

The Struggle for the System: The Long War and Sources of Legitimacy

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Abstract

The conflict between Caliphist and US-supremacist forces represents the most serious geostrategic threat to the system of states. This is because both sides seek to supersede the modern state system, taking their identity and legitimacy from normative, rather than legal or constitutional, sources. They are a threat to the state system because they seek collective affirmation through means other than the national state. The United States envisaged by the Bush Administration is unrecognisable as an element of the modern state system. Similarly, the Caliphist movement has a global aim of overthrowing non-religious state-recognition systems. There are other forces in play: a cosmopolitan incrementalist movement, and very strong support for the state-based status quo. These both advocate retention of the state system. However, both sides of the Caliphist/US-supremacist conflict seek to replace the current global international system with their own particularist moral and/or economic order. Both sides see the state as a useful strategic tool. One is in possession of a hugely powerful state and the other seeks the legitimacy a state brings. But at the core of both sets of war-aims is a new world order in which states no longer derive their legitimacy from nationhood.

INTRODUCTION¹

This paper is part of a larger project to establish the groundwork for an evolutionary theory of International Relations based around the notion of (re)constitution and affirmation of collective identity as the principal driver of policy and determinant of international action, subsuming all others. The aim of this project is to test the idea that a search for commonality in international political action can be reduced to a tentative first principle, this being that all policy, whether directed towards material, strategic or social gain, is ultimately intended to constitute and affirm manifestations of collective identity, or at least has this effect. I emphasise the tentative nature of this hypothesis. State behaviour is group behaviour, and the first thing a group must do is constitute itself. The next, of course, is constitute itself again, and then redefine and affirm itself in the light of changing circumstances. This is international, or inter-polity politics. Polities define themselves by their proximate sources of legitimacy, the ultimate source being collective identity itself. This paper will apply these ideas to an analysis of the conflict between US-supremacists on the one hand and one type of radical Islamist on the other. The analysis concludes that both sides of this conflict pose a threat to the basis of the state system, at least as formally constituted after WWII, but also in a more fundamental way, since they are both pursuing agendas that are antithetical to a system of even nominally sovereign, equal states. The most basic principle of the modern international system is that the people of each nation-state should decide the character of that state. They are the determinants of national identity and therefore of legitimacy. Ideology on both sides of the systemic conflict under discussion contains axia that logically abrogate, or abolish, that principle.

¹ I would like to thank my PhD supervisors, Dr Karin von Strokirch and Dr Graham Young, at the University of New England, for their indispensable assistance with this paper and consistent support in general.

ELEMENTS AND VITALITY OF THE THREAT

The elements of the threat posed to the international system, involve the derivation of identity and legitimacy from sources opposed to a system of national states. In the one case, this source is the word of God as administered and interpreted in the earthly realm by the Caliph.² Thus the ultimate goal of this group of radical Islamists - Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, among others - is the re-establishment of the Caliphate as the conduit of legitimation from the deity. I will call them Caliphists. They call for the recognition of the Caliphate as the source of legitimation of statehood³. In the other case the source of legitimation is a little harder to pin down, involving an appeal to an “American” state stripped of its constitutional and systemic democratic safeguards, yet still representing freedom and democracy. Further, in this conception the US not only represents freedom and democracy but actively promotes it within other states, going so far as to claim the right in practice to decide what kind of government individual states should have.⁴

Recently, it seems, there has been a diminution of idealist influence in United States foreign policy circles.⁵ On one analysis this is a result of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice establishing herself as an independent, moderate voice in President George W Bush’s ear. With US forces in a bloody box-canyon in Iraq, the influence of hawks like Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has diminished. The US has seen the neorealist light. The election victory of Hamas in the Palestinian Authority elections has panicked many who, believing in the absolutes of moral clarity, thought any sort of democratic process would necessarily deliver outcomes favourable to the US. This might follow if neo-con values were universal. This is their belief; hence the unsettling effect of events on the ground.

² R Scott Appleby, 'History in the Fundamentalist Imagination,' *The Journal of American History* 89 (2) (2002): 498-511 at pp. 500, 505.

