

1

Two Superpowers: The United States and World Public Opinion

In the months before the bombing of Iraq, while the leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom were piecing together their justification for war, public opinion around the world rose up against them. The media said that war was inevitable, but on February 15, 2003, people from Melbourne to Milan and from Vancouver to Tokyo took their protests to the streets. Some 15 million people marched — the largest mobilization of civil society in history to oppose a war before it began.

As I read the comment quoted above, I wondered if the *New York Times* was aware that we are at the beginning of a global social revolution. This revolution is the rise of civil society, bringing conscience to guide the behavior of governments and financial institutions.

For over 20 years I have spent every spare minute working on nuclear disarmament, and I have been watching the parallel growth of militarism and civil society. One force is moving us toward destruction, the other toward peace. In the 1980s, at the same time that nuclear arsenals

were increasing astronomically, the active involvement of people on both sides of the Iron Curtain was growing at an equal rate. People were not just opposing the bomb; they were fighting pollution, human

The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.

— Patrick E. Tyler, *New York Times*, February 17, 2003

rights violations, corruption, and violence against women.

The growth of civil society is a response to the failure of governments, both capitalist and communist, to address the concerns of humanity. Now that the communist model has been discredited, we can see more clearly democracy's vulnerability to corruption, as well as the shortcomings of the free market economy. The new superpower is more than just public opinion; it is public engagement in decision making.

This idea of two superpowers captures the essence of our current situation: one power is based on military domination and control of people by force; the other power is based on cooperation and the rule of law. The future is far from clear. The second superpower will flourish only if the huge number of people who want an end to violence, terror, and war continue to demand to be heard.

Civil society includes organizations as well as individuals who are acting to bring the values and conscience of humanity to the global issues we face. Women, youth, indigenous peoples, trade unions, faith groups, and academics are some of the diverse voices of civil society.

All three pillars of society — government, economy, and culture — are essential and must interact to benefit society, but one sector must not take over the role of another.¹ Throughout history, people — alone and in groups — have



DAVID SILVER

Anti-war demonstration in Seattle, USA.

INTRODUCTION

- CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation):
www.civicus.org
- UBUNTU (World Forum of Civil Society Networks):
www.ubuntu.org

constrained the attempts by rulers and the wealthy to assume unbridled power. Today there is an imbalance because governments and huge multinational corporations have become enmeshed. The result is that fundamental needs of society are not being met — especially the need to ensure a sustainable environment.

Furthermore, the disproportionate influence of militarization is distorting democracy. The military-industrial lobby influences decision makers to choose and fund military solutions to conflict instead of diplomatic alternatives. They see the military as the only way to combat terrorism. In fact, precise intelligence and police actions to arrest and charge terrorists are more effective ways to protect the public than military attacks that affect whole populations. Police actions must comply with laws that protect the innocent from arbitrary arrest or injury resulting from mistaken identity.

Military actions do not. The Carnegie Commission reports that today, for every soldier who dies in war, ten civilians die, about half of them children.² Targeting the innocent is now a deliberate strategy, whether the attack is carried out by the state or by a terrorist, and whether people are killed by a suicide bomber or by a bomb dropped from 35,000 feet, they are just as dead.

Civil society calls for a different response to terrorism, one that applies the dictum of medicine: “Above all, do no harm.” Ordinary people recognize that the barbarity of modern warfare is

Civil Society Values

- Human security above national security
- Compassion above profit
- Environmental restoration
- Human rights
- Participatory democracy
- International law
- Nonviolent conflict resolution
- Social justice
- Equity for the disadvantaged

not acceptable. That is why millions of people hit the streets in 2003.

The stories of civil society are rarely on the front pages, but they inspire actions by others, and their stories are spread in vast networks worldwide. Some of them are in this book.



Anti-war demonstrations in London, UK.

2 Two Possible Futures

We are at a crossroads and must choose one of two paths into the future. On one path we follow the law of force, which means might makes right. On the other path we follow the force of law, which means we agree to comply with laws we have developed jointly that apply to all nations.

