Does the U.S. Face a Future of Never-ending Subnational & Transnational Violence?

Thomas P.M. Barnett

May 2004

Does the U.S. Face a Future of Never-ending Subnational & Transnational Violence?

Thomas P.M. Barnett

May 2004

Introduction/Executive Summary

The short answer is yes. But the more important answers are that:

1) This future is worth pursuing because it represents genuine historical progress in the de-escalation of mass violence
2) This problem-set is boundable and easily described as a grand historical arc of ever-retreating resistance to the spread of the global economy, and
3) The sequencing of the regional tasks involved is of our own choosing.

But to achieve the tasks implied in this approach will mean that the United States must likewise forge three important new rule sets:

1) Internally, the U.S. must rebalance its own force to reflect the new focus on operations other than the now classic short, highly technological "effects-based" war meant to take down a regime and its military;
2) Externally, the U.S. must recast its national security strategy to reflect the overriding goal of extending globalization, or the connectivity associated with the global economy, thus abandoning a balance-of-power mentality vis-à-vis other putative peer or near-peer competitors in the military sphere (not the economic); and
3) Within the community of advanced nations, the U.S. must work to establish an A-to-Z rule set (e.g., international organizations with generally recognized procedures) for the managing of politically bankrupt states, i.e., those that are utterly corrupt or suffering some other crisis of governance.

The sequencing of these new rule sets is of great importance. The United States must first demonstrate a commitment to seeding a "peace-waging" force within its ranks that may ultimately constitute a main instrument of power projection across those regions logically targeted in a Global War on Terrorism. With that commitment demonstrated, the U.S. should subsequently enjoy greater success in attracting coalition partners for the "back half" (post-conflict) nation-building efforts associated with otherwise successful military interventions involving regime change. Once that full-spectrum capacity is demonstrated, the global community will be able to move in the direction of enunciating the logical global rule set describing how politically-bankrupt states may be successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated into the global economy.

What that sequencing argument really says is that it all begins with the Defense Department generating the required institutional capacity for "peace-waging" that it already possesses for warfighting. Absent that effort, the political leadership may be greatly constrained in its ability to forge the new security alliances required to successfully contain and ultimately shrink the sources of mass subnational and transnational violence in the global community. Without those alliances coming into being, the system as a whole will remain handicapped in its ability to reduce the number of political bankrupt states, and this negative status quo will ultimately settle into a sort of "civilizational apartheid" whereby the frontiers of the global economy demarcate—in a lasting fashion—the divide between the "connected" regions and those areas that remain fundamentally "disconnected" from globalization's advance.

The Historical De-Escalation of Mass Violence

The post-Cold War era has witnessed an amazing "downshifting" of the source of threats to global stability. In this short span of history, the world has moved from an era in which global nuclear war was the dominant threat, through a transitional era in which it seemed that regional rogues would become the primary source of system instability, to one in which it is increasingly recognized that transnational or non-state actors will

constitute the main source of violence --- sometimes of a mass nature --- that has the capacity to perturb, even in a significant fashion, the functioning of the global economy. In effect, America's definition of the threat has de-escalated from an "evil empire" to "evil regimes" to "evil actors."

Today, in the Global War on Terror, the United States faces the fundamental prospect of waging wars on individuals—not states and their armies, nor grand security alliances and whatever "civilization" they might represent. Consider the major military interventions the U.S. has made since 1989, the pivotal year in which the Soviet bloc began to unravel:

- In the Panama intervention, the U.S. went in after just one man—Manuel Noriega

- In Somalia, U.S. attention effectively settled on the disruptive actions of the so-called warlords—Mohammed Farah Aideed in particular

- In the former Republic of Yugoslavia, the Serbian regime's hostile actions were effectively ended with the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic and his ruling clan

- Going into Afghanistan, our targets focused overwhelmingly on the ruling Taliban leadership and that of al Qaeda

- In the takedown of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, the main goal of U.S. forces was to capture and/or kill a "deck of cards"—or roughly 50 senior members of the governing elite.

In none of these interventions did the United States or the associated multinational coalition declare war on the nation in question, but merely its senior leadership—or the bad actors embedded within the regime targeted for change. Nor, in any of these instances did the United States military face sustained and/or effective resistance from conventional military forces, either because no such resistance was possible on the part of the extant opposition forces or because the security situation featured no such organized

force. To the extent that U.S.-led military coalitions have faced failure in any of these interventions, the failures have been concentrated overwhelmingly in the post-conflict phase of the intervention—namely, the reconstruction or nation-building effort that inevitably follows any combat intervention.

