

Geopolitics, Globalization and Alternative Regionalisms: Possibilities for Global Peace, Democracy and Social Justice

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“In brief, for the United States, Eurasian geostrategy involves...three grand imperatives...to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep the tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.”

**Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US National Security Advisor
The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy & its Geostrategic Imperatives.**

World Politics and Global Security In Light of 9-11

The horrifying terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Anglo-American led war that followed illustrate some of the new threats to global security in the twenty-first century.¹¹ At the same time, September 11th is a window into the dramatic transformations unleashed by the destabilizing intersection of neoliberal globalization and militarization, in no small part resulting from the Cold War. The Cold War was in many ways a highly militarized form of conflict between the wealthy elites of the global North and poorer regions of the global South. Both superpowers used the conflict to justify limitations on democracy and sovereignty in their spheres of influence (Konrad 1984; Chomsky 1991). The collapse of the Soviet empire and the disintegration of the USSR removed only one part of the Cold War structure. For the US, the Cold War contained both enemies and allies, the latter as semi-sovereign states. The Cold War in fact provided crucial support for US state-corporate power in what amounts to a global US informal empire.

Indeed, as European scholar-activist Mary Kaldor (2002) notes, there has long been a close relationship between the ups and downs of the weapons procurement cycle (not to mention larger economic swings) and a focus on new threats (Kofsky, 1995; Borden, 1984). At issue here is not merely profits but rather the intersection of violence, profits and power as a whole (Lane, 1979). For a healthy military industry allows the US the geopolitical power projection that maintains the security dependency among the vassals, as Brzezinski (1997) notes, in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, while securing US advantage in the global economy by funding high-technology development. Moreover,

this militarized state-corporate nexus at the heart of US policy has given rise to new forms of economic globalization and related processes of militarization.

In fact, trillions of dollars of US federal government borrowing in the 1980s and 1990s went in no small part to finance new military expenditure, providing safe outlets for money capital seeking investment while further stimulating the global capital markets and speculative capital flows that have been a hallmark of contemporary globalization. This consolidated the power of the military-corporate complex and the related Wall Street-Federal Reserve-Treasury-Bretton Woods quartet (Reifer, 2002).² In so doing, the much hoped for peace dividend, not to mention visions of cooperative security and ideas for a global fund for socioeconomic reconstruction, were ruled out.

Such policies instead increased US military power, the debt payments of poor and middle-income countries and the power of speculative capital simultaneously, with especially devastating consequences for the global South (Arrighi, 1991: 51-52; Gowan, 1999). The emergence of these new forms of neoliberal globalization and related forms of militarization pose some of the sharpest challenges for human security today. These range from the Asian financial crisis to the devastation in the Islamic world caused in no small part by IMF and World Bank structural adjustment loans which cut spending on social welfare programs in health and education and rolled back subsidies on basic goods, so as to meet foreign creditors demands for debt repayment (Lubeck & Reifer, forthcoming).³

Marshall Plans from Europe to the Asia-Pacific

Many had hoped the US would embrace the possibilities of a peace dividend and cooperative security in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet empire, the breakup of the USSR and the historic summit between the leaders of North and South Korea in June, 2000. Certainly, some ten years after of the Soviet collapse, there was an immense historic change in US global policy underway, well before 9-11. Yet the Bush administrations vision was not a planned global socioeconomic reconstruction but rather an ambitious new global military strategy.

