

What would we want to say on global security policy to the incoming US administration?

An Oxford Research Group Briefing

John Sloboda and Gabrielle Rifkind report on a roundtable discussion involving around 30 journalists, academics and security analysts, held in London on September 29th 2004 as one in an ongoing series of *Liddite conversations*.

David Held opened the discussion by citing Kant's observation that "we are unavoidably side by side". This insight has informed a remarkable legal trajectory in the 20th Century, whereby sovereignty has been shaped and delimited through international agreements, bodies and instruments, with the intention of placing human rights agendas at the centre of international affairs.

This trajectory is under threat, as evidenced by the stalling of trade negotiations, the failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the failure to create a framework to deal with global warming, and the weakening of multilateral instruments in the aftermath of 9/11 (particularly in the case of Iraq). The situation has been pushed from bad to worse by US-led economic and security policies (described as the 'Washington Consensus' and the 'Washington Security Doctrine' respectively). These policies weaken global capacity to address the common good, and have been responsible for worsening the economic and security circumstances in some of the world's poorest countries.

It is nations, such as China and India, that have successfully resisted the Washington Consensus that have shown the most spectacular economic gains in recent years. It is commonly assumed that the US electorate support the Washington Consensus, however, this is not the case. The Chicago Foreign Affairs Survey shows that the US public have beliefs consistent with Social Democratic agendas: see http://www.cfr.org/globalviews2004/sub/pdf/2004_US_Public_Topline_Report.pdf. For instance, they believe that multilateralism is the key lesson of 9/11, and that the US should give up its veto power at the UN. Furthermore, they reject preventive action without UN approval.

The Washington Security Doctrine places one state, the US, as judge, jury and executioner in international affairs. It is this approach that threatens the multilateral instruments which are the world's only safeguards against a "return to nature".

Current US-led policies need to be replaced by a re-linking of security and human-rights agendas. This places the problems of terrorism in their proper context alongside, and directly linked to, the greater problems of global poverty, health and environmental degradation. The Human Security and Social Democratic agendas offer a way forward, and are described in greater detail in David Held's book *Global Covenant* (Polity Press, 2004).

Paul Rogers reminded the meeting that the major problems presaging current instability were clearly in sight well before 9/11, and foreseen by some. These included the “revolution of frustrated expectations” in the majority world (caused by increased education coupled with diminished economic prospects), and the impact of climate change. It was hoped that as global problems such as these became more evident, rational solutions would be developed. However, 9/11 receded the possibility of such solutions being developed with multilateral issues being further marginalized.

It was said that the outcome of the US election in November may not significantly change US foreign policy. Whoever wins, there will be strong forces internal to the US – namely, the neoconservative camp – resisting change. For example, in the influential discourse of the newly revitalised *Committee on the Present Dangers*, radical Islam has been inserted almost verbatim where communism would have previously been mentioned. What may be more significant are events on the front line. The fact that the largest military force in the world is losing the battle against an Iraqi insurgency is hugely damaging the neoconservative vision. The next 4-5 years will be crucial.

Mary Kaldor reported on a recent report produced for Javier Solana by a group of independent experts (*A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*. September 2004. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Human%20Security%20Report%20Full.pdf>).

This report takes a bottom-up approach based on the premise that most people in the world live insecure lives, and the greatest priority is to create the condition in which they can achieve physical security – a freedom from fear – primarily through being enabled to solve their own problems. Military forces do not solve these problems. Having 1.8m people under arms in Europe does not – or cannot – make Europeans feel more secure. Indeed, global security fundamentally requires a Human Security strategy to be truly effective.

It is evident that the European response to developing a Human Security strategy has historically been weak. If we are to criticise US foreign policy, we need to own up to how weak we have been. Furthermore, it is apparent that Europe needs to develop a way in which we can intervene in situations of intolerable insecurity. The question is *how?* The *Human Security Doctrine for Europe* report outlines (a) principles describing what such interventions might involve; (b) the proposal of a Human Security Response Force for Europe, and (c) enforcement of a global role of law through a common legal framework. The key element of the Response Force would be a mixture of military and civilian forces in one integrated unit, trained together and ready for rapid deployment.

