instead about identifying and addressing their perceived political and nationalist injustices in order to remove the relevance that US and allied policy actions in the Middle East and elsewhere provide groups like al Qaeda. As Cantori argues:

[The Islamists] have objectified their adversary, while American policy attributes to them an irrational evil and moral debasement. In doing so, America faces them after having unilaterally disarmed itself. In the process, the opportunities of the adversary to wreak havoc have increased exponentially. The more America struggles, the more its insecurity increases. The greater its effort, the greater the solidarity of the Islamic resistance movement mounted against it.³⁷

CONCLUSION

In the post-Cold War era, the threat of communism has been replaced by the spectre of a radicalised Islamic ideology that has, since the 9/11 attacks, now morphed into an unprecedented transnational threat. But while both the international political landscape and the threats within it are today entirely different to those that faced former US presidents during the Cold War, America's response to external threats – even though such threats now come from loosely organised groups rather than states – is still dominated by the fundamentals of Cold War thinking: military power and national interest. Today, however, the use of US power is unhindered by the opposing interests of another super-power, as it was during the Cold War – a development that now appears to have convinced Washington's neo-conservatives that realism's pragmatic, cost–benefit approach to defining and

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pursuing the national interest abroad has become redundant in the post-9/11 world.

In claiming the right to unilaterally determine the shape of the international system, and the kinds of states that can participate in it, the Bush Administration has provided little in the way of the justification needed to elicit the co-operation of the international community, other than providing reminders of America's unrivalled military power and vague references to Christian morality and notions of freedom. The result to date has been the further erosion of any remaining US credibility in the Middle East, where perceptions of the US were already less than positive, and the alienation of many of America's traditional allies.

President Bush's unfettered use of US power in a uni-polar world appears, in spite of the neo-con rhetoric, unable to compel or otherwise persuade either states or their peoples to accept and participate in his vision of the world and how it should be, a point that is well illustrated by the bleak prospects for peace and stability in Iraq, the earlier refusal of the Taliban in Afghanistan to hand over Osama Bin Laden, and the current stand-off with Iran over its nuclear programme. As Joseph Nye, arguing the limits to military power and the importance of soft power in responses to transnational terrorism, observed in the early stages of the WOT,

Primacy [of US power] should not be confused with empire. It is true the US is more powerful compared with other countries than Britain was in its heyday. But the US has less control over what occurs in other countries Indeed, it is an irony that the strongest country since Rome cannot achieve many of its goals by acting alone.³⁸

The Bush doctrine's reliance on the unilateral employment of military intervention to eliminate potential threats and replace hostile, authoritarian governments with democracies is doomed to failure for the simple reason that the US, despite its huge military and economic power, cannot go it alone; indeed for humanitarian and especially governance-based interventions to achieve their intended outcomes, credibility is absolutely necessary: credibility in terms of justification; credibility in terms of method; and above all credibility in the eyes of those on whose behalf the intervention is claimed to occur. In the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular, the US fails on each account. Efforts to maintain America's credibility as a force for 'good', a long-standing requirement for US foreign policy, were seriously undermined first by President Bush's willingness to act unilaterally on highly controversial grounds, and secondly his decision to do so in a region where US actions were already treated with great suspicion, if not outright hostility.

Perhaps the biggest hole in contemporary US credibility has resulted from the WOT itself, as framed and prosecuted by the Bush Administration. The

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WOT is based on false premises that cast the attacks by al Qaeda and other terrorist organisations in simplistic good versus evil dichotomies intended to obscure the historical and political circumstances from which Arab and Islamic militancy has evolved. This ‘covering of Islam’ – achieved through the construction of a discourse in the US and elsewhere that portrays Islam as little more than a terrorist ideology pitted against the West’s democracies and freedoms – has been used by the US government and its allies in the WOT as a shield against more nuanced and sophisticated assessments of Arab/Muslim related militancy and attacks. Such assessments, provided by Said more than twenty years ago and now argued on the basis of compelling empirical evidence by Pape and others, point to US policy in the Middle East as a major motivation for both the attacks against the WOT allies and the popular support that they attract among Muslims.

But although pressure appears to be mounting for President Bush to move the WOT beyond the caricatures of anti-US sentiment he so far has relied on to justify his administration’s military responses to transnational terrorism, as illustrated by his attempt to link terrorism and poverty at the United Nations summit in late 2005, his government remains fundamentally opposed to acknowledging the role its policies in the Middle East are playing in provoking and popularising attacks against the US and its allies. Indeed, the risk of compromising US control over the Middle East’s energy supplies, or its long-standing support for Israel, by taking a more balanced policy approach in the region has been deemed by successive US administrations as unacceptable.