A comparison of the Marshall Plans (named after the then head of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, Andrew Marshall) currently underway and those of the past is revealing in this regard. The original Marshall Plan was aimed at containing labor and the left within the parameters of an Open Door for US trade and investment, with recovery premised on Western Europe's integration into the US-led NATO military alliance (Hogan, 1987; Pisani, 1991; Rathbun, 1996; Hersh, 1992; Leffler, 1992). Today's neo-Marshall Plan involves no support for socioeconomic reconstruction whatsoever and is instead a call for an epochal shift in US global military planning away from Europe, towards Asia in general and China in particular (The New York Times (NYT), 5/17/01: A1, 8; RAND, 2001). Conscious of the relative shift of wealth and power towards Asia, the US now seeks to use its combination of economic and politico-military influence to increasingly open up the region to US trade and investment, as

Walden Bello (2001a) and Peter Gowan (1999) have shown. The consequences of such a rapid opening were dramatically revealed in the Asian economic crisis (see Bello, 2001a; see also Bhagwati, 2000). In addition, a vast US program to contain China through the beefing up of bilateral and regional military alliances, well underway before 9-11, continues apace.

The neo Marshall Plan, with its emphasis on basing new long-range US arms for the Pacific, has drawn some unusual criticism from high quarters; most significantly, perhaps, from Admiral Dennis C. Blair, head of the US Pacific Command, which last year held some 300 military exercises with some 37 countries in the region (NYT, 5/17/01: A8). While supportive of the shift away from Europe and towards Asia, Admiral Blair was critical of the exaggeration of Chinese military capabilities.

I think we have the tools to keep both air and naval power anywhere we want to in the theater and can for some quite time...If you want to look at serious forces designed to keep the U.S. out of part of the world, look at what the Russians did in the 70's - dozens of submarines, hundreds of long-range bombers, dozens of satellites, lots of practice....That was a serious system which we were going to have a hard time fighting our way through. Nobody in Asia is even close to that.... (NYT, 5/17/01: A1, 8).

Many top security analysts in Asia, Europe and the US fear that treating China as a threat creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, similar to the dynamics of the Cold War (Bello, 1996, 2001a; Achbar, 2000a, b; Forsberg, 2001b; Johnson, 1994). Yet despite intense resistance, particularly in Okinawa, the US will continue, for the foreseeable future, to base roughly 44,000 troops and personnel at nearly 100 locations in Japan with an additional 37,000 troops in South Korea (Weeks & Meconis, 1999:89, 93, 243).

The Anxiety of Separation & US Fears of Alternative Regionalisms

The persistence of Cold War like divisions in East Asia - between Taiwan and China, as well as North and South Korea - together with the lack of regional security mechanisms providing for confidence building measures, transparency and regional disarmament, gives the US a rationale for its shift in global military policy. At the same time, the rise of East Asian and Western European wealth and power have increased US concerns about preventing the rise of a regional hegemon or the evolution of cooperative security agreements that could lessen US influence.

A new RAND report (2001) conducted for the Pentagon and close to administration thinking, gives some insight into US policy concerns. In terms of the US-Japan alliance, the report (2001: 13) notes that the “most fundamental question...is whether Japan will continue to rely on U.S. protection...” The report (2001: 15) goes on to express concern about a rapprochement between China and Japan, arguing this would “*deal a fatal blow to U.S. political and military influence in East Asia*” (emphasis added). What is particularly interesting is that the desire to prevent trading relationships between either Japan and China or Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which might limit US influence was a major factor in the original Cold War thinking in Asia and Europe (Borden, 1984; Leffler, 1992). Thus, particularly worrisome in the present

geopolitical conjuncture, as US officials fear and Asian and European security experts have noted, is the potential lessening of threats which, heretofore, served as a justification the US forces presence in Asia and Europe (Bello, 2001b).

Indeed, the RAND report worries about the growing opposition to US troops stationed abroad and recommends shifting a large portion of US forces to the Philippines, Guam, Southeast Asia and other countries close to Taiwan, possibly Vietnam. The latest agreement of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on cooperation in the so-called war against terrorism, which is replete with new erosions of sovereignty and plans for increased US intervention in the region, is indicative of a growing trend.⁴ Already, some 1,000 US troops have been deployed in the Philippines and the US has decided to resume training and aid for the Indonesian military. US policy, similar to the West's first violent forays into Asia, intends to use military superiority – and the economic benefits that can flow from it - as a way of ensuring that dense regional trade links supplement US violence, profits and power rather than increasing the autonomy of the Asian region.