³ Ibid. Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977). p. 23

⁴ US Government, *The National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/> (10 March 2006). pp. 1-3. Condoleezza Rice, *Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service* (Washington, DC: US Department of State) <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59306.htm> (22 Jan 2006) p.1

⁵ Gerard Baker, "White House Waves White Flag on Using Us Might to Make the World Safe," *The Australian*, February 20, 2006. p. 11

Another way of seeing this change of tone is in light of forthcoming congressional elections, the parlous state of the US economy and budget and, yes, the dangerous overstretch of the country's armed forces. On this analysis, it is not so much a change of focus, as a strategic pause, or setback, in pursuit of an otherwise unchanged agenda. The struggle is even undergoing a gradual rebranding, from the War on Terror to the Long War⁶. The conviction that the US is the embodiment of democracy and the bastion of liberty is not restricted to neo-con hawks⁷. And even if a more moderate, Democratic Administration were to move in to the White House in 2009, the forces of evangelical Americanism are patient. Those who believe that Ronald Reagan's rhetoric was the catalyst of the fall of the Soviet Union were prepared to wait out the Clinton years. A second Clinton Administration would be more of a red rag than a wet blanket. The confluence of interest is not going away among those who feel a sense of duty to spread the benefits of US-style, capitalist democracy, those who desire to actively neutralise the numerous threats to the US they perceive and those who seek to utilise the offices of state to further commercial interests. Secretary Rice has indeed recently been emphasising the 'transformational' nature of US diplomacy, and talking up the idea that the 'fundamental character' of states is the concern of US and other players⁸. This language is repeated in the recently-released, updated National Security Strategy of the United States.⁹ I contend that the agenda so expressed is antithetical to a system of states based on national self-determination and sovereign equality.

Meanwhile, on the other side, jihadist passion waxes hot. Hostility towards Israel has been institutionalised in the Palestinian elections, and hostility toward the west in general manifested in widespread, violent reaction to Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed. Indeed, with the scent of the US's bloody nose in Iraq in the air, this movement has gained ground in leaps and bounds since the masterful provocation of the 9-11 attacks. Of course, the anti-western sentiments reflected in the Palestinian

⁶ US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense) <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf>. (14 March 2006) p. v

⁷ Even the British theorist Niall Ferguson sees the problem of US dominance as one of management, rather than any problem with American Empire *per se*. See Campbell Craig, 'American Realism Versus American Imperialism,' *World Politics* 57(1) (2004): 143-174

⁸ Rice, *Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service*. p.1

⁹ US Government, *The National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/> (10 March 2006). pp. 1-3.

election outcome and the cartoon protests have been widespread, cutting across many political and religious differences. This sentiment also has many sources, and it cannot be said that it is always driven by a desire to alter the fundamental arrangements of the international system. A significant section of the movement, however, is so driven, and has been working to harness these broader sentiments to its cause.

EVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Here I will sketch the initial stages of development, begun elsewhere, of an evolutionary theory of International Relations. It begins with the statement of tentative first principle: the first, or primitive, effect of policy is to define an entity, us, in just the same way that the first effect of experience is to define an individual, me, which then either perpetuates itself and its line, or does not. The basic idea here is that intentionality causes collective identity. For a group of people to agree on some (including moral) purpose, even mere survival, constitutes that group as a unit of identity and as a polity.¹⁰

This conforms with Searle's observation that appearance is logically prior to being.¹¹ The state constitutes itself as a formal institutional representation of an informal social fact: collective identity in the form of nationhood, say, or cityhood or of a particular, enfranchised class. A shared intentionality defines this manifestation of collective identity. A vital part of this self-constitution involves an appeal for recognition and legitimation by other actors in the system. This recognition requires some overarching institutional framework.¹² Which of these dynamics is an intrinsic element of all state systems, inherent in the nature of social grouping, and which is a culturally specific arrangement, and hence open to challenge and redefinition? Clearly, those elements which inhere in inter-polity interaction must remain as long as there are more than one or two polities, while those formal, ostensible aspects which provide specific

¹⁰ The theoretical approach derives from the work of Emile Durkheim, John Ruggie, John Searle and William Bloom. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John Spaulding and George Simpson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952). John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (London: Routledge, 1998), J Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin, 1995). William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. p. 13

¹² Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity*. pp. 1-6

institutional contexts may be adapted to evolving situations. Hence, an evolutionary analysis would hypothesise formal institutions as culturally specific representations of an informal institution of collective identity.

An evolutionary IR, or geostrategy, would focus on the ever-fluid formation and affirmation of collective identity. Policy and strategy can be analysed according to their effectiveness in terms of maintaining, expanding or reinforcing particular manifestations of collective identity differentiated according to proximate and ultimate sources of legitimacy.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Those elements common to all state systems are, in Reus-Smit's evaluation, a shared conception of the moral purpose of politics, a principle by which sovereignty may be allocated, and a norm of procedural juridical decision-making.¹³ Wight describes a rather particular thing he calls a states-system. He describes the origin of the term in various legal descriptions of Europe from the 17th to the 19th centuries. He canvasses several definitions which centre around the idea of some overarching, usually religious system of legitimation, and two of his examples are instructive for our purposes. Part of the essence of the Westphalian settlement in Europe was the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire as an overarching system of legitimacy and recogniser of sovereignty, rather than as a carrier, or location, of sovereignty itself. Wight also mentions the Abbasid Caliphate, whose devolution to this role was the result of a loss of temporal power. The same was true of the Holy Roman Empire. In the modern international system this overarching legitimator, particularly when it comes to authorising the use of force, has been the "international community," formally embodied in the United Nations.¹⁴ The UN has been cited as a source of universal norms.¹⁵ Both parties under discussion here are seeking to replace this source of legitimacy, Caliphists with a re-established Caliphate and US-supremacists with the US itself.