Yet establishing trust in the Middle East, and elsewhere, through the implementation of a more balanced set of foreign policies is precisely what is required if the US is to succeed in defeating extremist Muslim organisations like al Qaeda. In order to eliminate such stateless, unstructured terrorist organisations, it is first necessary to isolate them by neutralising their claims to relevance in the lives of Arab and Muslim peoples. Thus, military responses to terrorism can only be effective when used in conjunction with political initiatives – contrary to the false assertions made by the Bush, Blair, and Howard governments concerning the dangers of appearing to ‘give in’ to terrorists; the alternative, as Brzezinski argues, is to ignore the lessons of the past – learnt by the British in Northern Ireland and the Israelis first in Lebanon and more recently in the Gaza strip – by continuing to dismiss the political circumstances and origins of Muslim-related terrorism:

To win the war on terrorism, one must . . . set two goals: first to destroy all terrorists, and second, to begin a political effort that focuses on the conditions that precipitated their emergence. That is precisely what the British are doing in Ulster, the Spanish in Basque country, and what the Russians are being urged to do in Chechnya. Doing so implies neither propitiation nor concessions to the

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terrorists, but it is an imperative component of a strategy designed both to eliminate and to isolate the terrorist underworld.³⁹

NOTES

1. Michael Wesley (see 'The New Interventionism and the Invasion of Iraq' in this volume) contrasts the 'new interventionism' with the strategic interventionism of the Cold War, which he argues 'care[d] little for domestic processes and outcomes; whereas the new interventionism focuses exclusively on these issues'. This is not to say, however, that the new interventionism is without strategic intent as the Bush Administration clearly sees the homogenisation of states as beneficial to its perception of US national interests, particularly in terms of the WOT.
2. In August 2005, US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld began referring to the WOT as 'a global struggle against violent extremism' in what was described as an effort to portray the WOT as more than just a military response to terrorism.
3. For an excellent discussion of the now discredited evidence and assumptions used by the Bush Administration to justify the Iraq invasion, see Chaim Kaufmann (2004), 'Threat inflation and the failure of the marketplace of ideas', *International Security*, **29** (1), Summer.
4. Ziad Asali (2002), 'Arab-American perceptions of US policy toward the Middle East', *Middle East Policy*, **XI** (2), June, 36.
5. Edward Said (2001), 'Islam and the West are inadequate banners', *The Observer*, 16 September.
6. In addition to the evidence of widespread subscription to this image of Islam in Western media reporting on the Middle East – and in particular the Arab-Israeli conflict – provided by Said, numerous other examples and accounts can be found on media monitoring web sites such as *Media Monitors Network* and *Arab Media Watch*.
7. Edward Said (1997), *Covering Islam*, New York: Vintage Books, p. xvi.
8. I should point out here that I am using the term 'terrorist' in an admittedly simplistic way in order to avoid becoming ensnared in the complex and ongoing debate over how it should or can be defined. The terrorist definition debate is not central to the argument being made here and so, in the interests of expediency, I am, for my purposes, defining a 'terrorist act' as any use of violence for political ends that is specifically intended to produce civilian casualties.
9. George W. Bush (2001), 'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American people', 20 September, available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html.
10. Dilip Hiro, 'Playing the democracy card: how America furthers its national interest in the Middle East', available at www.tomdispatch.com/indexprint.mhtml?pid=2268.
11. See for example, Ronald Inglehart (2005), 'The Worldviews of Islamic Publics in Global Perspective', in Mansoor Moaddel (ed.) *Worldviews of Islamic Publics*, New York: Palgrave.
12. Zbigniew Brzezinski (2002), 'Failing to grapple with the political dimension', *Azerbaijan International*, Autumn, available at www.azer.com (an abbreviated version of this article, entitled 'Confronting Anti-American Grievances', appeared in the *New York Times* on 1 September 2002).
13. Said, *Covering Islam*, p. xxii
14. Writing in 1993, Leon Hadar accused journalists of acting as the 'transmission belt' for 'leaks and misinformation' from the US government and lobby groups that were intended to 'help construct the new Middle Eastern danger'. According to Hadar, journalists 'impose the term "Islamic fundamentalism" to describe diverse and unrelated movements that range from CIA-trained Islamic guerrillas in Afghanistan to the anti-American clerics in Iran,