The problems that the U.S. military currently faces in successfully pursuing a Global War on Terrorism are therefore logically located at the level of "bad actors," and not at the level of inter-state war (which has effectively disappeared across the post-Cold War era) or system-level war (to wit, the U.S. no longer faces an effective military threat from another great power, but merely the potential threat from some putative downstream "near-peer competitor"). In effect, the challenges we face today in taking on the task of increasing global stability reflect the immense success the U.S. has had in eliminating past sources (real or potential) for mass violence throughout the world. Other system-level powers no longer exist to threaten global peace, as the U.S. remains the world's sole military superpower and the stability of nuclear balances among the world's advanced nations is essentially unquestioned (because if it were, where are the new efforts to negotiate strategic arms control among these countries?). With state-on-state wars effectively disappearing, in large part thanks to the demonstrated willingness of U.S.-led coalitions to reverse any regional hegemon's attempt to expand through military conquest, the locus of the most salient threats to global stability are logically found at the level of individual actors, whether they are already embedded within existing failed states or seek to capture political control of such a state.

The Ever-Retreating Resistance to the Spread of the Global Economy—a Boundable Problem Set

The definition of "state failure" needs to be reflect the fundamental struggle of the age: a state is "failing" if it either cannot attract or build itself the connectivity associated with globalization's progressive advance or if it essentially seeks to retard or deny the development of such connectivity out of desire to maintain strict political control over its population. The former situation reflects the usual definition of "state failure," meaning the regime in question cannot generate sufficient stability (from physical all the way up to

financial) within its borders to allow for effective economic transactions with the outside world, whereas the latter reflects the willful pursuit of some level of disconnectedness from the outside world (and typically the "corrupt" influences it imposes) as a method of maintaining authoritarian rule.

Terrorist networks are likely to seek out the most disconnected/failed states in order to set up bases for a variety of reasons:

- If the regime in question lacks control over its own borders or territory, the country offers the potential for sanctuary (e.g., Pakistan, Afghanistan still)

- If the country in question is experiencing civil strife, it offers the potential for recruitment and regime change leading to new political leadership that can be co-opted for cooperation with and support to the terrorists (this situation may be reappearing in Sudan, and could appear in more sub-Saharan African states in coming years).

- If the regime in question is solidly in power and exercises authoritarian control over its population, it often offers opportunity—sometimes on a cash and carry basis and sometimes as a result of genuine ideological affinity—for specific avenues of cooperation/support (e.g., Liberia's Charles Taylor offering sanctuary in return for bribes, the Iranian government's systematic support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia's back-door attempts to bribe terrorists to engage in jihad anywhere other than in Saudi Arabia).

But the main reason why we can associate—in a strategic sense—failed states (whether they oversee chaotic internal conditions or engage in repressive rule) with the more general threats represented by global terrorism is because terrorism is—like all politics (recalling Tip O'Neill's description)—derived from the local situation, not the global situation. The global driver in the current era of transnational terrorism is not America's perceived role as "imperial hegemon," nor its continued support for the state of Israel, but

rather the historical reality of globalization's progressive advance into traditional Islamic societies. There, people exist who are motivated to fight this penetration in the manner of all-out war they are capable of—essentially terrorist warfare, with its bombing attacks on civilians, including suicide attacks.

Viewed in this manner, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda are just the latest version of an exclusionary/rejectionist ideology that demands from its members that they do everything within their power to halt the spread of the "corrupt" capitalist world economy. By doing so, they would successfully break off from that system's creeping embrace some portion of humanity that they, in the manner proscribed by their ideology, believe they have "liberated" and "preserved." They would do this through a combination of repressive internal political controls (police state), strict separation in terms of political boundaries (bloc-versus-bloc demarcations), and a generally hostile security stance vis-à-vis the outside world in general, but specifically against the most powerful military power within that "corrupt" capitalist world-system (Britain for Lenin and the Bolsheviks' network, the United States for bin Laden and the al Qaeda network).

Understanding that the current era's Global War on Terrorism is nothing more than the continuation of a long historical arc associated with the expansion of the functioning core of the global economy (traditionally defined by the market economy, free expression, and the opportunities they entail) is crucial to determining both the length of the strategic struggle ahead, as well as its likely pathways.

So far, we have seen the anti-capitalist forces in the world progressively retreat across history:

- Having failed to hijack Germany with a Communist insurrection during and just after the first World War, Lenin and the Bolsheviks initially retreated to a pre-capitalist environment in order to successfully break off a nation (Russia) from the capitalist world system (though 10 years later they began to build an industrial system).