Open discussion (Chatham House Rule – contributors not named)

There was a very lively conversation round the table that followed. A first-hand account was reported by a journalist who was in Fallujah with the Marines in early August 2004. It was reiterated that the US is losing the insurgency as US servicemen are being killed and injured daily – not to mention the deaths and injuries sustained by Iraqi civilians – with much of this carnage failing to be accounted for in US casualty figures. It is apparent that there is no model for engagement in Iraq other than a rigid US-designed framework which is failing. Marines have been expecting to “finish the job” in areas controlled by insurgents. However, this appears to be difficult if not

impossible under the current climate of unrest in Fallujah and elsewhere in Iraq and the Middle East. This is supported by Lt. Gen. James Conway's – retiring US commander in Fallujah – statement “the window of opportunity to win hearts and minds closed long ago”.

The difference between the British and the US military mind set was also noted. Parallels were drawn between the rigid and over simplistic formulas used by US planners (e.g. “7 steps to good governance”) and the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. In comparison to the failing US approach, British responses are flexible and are tailored to the emerging situation due to experiences in places like Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo. Although it is clear that British forces are not exempt from insurgent lead bombings and mortar attacks.

Parallels were drawn by another participant between what is happening in the Iraq insurgency and what is happening in Niger. The Niger Delta Volunteer People's force recruit from unemployed angry young men with no future. They are targeting Shell and other multinationals whose presence there has brought no benefits to the people. The Nigerian insurgents have been identified as ‘bad people’. However, they are revolting against legitimate injustices which have left them marginalized and angry. The Niger President is being forced to negotiate with the insurgents. Perhaps Prime Minister Allawi will have to offer something to the insurgents in Iraq in order to eliminate or lessen their campaign of destruction.

Another participant offered advice to the incoming US President not to postpone the elections in Iraq. Indeed, the majority of Iraqis want elections. It is widely thought that if the US fails to deliver elections in Iraq they will have little – or no – credibility with the Iraqi people. If elections were cancelled in parts of the country – which Donald Rumsfeld has supported – it could provoke Sunni v. Shi'ite violence which has so far been avoided. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that all insurgents are against elections, indeed quite the opposite, it would be in the interests of several groups (such as the Iraqi Islamic party operating in the Sunni triangle) to participate in elections in order to gain legitimate power. It may be the case that Allawi's decision to delay elections are due to his fear of a resulting loss of power due to increased power in the hands of parties like the Iraqi Islamic party.

A contrasting view was presented that it is pointless to offer advice to the incoming US administration due to the belief that the UK government has no influence with the US. This is further supported by Larry Diamond's statement that the US has had a policy to “freeze out the Brits”. The UK has also been damaged by siding with the US against the rest of Europe resulting in the UK's diminished influence in Europe. Therefore, it is imperative that we repair the damage with other European countries, and find a way to speak with a united voice. The US is more likely to have meaningful dialogue with a united Europe. The US may view a united Europe with a growing population and increasing economic prosperity as a threat to its own power. Therefore, current relations between European states and the US have largely come in the form of bilateral agreements between individual European states and the US.

Reinforcing the above was the observation that the only ‘special relationship’ the US administration has is with Israel. Indeed, it appears that the US is pursuing an essentially Likud doctrine in its international dealings. It can be hypothesised that the

US military tactics in Iraq are similar to what Sharon would have done in the same situation. It is evident that there is a close relation between the Israel Defence Force (IDF) and the US military, including joint training and security discussions. More specifically, due to the IDF's knowledge of Arabic they are being utilized in Iraqi prisons for interrogation purposes and are also a component of the coalition presence in the Kurdish held areas in Northern Iraq.

A further analysis was offered by **Paul Rogers** that the US has three plans for Iraq. Plan A involves the rapid establishment of a free market economy and a quick withdrawal of US forces to four large bases, once a client regime was in place. This has now failed. Plan B involves the use of heavy force against key centres of insurgency, the establishment of a strong client regime and a disengagement from urban areas. It appears that Plan B is currently being pursued. Plan C represents the military disengagement from major cities leaving maintenance of major bases in key oil areas in the southeast and north of the country. This policy may be pursued if there is not a rapid collapse of the insurgency. (See Paul Rogers' *Open Democracy* article <http://www.opendemocracy.net/themes/article-2-2128.jsp> for more on this.)