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- from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, operating in a parliamentary system, to murderous terrorist organisations like the Lebanese Hezbollah, from pro-American Saudi Arabia to anti-American Libya. Think-tank studies, op-ed pieces and congressional hearings add color to this image of a unified and monolithic Islam.' See Leon Hadar (1993), 'What Green peril?', *Foreign Affairs*, **72** (2), Spring, 30.
15. Bernard Lewis (1990), 'The roots of Muslim rage: why so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not be easily mollified', *The Atlantic*, **266** (3), September, accessed at Infotrac.
 16. Lewis (2002), 'What went wrong', *The Atlantic Monthly*, **289** (1), January, 45.
 17. Paul Kelly (2005), 'Future in the balance', *The Australian*, 10–11 September.
 18. Ziad Asali, 'Arab–American Perceptions of US policy Toward the Middle East', pp. 35–6.
 19. Hadar, 'What Green peril?', p. 32.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid., p. 31.
 22. Alan Richards likens US policy in the Middle East to America's policies in South America during the Cold War 'when American paranoia about Marxism undermined existing democracies and blocked nascent pacted transitions' (that is, cooperation on democratic transitions based on agreement between moderates in government and in opposition). According to Richards, US policy in South America 'strengthened hardliners (and, therefore, also radicals in opposition), partly because it feared that Marxists would not play by the democratic rules of the game if they won elections. Moderates in opposition were weakened, because radicals could plausibly argue that winning an election would be meaningless, since the hardliners, with US help, would engineer a coup to overthrow an elected opposition government. Substitute "Islamist" for "Marxist", and you have a reasonable picture of the key dynamics thwarting a transition to democracy in the Arab region.' See Alan Richards (2005), 'Democracy in the Arab region: getting there from here', *Middle East Policy*, **12** (2), Summer, Proquest Document ID: 858575691.
 23. Judith Yaphe, 'Bush Policy and the (de)stabilisation of the Persian Gulf', in 'Evaluating the Bush Menu for Change in the Middle East', Louis Cantori and Augustus Richard Norton (eds) (2005), *Middle East Policy*, **12** (1), Spring, ProQuest document ID: 814022171.
 24. George W. Bush (2003), 'Remarks by the President at the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce', 6 November, available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/print/20031106-2.html.
 25. See *Spiegel Online* for the results of research on Middle public opinion released in February 2005 by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. *Spiegel Online* reports that the results of the survey, which included opinions in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority, 'suggest that the so-called Arab street doesn't see the existence of an over-arching conflict of values between the West and the Middle East at all. Rather, the tensions are seen almost completely as a result of United States and British foreign policies in the region'. See Charles Hawley (2005), 'The United States is "aggressive, morally decadent and racist"', *Spiegel Online*, 9 March, available at <http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,druck-345550,00.html>.
 26. Carrie Wickham (2004), 'The problem with coercive democratization: the Islamist response to the U.S. Democracy Reform Initiative', *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, **1** (1), 3.
 27. See Richards, 'Democracy in the Arab Region: Getting There From Here'.
 28. Wickham, 'The problem with coercive democratization', op cit., n. 26, p. 1
 29. See for example 'Root causes of terrorism: findings from an international expert meeting', Oslo, 9–11 June, 2003, available at http://odin.dep.no/filarkiv/191745/background_paper.pdf, and Karin Von Hippel (2002), 'The roots of terrorism: probing the myths', *The Political Quarterly*, **16** (58).
 30. Scott McConnell interview with Robert Pape, 'The logic of suicide terrorism', *The American Conservative*, available at www.amconmag.com/2005_07-18/print/articleprint.html.

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31. See Robert Pape (2003), 'The strategic logic of suicide terrorism', *American Political Science Review*, **97** (3), August.
32. Caryle Murphy (2005), 'A scholarly look at terror sees bootprints in the sand', *Washington Post*, 10 July, available at www.washingtonpost.com.
33. Marc Sageman quoted in *ibid*.
34. 'Root Causes of Terrorism: Findings from an international expert meeting in Oslo', 9–11 June, 2003.
35. 'London bomber video: "I am a soldier"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 2005, available at www.smh.com.au.
36. Richard Holbrooke (2005), 'Our enemy's face', *Washington Post*, 9 September, available at www.washingtonpost.com; Robert Pollard, a diplomat with the US Embassy in Malaysia, went further in a counter-terrorism conference dinner speech late last year, arguing that 'The root causes of terrorism are debatable. But what is not in dispute is that evil men and women, unchecked by human morality and often encouraged by those who pervert political or religious beliefs, can do terrible things. Sadly, there are people in this world – psychopaths, really – who get a thrill from hurting, killing, and destroying. And whether they do so in the name of some ideology or religion is beside the point: they must be stopped.' Speech by Robert Pollard at the conference dinner for the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counter-Terrorism Conference on 'CT best practices', 27 September 2004, available at <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov/dcmosp092704.htm>.
37. Louis Cantori (2005), 'Accelerating Islam: Bush policy in the Middle East', in 'Evaluating the Bush menu for change in the Middle East', Louis Cantori and Augustus Richard Norton (eds) (2005), *Middle East Policy*, **12** (1), Spring, ProQuest document ID 814022171.
38. Joseph Nye (2002), 'Lessons in imperialism', Kennedy School of Government website (op-ed reprinted from the *Financial Times*), 16 June, available at www.ksg.harvard.edu.
39. Brzezinski, 'Failing to grapple with the political dimension', op cit., n. 12.

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