- Other Communist successes followed historically, other than those generated by the Soviet Union's military successes in World War II (i.e., the conquering and subjugation of Eastern Europe), and were based on even further retreats back into the past—namely, Mao's peasant-based revolutions (and all the variants that followed in various Third World locales, with varying levels of success),

- The peak of this retreat, as far as the Communists were concerned, was seen in the Soviet Union's shift to support of "Countries of Socialist Orientation" following the Cuban missile crisis. In effect, the Communists experimented with the notion that future successes were to be had in breaking societies off from the capitalist world system and would involve the world's poorest and most economically backward states. This experiment failed miserably, and with it, the grand historical retreat of the Communists' influence began in the early 1980s, abetted by the rise of internal reformist leaderships in both the Soviet Union and China.

- With the end of the Cold War, strategic thinkers in the West tended to assume that no coherent resistance to the then-rapidly enlarging market world order would emerge again—or the notion voiced by Francis Fukuyama of an "end of history." In retrospect, this was a fundamental misreading of history. History was simply resuming after the Communist planned-economy interlude, with the locus of violent resistance to the global economy's spread shifting to the traditional cultures of the Middle East.

- To the extent the United States and its allies succeed in connecting the Middle East to the global economy beyond the slim bond currently offered by the energy trade (which results in wealth for elites but no broad economic development), those elements committed to violent resistance against the spread of the "corrupt," Western-derived global economy (the threat of "Westoxification") may yet again retreat into the past by targeting ever-more pre-globalized societies as their next

venues for revolution/jihad. In other words, as we succeed in the Middle East, we may be setting ourselves up for the next historical round in sub-Saharan Africa.

This gets us to the question of the historical sequencing of the tasks that lie ahead—namely, in what sequence are those regions currently not well-connected to the global economy to be integrated into the larger, more stable whole. It is in this grand historical process that we might find the solution to subnational and transnational violence, as well as shifting the battle lines in the Global War on Terrorism.

Scenario Pathways for Ffuture Integration of Ddisconnected Regions into the Global Eeconomy

Four broad regions can be currently identified as suffering a disproportional lack of broad technological, social, economic and political connectivity to the global economy. As such, it is within these regions that all of the internal and terrorist violence since the end of the Cold War can be located, as well as more than 90 percent of U.S. military interventions over the same time period (for details on this mapping of instability and "disconnectedness" across the world, see my *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 2004). These four regions can be loosely described as Southwest Asia/Greater Middle East, Asia Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean Rim/ Central America/ northern Andes region.

Stipulating that the current administration's focus on generating a "big bang" of political change in the Greater Middle East will mean that efforts by the United States to integrate these disconnected regions will begin—in a sequential fashion—with that region, then six alternative scenario pathways can be described (listed below in the chart):

ORDER OF LIKELIHOOD	INITIAL FOCUS	SECONDARY EFFORT	TERTIARY EFFORT	FINAL EFFORT	SHORTHAND DESCRIPTION
1	Greater Middle East	Asia Pacific	Caribbean Rim	Sub-Saharan Africa	Rogue State Focus
2	Greater Middle East	Asia Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	Caribbean Rim	Islamic Arc Focus
3	Greater Middle East	Sub-Saharan Africa	Asia Pacific	Caribbean Rim	Failed State Focus
4	Greater Middle East	Caribbean Rim	Asia Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	Homeland Defense Focus
5	Greater Middle East	Sub-Saharan Africa	Asia Pacific	Caribbean Rim	Natural Resources Focus
6	Greater Middle East	Caribbean Rim	Sub-Saharan Africa	Asia Pacific	Humanitarian Aid Focus

Discussing each of those six scenarios in turn, in order of judged likelihood, and understanding that some U.S. effort will be made at all times across all four regions, but likewise realizing that a sense of successful sequencing is necessary if political support for such interventions is to be maintained among the public (i.e., avoiding a sense of accumulated responsibilities beyond our national capacity to manage):

1. **Rogue State Focus**: In this scenario, the United States focuses on dealing with the so-called "axis of evil" regimes, a process that began with Iraq and would subsequently focus on Iran and North Korea.

    - Stipulating a strong U.S. focus on Iran in conjunction with the ongoing effort in pacifying and rehabilitating post-Saddam Iraq, the question would then be, at what point does the situation in the Persian Gulf permit a new focus on regime change in North Korea and a ramping up of efforts across Southeast

Asia as a whole to deal with the threat of transnational terrorism and ideologically-inspired insurgencies there?

- Beyond the East Asia/Pacific region, the next choice for significant interventions designed to disable dangerous, rogue-like situations would logically be the long-running failed state of Colombia.
- In this scenario, U.S. attention would turn to Africa last, primarily because of the lack of any rogue regimes there capable of mounting even indirect threats to either the United States' homeland or the functioning of the global economy.

