

Pathways to a Secure World: Taking Notice of Hope

William Morris, Secretary General of The Next Century Foundation, speaking in Caux, Switzerland, to the 'Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy' conference, 17 July 2007

The Post 9/11 World

The Modern Era lasted 200 years from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. We live today in a postmodern world. A world that has been utterly and seminally changed by the attack on the World Trade Centre on 11th September 2001 and by the Western World's reaction to that attack.

I would go further. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a signal event that re-empowered that arcane doctrine, the dream of a world without frontiers, a world without fear, a world in which we could all sleep easy in our beds.

9/11 turned that dream into a nightmare.

9/11 gave us the mechanism to re-create a bipolar world and we grasped the nettle eagerly, perhaps because it was a mechanism with which we were familiar. Post 9/11 the fears of the parents have been visited on the children. And now, both we and our children have grown to relish our new enemy. The World of Islam has become the enemy of the hegemonic West.

This makes life so easy for us. We reinforce and bolster this worldview with the tools at hand: rampant xenophobia and its bedfellow fear. In this we are, as in all wars whether nascent or full-blown, aided and abetted by the media.

The Cogent Danger of the Status Quo

Let us focus on the Middle East.

Both for the Arab World and for the World at large there is no more cogent danger than the persistence of the status quo. Which is, interestingly, that Iran has become the only Mid East Superpower. Not Israel, Not Turkey, Not the USA, But rather Iran.

Remember that awesome brute strength no longer goes to make a superpower. The Anglo-American experience in Iraq has been one of defeat on defeat. Iraq is an arena in which chaos holds sway. To travel Red Zone Iraq regularly, as I do, is to take a calculated risk. Admittedly some areas, such as the Nineveh Plain, have become safer during the past year. Others, like Kirkuk, have become cauldrons of misery as violence has surpassed all rational levels.

Meanwhile, Iran's proxy force, Hezbollah, has defeated the massed armed forces of its neighbor state Israel and has in the process become the heroic movement that all others aspire to emulate. Hezbollah retains a minimum of 15 long-range missiles capable of reaching Tel Aviv (the C.I.A. estimate) and a maximum of 200 (the Iranian figure). The number is irrelevant. It retains enough.

And America is emasculated as it awaits the emergence of a new captain to take the helm. Emasculated after a period in which it has steered a foreign policy with Condoleezza Rice at the helm, arguably the most ineffective Secretary of State in Modern history.

Consequences of the Status Quo – Radical Multiculturalism

All of which begs the question: What is wrong with the status quo?

So let us be clear. The consequence of the status quo is an increase in radical multiculturalism.

The governments of the states of the Middle East face no greater fear. They tremble at the prospect of a militant Arab Street frustrated by the absence of a peace process. Radical Islam is no longer merely a bogymen with which to scare the children; it is a cogent reality.

This is not a religious thing per se. As the Establishment fails to deliver, whether through the absence of security in a failed state like Iraq, or through a failure to meet the aspirations of the people, as in Gaza, so people then seek the old allegiances, the bedrock of mosque and family.

We saw this in former Yugoslavia, post communism, where, if questioned, Christians had no idea who might have been the husband of the Virgin Mary, whilst Moslems were completely unaware of the Five Pillars of Islam. Yet these old quasi-tribal allegiances became important overnight in a largely secular society.

It is the same everywhere. Gaza fifty years ago was not Islamic. They wore bikinis in Gaza fifty years back and the West Bank was the place to find the women in black. Now it's vice versa. And the governments of the Arab World look at the empowerment of Hamas and see the cold harbingers of what may yet become their own doom.

Opportunities for War

The question now becomes how to break the dominion of the status quo. One effective and perhaps less dangerous option is war. War is a poor second cousin to peace but it is, as Von Clausewitz reminds us, a real tool in the armory of the diplomat and war would at least lance the suppurating boil that is the Middle East today.

By which I mean war with Iran.