¹³ Christian Reus-Smit, 'The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions,' *International Organisation* 51(4) (1997):555-580 at 566-568.

¹⁴ Wight, *Systems of States*. p. 27 Adam Roberts, 'The Use of Force,' in *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, ed. David Malone (Boulder: Lynne, Rienner, 2004). p. 133

¹⁵ Joe Sills, 'The United Nations and the Formation of Global Norms,' in *The United Nations: Confronting the Challenges of a Global Society*, ed. Jean E. Krasno (Boulder: Lynne, Rienner, 2004).

Transitions from one system of fundamental institutions to another are dangerous periods, by definition involving instability. They can be caused when one or more locations of power combine both the material means and the expansionary or hegemonic ambition to press the case for fundamental change. This combination was present in the Napoleonic Empire, the Nazi eruption, and Soviet Russia and is a driving force on both sides of the “Long War”. It was as a result of such a change that the Ottoman Empire was destroyed during WWI, and the overarching legitimator, the Caliphate, was abolished in 1924.¹⁶

Such moments of imbalance fall back, however, to more stable arrangements in the face of strategic necessity. Each bout of systemic conflict resolves to a situation in which competing powers come to some formal or informal cooperative settlement. These settlements are always necessarily contingent and temporary. Thus balance is never actually achieved, but serves as an attractor in a system of perpetual systemic flux. The only plausible alternative to this mechanism is unification. But the fact remains that the (often unsuccessful) drive toward unification, the impulse to impose a value system universally, is part of the selection mechanism of evolutionary inter-polity development.

The international system as it has evolved since WWII is an example of such a system having been formalised in the shape of the informal strategic situation at the end of a systemic war. As with all systems of states the necessary foundations were laid: an organising principle of sovereignty based on national self-determination; a conception of the moral purpose of political organisation as the achievement of self-determination, stability and peace; and, a norm of pure procedural justice based around international organisations like the UN, the International Court of Justice and the various financial instruments like Bretton Woods.

Since the way to formally constitute “us” in this system is recognition in the form of the granting of statehood (or at a domestic level, recognition *by* the state), the state plays a central role. If, however, the state is regarded as merely a strategic tool in

¹⁶ Joshua Teitelbaum, “‘Taking Back’ the Caliphate: Sharif Husayn Ibn Ali, Mustafa Kemal and the Ottoman Caliphate,” *Die Welt des Islams* 40, (3) (2000) p. 423.

service to an alternative source of legitimacy, this attitude represents a challenge to the foundations of the current state system itself. Both sides in the Long War see it this way. It is a challenge because in the *status quo ante* the state is held supreme, the ultimate repository of sovereign political identity and legitimacy, and instrument of strategy. It is also a challenge because it is unificatory, as against a system based on differentiation.

ELEMENTS OF THREAT FROM RADICAL ISLAMISM

It is important to be precise about exactly who we are talking about when referring to the Islamist side of this conflict, to avoid the stereotyping of political Islam, and of Islam itself, which is a hallmark of much western public discourse.¹⁷ Theories regarding the political and strategic mobilisation of Islamism range from those that emphasise reaction to the west, including Israel, to those which find the roots of the movement inherent in the tenets of Islamic theology.¹⁸ Many assume that it is a reaction to deprivation.¹⁹ The mix of origins and influences these theories describe is reflected in the multifaceted Islamic opposition to US hegemony. Anti-US activity in Iraq, for example, is carried out by a wide variety of actors: ex-Baathists, nationalists, criminal gangs and Shi'ite hotheads, as well as al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia.²⁰ More broadly, political Islam encompasses a vast variety of different ideologies and identity-groups.²¹

The focus here is on those Sunni Islamic actors whose system of beliefs requires more than that they buy or bomb themselves a seat at the table, although they may have to content themselves with that in the event. This group holds views which are antithetical to the notion of a state deriving legitimacy from the will of its people. In particular, they seek to re-establish the Caliphate, the historical overarching arbiter of political authority in the Muslim world. These aims are represented in their most

¹⁷ It is also necessary to avoid the mistake of giving too much weight to Caliphists' influence, which is often exaggerated for effect. Robert Dreyfuss, 'Talk to the Enemy,' *The American Prospect* 17, (2) (2006). US Government, *The National Security Strategy* p. 1