It was suggested that Allawi will try to make a deal with the insurgents, and the price of that deal would be total US withdrawal. There was heated debate about whether the US could possibly accept that, with views expressed ranging from "the US would be delighted to be given an excuse to get out of Iraq" to "a US withdrawal from Iraq would be the worst foreign policy failure in the US' history – far more damaging to it than Vietnam". Supporting the latter view was the observation that control over oil had little to do with short term gain, but everything to do with preventing emerging powers, such as China, gaining access to these resources in the long term.

An observation was that we need to look at issues from a Middle Eastern perspective, where the key, and possibly irresolvable, issue is the shame and loss of dignity which is felt in the region as a result of the way that the region has been exploited over the past century or more. It is this which fuels support for terrorism, and which is more intractable than the potentially solvable issues of the Palestine, Iraq and Iran. It was proposed that we need to listen to the Middle East to extract and promote locally based solutions to problems. The *Amman Roundtable on Human Security in the Middle East* is an example of such work. (<http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefings/amman.htm>)

We were reminded by another participant that it is important not to underestimate the importance of religious faith in current world affairs. The Islamic faith gives Muslims a sense of the ultimate triumph of the law of God which is not matched by equally strong secular convictions. The US is a religious society where politics is seen by some as the arena in which biblical destiny is worked out. This leads to such phenomena as the twinning of US church communities with Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Our strategists in general do not appreciate the profundity of the faith which motivates people (on both sides). It was said that a revolt against the profoundly unpleasant aspects of materialism in the West is what drives fundamentalism especially that of Islamic fundamentalism. However, this realisation needs to be tempered by an awareness that the re-religionisation of politics cannot solve the core problems facing the international community (e.g. environment, trade). Politics based on the attempts to protect yourself (at the expense of others) will always ultimately fail.

An interesting debate was held about the conditions under which religious extremism comes to the fore. It was proposed that this happens when communities feel threatened. It needs to be understood that Christian extremists in the US feel threatened by secularism and are often drawn to a neo-conservative dogma which reinforces their fears. It was agreed however, that religious fundamentalism and political extremism are different things, and that someone like Bin Laden is primarily a politician who exploits fundamentalist impulses.

It was pointed out that there are many powerful foci for alternative political approaches around the world. Europe does not have to restrict its primary dialogue to the US. Its relationships to China, India, Brazil, etc. are equally important and should be strengthened. We should not draw too much from the particularities of current issues (e.g. insurgencies). The larger trends will continue, whatever their local manifestations, and it is the larger issues which must be resolved – such as the effects of unequal trade, climate change, a lack of commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and the weakening of international initiatives.

Anthony Barnett, who ably chaired the discussion, drew the discussion to a close with the following observation. There was a huge wave of support for the US after 9/11, which represented a welcoming of the US as a country like other countries, vulnerable and interdependent. What may drive Bush to victory on 2nd November 2004 is the opposite view that the US is a “city on the hill with all eyes upon it” – as John Winthrop, the first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony said in 1630 – exceptional and inviolable. Bush will attempt to convince the American people that the US will not be attacked again because of his ability to ‘win the war on terror’ and bring democracy to the Middle East. In this attempt he may fail in creating a world after his own image. The ineluctable long-term global trends – unequal distribution of wealth, environmental degradation, failure to systematically address the Millennium Development Goals and the US’ gradual move away from multilateral initiatives and agreements – provide long-term triggers for terrorism and foundations for fanaticism.

Notes.

1. **Liddite Conversations** are off-the-record roundtable discussions hosted by Gabrielle Rifkind on behalf of Oxford Research Group. They offer an opportunity for UK journalists working in security and foreign affairs to meet together with analysts and security experts to look at the broader trends underlying current international events. The discussions are held under the Chatham House rule, where individual contributions are not attributed. The term ‘Liddite’ was coined by Paul Rogers to describe the pressure cooker effect which arises by ‘keeping the lid on’ global security problems, instead of addressing the root causes of conflict and political violence.
2. **Named contributors.** **John Sloboda** is Executive Director of Oxford Research Group and a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment at Keele University. **Gabrielle Rifkind** is Human Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group and Convenor of the Middle East Policy Initiative Forum. **David Held** is Graham Wallas Professor of Political Science at the LSE. **Paul Rogers** is Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, and Global Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group. **Mary Kaldor** is Programme Director at the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics. **Anthony Barnett** is Editor in Chief of *Open Democracy*.