The advantage of this approach is that by moving fastest against the existing rogue regimes, strong precedents would be set with regard to future potential regimes of that sort. The major disadvantage would be the global community's lack of an A-to-Z rule set on how best to handle a politically-bankrupt regime, meaning the system's major powers could experience significant divergence of opinion regarding the utility of preemptively disabling these regimes, in large part because of the huge military and nation-building resources that would be entailed while the other advanced countries struggle with stagnant economies and aging populations.

2. **Islamic Arc Focus:** A focus on integrating the Islamic world as a whole would yield a sequence beginning with the Greater Middle East, and then an eastward shift toward the major Islamic populations of South and Southeast Asia.
   - Africa would follow next, given the slow but steady penetration by Islam in societies there that has been going on since around 1100 (see Ibn Khaldun).
   - The Caribbean Rim region, overwhelmingly Christian in religious preference, would constitute the final effort in this historical pathway if it were necessary.

   The advantage of this approach is that it speaks most directly to the fears of major powers the U.S. desires as allies in a Global War on Terrorism (Europe, Russia, India, China), as all these political entities have their own concerns about being

able to integrate Islamic sub-populations. The major disadvantage is obvious: a clash of civilizations approach carries, among other things, heavy racial overtones, which would make political support at home in the U.S. hard to maintain, thus raising the attraction for many people of accepting the offer of "civilization apartheid" from Islamic radicals, that is, containing them and walling them off.

3. **Failed State Focus**: Following a focus on the Greater Middle East, which would last at least through the stabilization and functioning of a Palestinian state:

   - This pathway would wind next through Africa—ground zero for failed states in general.
   - Beyond Africa, arguments can be made for a subsequent focus on Asia Pacific rather than the Caribbean Rim on the basis that state failure in the former has greater potential negative impact on the global economy than that in the latter (which tends to generate economic refugees migrating toward the U.S.—not itself a problem and in many ways an economic benefit).

   The major advantage of this pathway is that it focuses on the most disconnected regions first and foremost (Middle East and Africa), thereby achieving the greatest good in terms of advancing globalization most quickly to those regions most in need of broader economic connectivity. The major disadvantage is that we tackle the toughest nuts to crack first, raising the question of America's staying power in this long-term effort, not to mention that of other advanced countries who may not see much economic gain in pursuing this pathway beyond securing the flow of energy coming out of the Persian Gulf.

4. **Homeland Security Focus:** Following the initial effort to deal with Middle East-inspired transnational terrorism:

- This pathway shifts focus to the Caribbean Rim and the dangers presented by instabilities closest to our borders. This pathway would be driven, therefore, by internal perceptions derived from the inflow of Latinos, Jamaicans, and Haitians into the U.S. population, and the need to maintain America's internal coherence against the "threat" Sam Huntington thinks is posed by multiculturalism.
- Asia Pacific would form the tertiary focus here, simply because, after those coming from our own hemisphere, Asians will constitute the fastest-growing minority in the U.S. in coming decades.
- Africa would therefore be stuck in last place in this historical pathway.

The major advantage to this approach is the possibility of maintaining popular support for the security effort over time. The major disadvantage is the flip side: America is perceived as isolationist and overwhelmingly concerned with its national defense as opposed to international stability in general. (This option is included simply for logical sequence. As Herman Kahn once said, you have to include the jokes in a sequence if you want to identify the real options.)

5. **Natural Resources Focus:** This pathway basically focuses on access to energy, beginning with the Greater Middle East:

- And then shifting to Africa and the additional energy sources that are being developed there for us.
- The Caribbean Rim would constitute the tertiary focus,
- With Asia Pacific receiving the least attention.

In many ways, this pathway could be described as the new colonialism whereby the functioning parts of the global economy (West plus East) fundamentally focus on bringing order first and foremost to those regions that possess crucial raw materials for the growth of the global economy. The major advantage here is the

economic logic, whereas the major disadvantage is the popular cynicism such an approach would engender.

6. **Humanitarian Aid Focus:** this last scenario sees the United States focusing on humanitarian aid efforts following its successful pacification of the Middle East. This would translate into a secondary focus on the Caribbean Rim (due simply to proximity and a larger domestic constituency pushing for such aid) and a tertiary focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Asia Pacific would receive the least focus because of the better economic development situation there. The major advantage here would be the logic of focusing on the underlying conditions that give rise to subnational violence (societies in economic distress), and the major disadvantage would probably be the difficulty of achieving discernible progress except over a very long term.