Moreover, this US move towards Asia and its embrace of Cold War like attitudes has been combined with strident opposition to international agreements. The Bush administration's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, treaties on germ/biological warfare, the ABM and the International Criminal Court (ICC) is all part of its increasingly aggressive unilateralism (WSJ, 7/19/02). The administration's withdrawal from the ABM treaty is designed to facilitate its revived version of Star Wars (recently renamed as "missile defense") (IHT, 7/23/01). In fact, so-called "missile defense" is really part of an offensive strategy that would allow the US to preemptively attack rivals if necessary, while limiting any damage to its own forces which might come from a retaliatory strike. (Steinbruner & Kaufmann, 169-174; Arkin, 7/14/02: M1, 6).

9-11 & the New Geopolitics of the Global System

It is now timely to consider the impact of 9-11 on the global security environment. The attacks of 9-11 brought into central focus the asymmetrical threats long debated by security experts. This first attack on the Continental US since the war of 1812 raises difficult questions about security in the twenty-first century. There is a need to understand the root causes of such security threats and to respond accordingly, garnering as much international cooperation as possible so as to prevent further deadly conflict in general and killing of innocents in particular.

An extensive review of US policy making, which has made its own contribution to the new global security threats, is necessary so as to redirect efforts in this area. For one is hard pressed to see how vast increases in the US military budget, expected to now rise to almost half a trillion dollars annually, will address the increasingly diffuse forms of global violence, chaos and widening inequality now threatening global security (Elworthy & Rogers, 2001; Steinbruner & Kaufmann, 1997; Ellsberg, 1988).

Instead, the concept of “self-defense” and preemption, increasingly being embraced by US elites, is seen by many as a radical challenge to the UN Charters and world stability as a whole (ASIL, 2002; NYT, 6/17/02: A1, 6; Arkin, 7/14/02: M1, 6). The violation of these norms of international relations by the US could exacerbate global instability and chaos in the international system in ways that will likely reduce rather than improve US and global security (AJIL, 2002).

Since 9-11, the US has shifted its strategic focus away somewhat from China and East Asia, towards Central Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, in his recent State of the Union address, Bush drew upon the image of an Axis of Evil, which covered Iraq, Iran and North Korea. The speech strongly signaled US proclivities towards preemptive attack, as evidenced in the ongoing planning for a US invasion of Iraq. Such planning continues despite the risks of enflaming tensions already high from US support for Israel’s illegal military occupation and the deadly cycle of action and reaction in this conflict.⁵

More recently, the Bush administration has approved a new Nuclear Posture Review (DOD, 2001) and Defense Planning Guidance, further enshrining the preemptive strategy as national policy, including the possible use of nuclear weapons (Arkin, 7/14/02: M1, 6). Though it is not widely realized, many of these developments represent the elaboration of plans for preemption, damage limitation and the possible use of nuclear weapons which were in place throughout the Cold War (Stratcom, 1995). Nevertheless, the Bush administration seems to have moved significantly towards extending and institutionalizing these policies in ever more dangerous ways. Most notably, the Bush doctrine of preemption envisions attacking or invading other countries far in advance of any immediate threat of external attack against the US (NYT, 8/27/02: A1, 8). As an editorial in the most recent issue of the *American Journal of International Law* (2002) noted in regards to the newly announced Bush doctrine:

At this point, there is simply no cosmopolitan body of respectable legal opinion that could be invoked to support so broad a conception of self-defense. It is in fact reminiscent of the notion of strategic preemption that animated German policy in the early years of the twentieth century...Even tactical preemption...has, since the adoption of the Charter, been deemed illegal. It was unsuccessfully invoked by the Nuremberg defendants in relations to the German invasion of Norway in 1940.