Prospects for such a war are slim. The government of Iran has sent clear messages to both the Government of the United States and the Government of the State of Israel, that if attacked by one it will only respond with an attack on the party by which it was attacked, not the other. If the US attacks, Iran will attack US interests. If Israel attacks, Iran will attack Israel.

Iran will, in the absence of such an attack, develop a nuclear bomb.

An attack on Iran by the United States would result in an Iranian counter attack on US forces in Iraq and the subsequent immediate and total withdrawal of US forces in Iraq who would not be able to endure the level of attrition involved in that counter attack. That would of itself salve the pride of the Moslem World and result in an abatement of the current helter-skelter slide towards radical extremism. This despite the retribution that would be visited on Iran. The parallel with the Lebanon Summer War is exact.

Opportunities for Peace

However peace is eminently preferable to war. And scarce ever has peace been more tantalizing. It is so close you can almost taste it.

For one thing Israel has an unshakable coalition, united by their common fear of Likud leader Bibi Netanyahu waiting in the wings for another chance at taking the driving seat come the fall of 2008 when a general election becomes inevitable. In the interim, Israel's rump Khadima Party and its Labor Party allies have to prove themselves effective. This they can only do with a peace process. The continuation of the status quo means they too are finished politically.

At the same time, the entire Arab World, arguably for the first time in history, is truly holding out the hand of friendship to the Children of Israel. This is being done in the shape of the reinvigoration of the so-called "Arab Plan" for peace with Israel. And, interestingly, they really do mean it.

Add to this the Hamas victory in Gaza, which means we at last have the possibility, in due course, of an effective Palestinian Government of National Unity. Hamas would have to recognize Israel first, but they might just manage to do that, given the carrot that is the prospect of power. And Hamas are very keen to govern.

That's not to say we should abandon the long view. We should continue to work doggedly toward peace ten years down the line in 2018. But if there's a chance of peace in 2008 – and there is – let's go for it. Carpe Diem every time.

Talk to all, Hope and Listen

So what then is the Next Century Foundation's vision for the pathway to a secure world?

To state the obvious, we believe in a comprehensive peace process, one that delivers peace between Israel and the entire Arab World. A just peace is, of course, undeliverable. This not only because we too often use "justice" as a synonym for retribution but also because there are just too many wounds, too many wrongs.

There's an old Welsh rugby motto. It goes, "Chwarau teg pob amser" which translates as, "Fair play all the time". Fair play is the best the Middle East can now hope for – not justice. And fair play is all that it needs.

To facilitate that we must talk to all, whether they be the commanders of the Hamas Qasam Brigades or the settlers that support Bibi Netanyahu. We must talk to all, and we must listen. A dialogue of the deaf where we both shout at one another may be cathartic, and thus better than nothing, but it is ultimately fruitless.

More than that, we must talk to all, we must hope, and we must listen. Hope is the greatest weapon in the armory of the peacemaker. The Armenians have a semi nary in the Old City of Jerusalem. My wife befriended one of their trainee priests and I asked him to translate the catechism they recite before communion. It is a group confession in which they list every sin from theft to pride and collectively apologize to God. It is a long list. And right up there with the great sins like murder and adultery, smack dab in the middle, is one of the greatest sins of all: Loss of hope. Loss of hope is an indulgence we are never permitted.

The Bright and Morning Star

And what is this bright and morning star, this better world we are all working so hard for? It is a place where love replaces fear.

It is a world without frontiers.

And for me, and I realize that this is profoundly controversial, it is an integrated world.

I do not, for one minute, say that we cannot celebrate our different cultures, and I most certainly reject a worldview of a globalised culture in which the West has dominion.

But essentially I am a child of the sixties.

I remember a Blue Mink pop song. I wouldn't dare attempt to sing it but the words went:

"What we need is a great big melting pot.

"Big enough to hold the world and all it's got.

"Then we mix it for a hundred years or more,

"And churn out coffee colored people by the score."

So here's to a far better world – right quickly.

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See: <http://www.ncfpeace.org/>