¹⁸ Are Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East,' (Cnr. Michelsen Institute, 2003) <http://www.cmi.no/pdf/?file=/publications/2003/rep/r2003-3.pdf> (15 February 2006) pp. 16-21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p16

²⁰ See the New York Times' coverage: www.nytimes.com/iraq

²¹ William E Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,' *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, (3) (1987): 307-335

robust manifestation by al-Qa'ida leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri,²² but they are part of a movement which, while not always engaging in direct action, is nevertheless committed to the same goal.²³ These Caliphists should be distinguished from those Shi'ite activists whose aim is to establish a Shia Islamic theocracy from Iran to Lebanon and beyond. While these also pose a challenge to the basis of the current state system, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

While secularist Muslims may recognise, as does the 1973 Pakistani constitution, the supreme sovereignty of Allah,²⁴ they allow the nation a large role as state legitimator. Caliphists, on the other hand, see the authority of the deity alone, exercised through the Caliphs²⁵ as the legitimator of all earthly activity.²⁶ Thus even the Islamic State they call for is not supreme. It does not derive its law from itself, but from the Shari'a, through the Caliph, and it administers this law not in the interests of the state or the nation, but according to the writ of Allah (and the Caliphists).²⁷ There is debate within Islam as to whether the separation of religion and politics, or the state, is a modern innovation to be embraced, or a western construct and another way of forcing Muslims to think in western ways.²⁸ The authority of the Caliph is their alternative.

The early Islamist Ibn Khaldun recommended replacement of local, social unificatory identifiers with universal Shari'a law as a way for urban elites to maintain the group solidarity of nomadic tribes. This was his remedy for the cyclical conquering of urban by nomadic populations. Knudsen places this as part of an ongoing debate within Islam over the respective roles of religious and political leadership.²⁹ This separation began with the Prophet who, while he held both temporal and religious authority

²² Appleby, 'History in the Fundamentalist Imagination.' p. 498, 505

²³ Zeyno Baran, 'Fighting the War of Ideas,' *Foreign Affairs* 84, (6). p. 79

²⁴ Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology.' p. 311

²⁵ Khalifa: Successors, or Deputies of the Prophet. Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology.' p309-311. Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). p. 101

²⁶ There is debate over this. Lewis argues that Islam, unlike Christianity, 'received no instruction' regarding the duties owed to God and Caesar. Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. pp. 101-103. Bhargaya, on the other hand, describes a clear division even in the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. KD Bhargaya, *A Survey of Islamic Culture and Institutions*, 2 ed. (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1981). p. 40

²⁷ Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East.' p. 3-6

²⁸ Ibid. Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology.' p. 308.

²⁹ Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East.' p. 16-17

himself, separated them in some of his later appointments.³⁰ The Caliphs had therefore primarily spiritual authority, their temporal power deriving therefrom. Under the Ottoman Turks the two realms were reflected in the positions of Sultan and Caliph. By 1918 these offices were amalgamated into one, held by the Sultan-Caliph Mehmet Vahdettin VI.³¹ He was an anti-nationalist, due to dynastic considerations, in opposition to Kemal Pasha and the Turkish Nationalists, as were other Islamic spiritual leaders.³² The Hashemite Sharif Husayn ibn Ali, father of that Faisal who was instrumental in the Arab Revolt, also laid claim to the Caliphate, as a means of establishing not an Arab state, but an Islamic polity - what Anderson calls a sacral community³³ - to succeed the Ottoman Empire³⁴. The Caliphate thus acted as a symbol of anti-nationalist, Islamic self-determination, whether of the Ottoman Turkish family or the Hashemite-led Arabs. Vahdettin claimed it for the Ottomans against Turkish Nationalists and Husayn for the Hashemites against his son's Arab Nationalists of the Arab Revolt.³⁵

The current systemic conflict thus could be said to begin with the Revolt and the abandonment by the British of any possibility of the promised Arab national self-determination after WWI. While Faisal and the leaders of the revolt were Muslims, they were principally nationalists, seeking to establish independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire based on western conceptions of the state as a formal institutional representation of an informal institution of nationhood.