Consequences of the Law of Force

The law of force threatens the death penalty for all because there are enough nuclear weapons to kill everyone on Earth many times over. The law of force inspires terrorists to take desperate action because they see no alternative to bring about change.

The law of force is often used by unscrupulous leaders who seek to gain personal power and

wealth by inciting others to fight, often using money-laundering schemes to buy weapons with funds from the illegal drug or diamond trades.

War brings injuries, death, and economic and social disruption that plunges both winners and losers into poverty. Refugees flee their homeland and

The most significant democratic transformations in our lifetime, from South Africa to the break up of the Soviet Union and its gulag, were essentially peaceful transformations led by citizens of those nations given courage by international solidarity, but making change from the bottom up. Brave advocates faced violence, and many died. But in the end, these revolutions overwhelmed repressive governments not by the force of arms, not by outside intervention, but by the amassed power of people and ideas.

— Gara La Marche, Open Society Institute

bring stress to adjoining countries that can ill afford more demands on their resources. Military conflicts increase domestic violence, rape, and the spread of disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

War devastates the natural environment and often contaminates it with radioactive waste, chemical pollutants, and landmines left behind after the end of hostilities. The use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions is just the most recent example of weaponry that leaves long-lasting human and environmental devastation.

The trauma of war is suffered by the victorious forces as well as by the defeated. Large numbers of US troops have returned from the Gulf Wars with lifelong severe disabilities, post-traumatic stress disorder, or Gulf War Syndrome. They suffer high rates of depression, alcoholism, and suicide.

Consequences of the Force of Law

The force of law, on the other hand, means building a world based on cooperation, with support for treaties and international law, the UN, the Declaration of Human Rights, and international norms of behavior. It means a world where all have a right to participate fully in civic life and governance; where women and minorities can vote and run for office; where everyone has a right to education, health care, shelter, and work; and where parents can put their children to bed at night without fearing an attack.



CERRI HAINES

UNICEF poster warning of danger of unexploded ordnance in Iraq.

INTRODUCTION

The force of law is designed to apply evenly to all states and all people. With the recent establishment of the International Criminal Court (see Solution 78), leaders who commit war crimes or crimes against humanity can now be held personally accountable to the law.

The nonviolent resolution of conflict is possible through the rule of law because we have expertise and skills that were just emerging a decade ago. We know how to recognize the early signs of an escalation of conflict in time to stop it. We know more about the root causes of war and terrorism than ever before, and we know many strategies that can successfully prevent them.

We also know much more about the resolution of conflict. In Northern Ireland, after

several previous agreements had broken down, the governments of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom acknowledged that those who were at the table were not those who were fighting. At that point they chose to include the political wing of the Irish Republican Army in the negotiations, and real changes began to occur. The IRA gave up its armed struggle, and in 2005 it turned over its massive arsenal for destruction under the supervision of international weapons inspectors.

The world has learned much from the mistakes of the past, and civil society has also learned from nonviolent successes over many years. We are inspired to continue our work because we know what is needed and what is at stake.

- Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict: www.ccpdc.org
- Institute for Energy and Environmental Research: www.ieer.org
- Oxford Research Group: www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
- Transcend: www.transcend.org

The World of Violence

Domination by force
Dictatorships tolerated
Huge military budgets
Male-dominated societies
Competition
Win-lose philosophy
Large gap between rich and poor
Racism and sexism common
Injustice tolerated on religious, racial, or ethnic grounds
Disregard for treaties and international law
Social and environmental concerns trumped by military
Social services sacrificed for military budget
Punitive justice system with many in prison
People committed to defeating "the enemy"

The World We Want

Cooperation and collaboration
Elected, accountable governments
Small military budget or none
Gender partnership society
Minimal competition
Win-win philosophy
Large middle class, little inequity
Tolerance of diversity
Injustice not tolerated
Support for UN and international law
Social and environmental concerns given high priority
Social safety net
Restorative justice and rehabilitation of prisoners
People committed to peace and justice