Major Rule Set Changes Required to Deal Effectively With All Potential Pathways

The first and most obvious rule-set change must occur within the Defense Department itself: moving off the paradigm of the near-peer competitor as a force-sizing principle. So long as the Pentagon views the Global War on Terror or interventions in internal conflicts as "lesser included," sufficient resources would not be devoted to those capabilities within the military required to deal with the operational challenges of eradicating the local, root causes of subnational and transnational violence. In effect, planning for war against a near-peer competitor must be demoted to the position of a hedging strategy, possibly requiring no more than one-third of the investment in R&D and procurement the U.S. makes, with the bulk of such investment prioritized to the areas of small-scale contingency warfighting and long-term nation-building and peace-keeping roles and missions---including the shift of DOD funds to other agencies.

Unless the U.S. military effectively "seeds" the "back half" force designed to win the peace, having the world's preeminent "first half," or war-winning force yields little strategic advantage over our enemies in this Global War on Terrorism. Moreover, until

the United States demonstrates the commitment to nation-building and peace-keeping following any major combat intervention overseas, it will not attract the coalition partners who can augment U.S. forces with the numbers of ground troops required to follow through on any effort for nation-building.

Not having that "back half" capability sufficiently in place restricts the ability of U.S. political leaders to argue the utility of preemptive war for regime change and preemptive war within the larger context of the Global War on Terrorism, primarily because prospective coalition partners will not believe our declared intention of successfully concluding the intervention by making the long-term effort at integrating the successor regime into the global community of states. Instead, our efforts at preemptive war will be viewed as nothing more than "drive-by regime changes" or worse, the geopolitical equivalent of "revenge killings."

The failure to attract sufficient coalition partners for the back-half effort would, over the long run, deny the United States the ability to make ad hoc responses to rogue regimes, with each effort considered unique by the global community, and would not lead over time to an enunciation of an A-to-Z rule set, complete with attendant international organizations to guide the process.

What would such a global A-to-Z rule set look like? I can—in a very cursory fashion—describe it as follows:

1. The existing United Nations Security Council functions primarily as a sort of global "grand jury" that is able to indict parties within the global community for acts of egregious behavior
2. What is needed next in the process is a sort of functioning executive body, made up of the world's advanced nations, to issue effect "warrants" for the arrest of the offending party. This body is logically located within the existing community of the G-8 (or better yet, G-20) states, because not only do these states wield the majority of the world's military power, but their financial

resources are required for the successful implementation of the "back half" effort of nation-building.

3. At that point of agreement among the world's great powers, a U.S.-dominated warfighting coalition engages in whatever variation of force-on-force effort is required, apprehending the indicted elements within the targeted battlespace.
4. Following the cessation of major hostilities, a more balanced international security force, including U.S. constabulary units, could replace the U.S.-dominated warfighting force in-theater.
5. Once sufficient security was generated, peace-keeping and nation-building efforts would ensue under the auspices of an internationally recognized organization whose constitutional make-up and procedural approach is roughly equivalent to that of the International Monetary Fund in the rescue of economically-strapped states.
6. The final step in the process would be the legal processing of those actors identified in the original indictments within whatever specific procedures might be established by the International Criminal Court.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that subnational and transnational violence will represent the fundamental focus of U.S. national security efforts in the coming decades, but that this development represents tremendous progress in the institution of a global security system within which neither system-level nor state-on-state war remains a viable or widespread threat.

The major obstacle for the U.S. in dealing with this threat is its own inherent tendency—through the mechanisms of its long-range national security planning—to require that a worst-case scenario involving another great power serve as the "greater inclusive" force-sizing principle. Until the U.S. national security establishment moves from this outdated paradigm of focusing on the greatest hypothetical threat and toward a more purely capabilities-based planning paradigm focused on managing that strategic environment as a whole, the tasks associated with subnational and transnational threats arising from the

Global War on Terrorism will continue to be viewed—both programmatically and politically—as an additional or cumulative burden that may then be regarded as simply too great to bear over the long run.

In reality, such a judgment is completely unwarranted, because it reflects an institutional unwillingness by U.S. administrations to persuade the military establishment and its immediate supporters to recognize and take advantage of this country's past overwhelming successes in reducing the threat of system-level war and the incidence of state-on-state war. This inability to exploit past successes will continue to deny us future ones so long as the U.S. national security establishment subscribes to the view that the present global security situation is one of "chaos" and “uncertainty,” without any specifics, and thus cannot be remedied by any long-term pursuit of a grand strategy designed to generate a successful conclusion to the Global War on Terrorism.