However, the promise of Arab national sovereignty devolved into the British Mandate of Palestine and the abolition of the Ottoman Sultanate (1922) and the Caliphate (1924).³⁶ This last was accomplished by Kemal Ataturk, and might be seen by such as

³⁰ Bhargava, *A Survey of Islamic Culture and Institutions*. p. 40-41

³¹ Teitelbaum, "Taking Back" the Caliphate: Sharif Husayn Ibn Ali, Mustafa Kemal and the Ottoman Caliphate.' p. 413

³² 'The Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam issued a fatwa stipulating that all true believers should try to kill ... nationalists'. Ibid. p. 414

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). p. 12

³⁴ Teitelbaum, "Taking Back" the Caliphate: Sharif Husayn Ibn Ali, Mustafa Kemal and the Ottoman Caliphate.' p. 412

³⁵ The office of Caliph had been taken by the Ottomans from the Arabs in 1517. Husayn claimed it again for the Arabs after it was abolished in Turkey. 'Alas, his Caliphate was recognised by few, and the office vanished into oblivion'. Ibid. p. 419, 424

³⁶ Ibid. p. 413, 418, 423

Sayyid Qutb and bin Laden as a betrayal of Muslims by Muslims, according to a Western nationalist principle, and also as the end of any legitimating foundation of statehood. In other words, without the Caliph in place, no state can be considered legitimate. There is an interregnum then, as Arab Nationalists pursue self-determination on western grounds. But as the failure (in Islamist eyes) of this course becomes apparent - with redrawing of boundaries in the region by the British in the early 1920s, the establishment of the state of Israel and the increasing American influence after WWII – Islamists determined a new course. Since they now saw the nation-state as intrinsically a Western construct, and since they were now defining themselves *against* the West, that particular arrangement of identity and legitimation became anathema to them. It still is, and the proximate source of their legitimation, being the religious office of the Caliphate, is incompatible with the ostensible proximate source upon which the current international system is based: the self-determining nation. ‘Thus’, as Appleby succinctly puts it, ‘the origins of Islamism are connected with the loss of a transnational and sacralised Muslim political unit,’³⁷ represented by the Caliphate.

Modern Middle Eastern radical Islamism, then, developed as a reaction to nationalism in general and Arab Nationalism in particular.³⁸ Politically, this was reflected in the split between Gemal Abdel Nasser’s state-based conception of Pan-Arabism beginning in Egypt, and the more religiously-based Muslim Brotherhood. Philosophically we can see writers and thinkers like Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) turn from the national state as a source of legitimacy and identity and towards the idea of the Islamic state. Qutb began as a nationalist. He perceived the failure of the nationalist project in practice with the increasing Westernisation of Arab culture and the continuing political and strategic influence of the Western powers.³⁹ He felt he must redirect, or refound the identity which was protesting western dominance and support for Zionism. Thus the movement advanced by Qutb was a reaction against the West, and the Westernising influence on the ‘Umma, or Muslim community, but also against the state, and particularly the nation-state.

³⁷ Appleby, "History in the Fundamentalist Imagination." p. 505

³⁸ Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. pp. 106-107

³⁹ Appleby, "History in the Fundamentalist Imagination." p. 507

Qutb, intellectual river to the Sunni Islamist movement, was deeply concerned with collective identity-formation, explicitly attempting to differentiate an eastern, Egyptian identity from that of the West, including the regime of Nasser.⁴⁰ Nasser was a leading light of the Arab Nationalist movement, which can be distinguished from its Islamist successor by their respective proximate sources of legitimacy. Nationalists define themselves by their claim to statehood; statehood, or at least the self-determining sovereignty it brings, is an end in itself. Caliphists desire the state only as an instrument of God's will. Nationalists derive the legitimacy of their claim from their national status. Islamists see the state as legitimate only insofar as it acts according to the holy texts. Thus, as Qutb accused Arabs of succumbing to Western corruption, materialism and political secularism, he came to see the national state, in its capacity of identity-marker, as an instrument of Christian Crusade. Jihad, in this conception, becomes not only a defensive war against outsiders, but also a purgative internal struggle for control of the state, and of sources of legitimacy and identity, in the name of God.⁴¹

This particular branch of Arab Islamism, represented by al-Qa'ida (remembering the fragmentary nature of the movement) has quite a clear goal: restoration of the Caliphate as the overarching source of legitimation of sovereignty.⁴² Theoretically this represents a fundamental threat to the current system, because its aim is to set up an entire states-system, in Wight's sense, in opposition to the current system, whose origins are perceived, with some justification, to be the successors and instruments of the hegemony of Christendom. Al-Qa'ida's leading ideas-man, Ayman al-Zawahiri partly explains the importance of the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan specifically on the grounds that they fought under 'purely Islamic slogans' whereas, he says, other movements had diluted Islamism with nationalism.⁴³ Again, this is an explicit turning

⁴⁰ John Calvert, "'The World Is an Undutiful Boy!': Sayyid Qutb's American Experience,' *Islam & Christian Muslim Relations* 11 (1) (2000): 87-103 at p. 87-89

⁴¹ Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. p. 47. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East.' pp. 4-5

⁴² Byman doesn't mention the Caliphate and seems to conflate al-Qa'ida and Iran, evidence of the ethnocentricity of many US policy-makers and theorists. He describes 9-11 as a "prelude", when it is actually part of a struggle which has been going on for most of the 20th century. Daniel L Byman, 'Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?' *World Politics* 56, no. 1 (2003). The answer in his case appears to be "no". See also Appleby, 'History in the Fundamentalist Imagination.' p. 498, 505-507. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East.' p. 6,13

⁴³ Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'The Importance of Afghanistan for the Islamist Revolution,' in *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East*, ed. Rubin & Rubin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). p. 48

away from one foundational principle of the international system, the legitimization of sovereignty on grounds of the people's will.

ELEMENTS OF THREAT FROM US-SUPREMACISTS

On the US side also there is a need to distinguish exactly the group we are discussing. Current policy and leadership of the US must not allow the venerable tradition of liberal internationalism there to be forgotten. Again, many of those in the conservative, realist foreign policy establishment, even on the Republican side, have been aghast at the wilful evangelicalism of the Bush Administration's agenda⁴⁴. However, contested though it may be, this transformational zeal is entrenched in the highest foreign policy bodies of the US: the White House,⁴⁵ the Department of Defense⁴⁶ and the Department of State.⁴⁷

The relevant group, or ideology, is distinguished by its recourse to the US *per se*, its assumed adherence to freedom and democracy and the attacks of September 11, 2001, as sources of legitimacy⁴⁸. The power of this source is evident in the mandate it apparently gives for 'transformational diplomacy', the concern of the US with the 'fundamental character'⁴⁹ of other states.⁵⁰

US grand strategy can be seen as pursuing three principal, convergent ends. It is quite clear that Christian fundamentalist religion plays a large part in US domestic politics, as evidenced by the attempted closing of the gap between religious and temporal authority in the US.⁵¹ This illustrates another similarity between the two sides of the Long War and is reflected in foreign policy decisions like support for evangelical "aid" groups and the quarantining of funds for organisations that acknowledge

⁴⁴ Steven R. Weisman, 'Democracy Push by Bush Attracts Doubters in Party,' *New York Times*, March 17, 2006. Late Edition - Final, Section A, Page 1, Column 6.

⁴⁵ US Government, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2006); <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/> (10 March, 2006)

⁴⁶ Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*

⁴⁷ Rice, *Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service*

⁴⁸ US Government, *National Security Strategy*. p. 1. Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*. p. 1

⁴⁹ Rice, *Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service*. p. 1

⁵⁰ US Government, *National Security Strategy*. Introduction.

⁵¹ Graham Maddox, 'The "Crusade" against Evil: Bush's Fundamentalism,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49, (3) (2003): 398

abortion as an option for women.⁵² This crusading evangelism coincides with the secularist, idealist view of the US as guarantor of “freedom” and capitalised democracy.⁵³ In this scenario the US seeks to become the overarching legitimating principle, or recognisor, of a global system of states. Finally, corporate interests, especially oil and arms, undoubtedly influence, if not dictate, US strategy. In the theoretical hypothesis being developed here, these material considerations are subsumed by the overarching drive toward recognition, identification and affirmation.

There is no doubt the concepts “America” and “American values” have strong identity currency. That is, some idea of the state acts as a powerful source of collective affirmation. My argument here is that the America envisaged is unrecognisable as a member of a system of even nominally equal states. The US imagined by unipolar warriors has no equal, nor is it subject to any imaginable higher polity. Indeed, it sees itself as being in competition with other international bodies for the position of suzerain, or arbiter of statehood. Somewhat tiresomely, yet another discourse of (threatened) humiliation and emasculation is present in attitudes to the UN and ICC, among other international institutions.⁵⁴ Ruggie, for example, demonstrates the illusory nature of the threat posed by customary international law to that of the US federal jurisdiction.⁵⁵

The America invoked by neoconservatives as a source of legitimacy is only vaguely identified as a state, however, and involves a very thin idea of statehood. This is demonstrated in the Bush White House’s strong push to be regarded as above and exempt from domestic law, part of its refusal to be bound by *any* law, on grounds of September 11, 2001.⁵⁶ Thus, while the US policy-makers cannot be said to be an actor

⁵² White House, *Memorandum from the White House to USAID* (2005); http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/mcpolicy.html.

⁵³ Michael Ignatieff, *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton University Press, 2005); <http://www.pupress.princeton.edu/chapters/s8080.pdf>. (11 April 2006) pp. 13-16

⁵⁴ ‘Our strength as a nation state will continue to be challenged by those who employ a strategy of the weak using international fora, judicial processes, and terrorism’. US Department of Defense, *National Defence Strategy* (US Department of Defense, 2005); http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/nds-usa_mar2005_ib.htm. (18 March, 2006) p.1

⁵⁵ John Gerard Ruggie, ‘American Exceptionalism, Exemptionalism and Global Governance,’ (Princeton University Press, 2003 (Draft)). pp. 23-26

⁵⁶ I use the wording here advisedly. The attacks of September 11, 2001, are used as a justifying principle *in and of themselves*. Gregory P Magarian, ‘Above the Law,’ *Commonweal* 131 (12): 12

‘for which the territorial state is not the cardinal organising principle,’⁵⁷ it is reasonable to say that only one state’s territorial and legal sovereignty need be taken into account in their moral schema. And it is also true to say that that state’s own internal checks and balances are seen as a restriction and a violation of the rights of the executive. This executive derives its legitimacy on the one hand simply from itself (“we are America”) and on the other from the perceived threat posed to it by a mythical notion of al-Qa’ida as all-pervasive evil, with bin Laden as its Sauron.

Ruggie describes exemptionalism as part of US exceptionalism. The latter is the perceived need to protect the US’s own internal constitutional arrangements – particularly in the area of social rights – from international bodies seen to adopt inferior standards.⁵⁸ Exemptionalism, derived from a tension between this exceptionalism and successive administrations’ desire for a role in international architecture, involves the practice and principle of exempting the US itself from treaties and laws it would otherwise like to see enforced.

This translates into the transformational diplomacy we now see advocated by the Secretary of State.⁵⁹ This is exemptionalism taken to its logical conclusion: that it is the US’s business to involve itself in deciding the fundamental character of other states, while at the same time resisting examination or oversight of the executive’s character or policy, including by the US’s own internal mechanisms.

However, given the impact of US attitudes to international norms, this turns out to be a self-defeating strategy. By exempting itself, it undermines the legitimacy of these norms and institutions, and therefore their effectiveness. This has been amply demonstrated in the field of non-proliferation, where the US’s desire for vertical

(2004). Tim Grieve, *Above the Law* (Salon.com);
<http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2004/04/28/combatants/index.htm> (12 April, 2006)

⁵⁷ Ruggie, ‘American Exceptionalism, Exemptionalism and Global Governance.’ p. 19

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 1 Ruggie describes this exemptionalism as being originally centred in Congress and the states, and their desire to protect the practice of lynching. This agenda has broadened to include ‘capital punishment, abortion, gun control, unfettered property rights and the public role of religion,’ but, of course, ‘trade treaties arouse no concern, as long as they don’t touch on these “social” issues. The global power of transnational corporations is never mentioned’ pp. 20-21, 30.

⁵⁹ Rice, *Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service*.

proliferation for itself has significantly undermined its efforts at horizontal non-proliferation.⁶⁰

The strategy is not only self-defeating. At the same time it undermines the foundations of the international system, in terms of international law, institutions and the norms and goodwill that uphold them. If the US is not going to play by the rules, why should anyone else? More fundamentally, Bush Administration policy undermines the most basic principle of the post-WWII system, that of the right to national self-determination.

ASSESSMENTS

It is important to stress how both sides are defining themselves against the other. The conflict is constitutional. This fits with an evolutionary approach to IR, in which such conflicts over sources of legitimacy serve to delineate and differentiate manifestations of collective identity. Here is the heart of the difficulty faced by US strategists in those periods when the US was dominant, and had opportunities for world-building, but there was no significant, well-defined threat.⁶¹ This was particularly apparent in the period after the Cold War and before September 11, and explains the eagerness with which US policy-makers leapt on that event.

In other words, the threat defines and galvanises opposition to it. Misunderstanding this leads to the great flaw in US grand strategy in the Long War. While policy-makers saw that they could utilise a mythologised September 11 as an organising principle and as a defining vision, they failed to see the same mechanism at work in their opponents, and concluded that they must robustly confront and attack Caliphists in order to destroy them. An evolutionary approach to IR would lead to the conclusion that this strategy merely serves to more clearly define, unify and mobilise those enemies of the US, and of the secular world order.

⁶⁰ Karin von Stokirch, 'The Role of Legitimacy in Non-Proliferation Policy: A Critique of the Bush Administration' in *Legitimation and the State*, eds. Graham Young and Graham Maddox (Ardialde: Cardoorair Press, 2005).

⁶¹ John Gerard Ruggie, 'The Past as Prologue? Interests, Identity and American Foreign Policy,' *International Security* 21 (4) (1997): 89-125 at 92.

In this context it is worth remembering the Taoist strategist Sun Tzu's thoughts on form.

Military formation is like water ... avoid the full and attack the empty ... So a military force has no constant formation, water has no constant shape: the ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the enemy is called genius.⁶²

On a geopolitical level, attacking where the most resistance is to be found simply reinforces and reconstitutes that resistance.

While radical Islamism does pose a credible, medium-term geo-strategic threat to the system of states, as we have seen, it cannot be said to be immediate. One reason is because the stepping stone to realisation of a global agenda, namely the takeover of a state by fair means or foul, has the effect of immediately investing the new incumbents with a stake in the system. The dreamt-of re-establishment of the Caliphate might provide a new basis of state legitimacy, and therefore a new system. However, steps along the way to realising such a dream must include the takeover of existing states, and this merely anoints a new player in the system, it does not transform the system itself. Even if this new player stands in opposition to the basis of the larger system, it has no real choice but to work within it. If state takeover is achieved through the ballot-box, then the phenomenon is likely to be even more pronounced, since the resulting legitimisation will buy the leaders an even greater stake in the *status quo*. This seems increasingly likely, partly as a result of idealist US foreign policy.

Terrorism is one means of dealing oneself a place in the established political process. Even if this is not its initial aim, the most effective method of turning such movements from violence has been to deliver them such a seat, by one means or another. Hizbollah is an example. Both Hizbollah and Hamas, aside from their terrorist activities, have provided social services – health clinics, schools, etc – to the

⁶² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988). pp. 112-113

extent that in some areas they have effectively taken over the functions of the state.⁶³ They have then translated the resultant *de facto* increase in legitimacy into electoral clout. It remains to be seen if this newfound imprimatur will blunt the determination to destroy the state of Israel but, even if it does not, that is a conflict about who should be a member of the system, not necessarily a rejection of the system itself. There is a more general strategic agenda involving keeping the US and its allies heavily engaged militarily in Iraq and elsewhere in Central Asia and the Middle East in order that the eventual withdrawal be disorderly and complete, as happened in Vietnam. This is an achievable goal, and would have a profound effect on the international geo-political situation. It could theoretically, however, be accommodated into the larger institutional framework of the nationalist state system, as was Vietnam. The larger agenda of dismantling the Westernised global state system itself may well, like Stalin's Socialism in One Country, give way to a more realistic strategic analysis.

The challenge from US supremacists is far more subtle, involving a slippage of meanings such that “the desires of the international community” can often be translated as “the pleasure of the President”. That the US sees management of Middle Eastern political and strategic affairs as an integral part of its bailiwick is clear evidence that it no longer holds to even an ostensible doctrine of non-intervention or self-determination.⁶⁴

Thus, taking into consideration the vastness of US influence and the ingrained nature of this kind of thinking, the challenge from the US to the international system has to be seen as both present and clearer than that posed by radical Islam. This conclusion is reinforced by the recent release of the US Department of Defence's Quadrennial Review Report.⁶⁵ In this document the US is described as being ‘engaged in a long war’ with a global network of ‘violent extremists’⁶⁶ who seek weapons of mass destruction. It goes on to describe the redeployment of its warmaking capabilities, allowing its forces to ‘surge quickly to trouble spots across the globe’,⁶⁷ presumably to inflict violence. The report does not emphasise the US's own arsenal of deployed

⁶³ Knudsen, "Political Islam in the Middle East." pp. 7-9

⁶⁴ Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* Especially pp. 11-12

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.v

⁶⁷ Ibid.

nuclear weapons. As for extremism, I have demonstrated that the Bush Administration's intention is to reshape the foundations upon which states are permitted to become, and continue as, states. The defence report itself has a section entitled, "*Shaping the Choices of Countries at Strategic Crossroads*". In other words, the US quite explicitly claims the right to shape the institutional environment in which polities constitute themselves.

CONCLUSION

Nationalists seek recognition of the claim to statehood by the international community, on grounds of self-determination of "the people". The world system since WWII has been based, in principle, on this system of legitimation. Caliphists do not recognise the greater world system's legitimacy, nor seek its blessing. The world that is not the 'Umma is Jahiliyya, and is to be conquered, not appealed to for recognition. Similarly, the US-supremacists in the Bush Administration seek recognition from other states, not as an equal, but as the supreme arbiter of the basic arrangements of the domestic politics of states. Both of these positions are a direct challenge to the system in its present form.

We can see that this challenge revolves around sources of affirmation and legitimation. Caliphists affirm their collective identity through their allegiance to their interpretation of Islam. They seek formal institutional expression of this identity in the form a state whose legitimacy is recognised by Allah through the Caliph. US-supremacists affirm their collective identity by reassuring themselves of the superiority of their political arrangements. Both of these mechanisms serve to formally constitute and reconstitute informal institutions of identity. The attempt to remap formal institutions to suit these particular conceptions of collective identity poses a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the international community of states.

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