After 9-11, NATO invoked for the first time in history, article 5 of its Charter on collective self-defense, calling the terrorists attacks acts of war. In East and Southeast Asia, however, many US allies, including those with large Muslim populations, were much more cautious and advocated a measured response. Chinese officials formally embraced many aspects of the so-called war on terrorism and hoped that Washington would realize the need for multilateral security cooperation and closer US-China ties so as to respond to this newly emergent threat. Instead, the US has used the crisis to solidify increased military ties across Asia and the Middle East (NYT, 1/9/02; IT, 2001). And in July 2002, the publication of two hawkish reports on China to the US Congress (one from the bipartisan US-China Security Review Commission (2002) and the other from the

Pentagon) indicate that plans by the Bush administration to contain China through regional alliances and increased bilateral US-Taiwan ties are continuing (NYT, 7/13/02). Indeed, since the collapse of the USSR the US has been steadily expanding eastward with NATO in Europe and throughout Asia in its bid for ultimate global dominance (Achar, 2000a, b; Gowan, 1999).

Today, US officials point to the rise of radical Islamist movements and so-called rogue states as ostensible justifications for a new age of global intervention (Forsberg, 2001a; Siegel, 2001; Harrison, 2002). Yet properly addressing contemporary security threats necessitates a review of such simplistic assumptions regarding Islam and “rogue states,” past US policy and contemporary Islam. For example, according to officers involved in covert US plans to help the Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq war, the Reagan administration gave Iraq

critical battle planning assistance at a time when American intelligence agencies knew that Iraqi commanders would employ chemical weapons....Iraq’s use of gas in that conflict is repeated cited by President Bush...as justification for “regime change” in Iraq (NTY, 8/18/02: A1, 6).

The new Cold War and increased US intervention into Central Asian and Middle Eastern affairs in the 1980s thus set the stage for the Gulf war at the end of the 20th century and so-called war on terrorism and against the so-called “Axis of Evil” at the dawn of the 21st. Indeed, as the US found out to its detriment, having provided support for radical Islamists across the globe to counter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (from its allied states of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to those who came to form the Taliban and Al Qaeda), today’s friend may become tomorrow’s enemy (Cooley, 2002; Gunaratna, 2002). Moreover, structural adjustment programs imposed upon the Islamic world have themselves provided a huge stimulus for Islamist movements, the vast majority of which are non-violent, engaged in mutual aid, social welfare delivery and peaceful protest (Lubeck and Reifer, forthcoming; Walton and Seddon, 1994).

Global Security Challenges in the 21st Century

The move to create a Cabinet level position in the US for an Office of Homeland Security and revelations regarding failures of intelligence before 9-11 are telling indicators of the degree to which the US National Security State Corporate Complex, a fusion of private corporate power and public state bureaucracy, has historically been geared towards overseas intervention rather than protecting the physical security of the US (Reifer, 2002). US policy remains deeply rooted in the structure of militarized state-corporate capitalism, where military spending simultaneously props up both US corporate power and geopolitical power projection at one and the same time (Chomsky, 1991; Kaldor, 2002; Markusen, forthcoming).

The corollary to US comparative advantage in the use and control of violence in the global system is the pronounced dependency of Asian, European and other global elites on US leadership in the realm of “global security”. European and Asian scholars

and movement activists working for alternative regionalisms have highlighted the critical need to challenge this crucial feature of structural inequality in the global system (Bello, 1996, 2001a, b; Gowan, 1999, 2000; Calleo, 2001). For without breaking free from US hegemony in regional security arrangements, alternative socio-economic policies will be difficult to implement.

The Asian region faces grave security challenges in the new millennium. These range from the possibility of large-scale conflict - over disputes between the two Koreas or Taiwan and China - to more diffuse forms of global violence, insecurity, and in particular, the problem of global poverty and inequality (Haq, 1998; Elworthy & Rogers, 2001). Yet the US has largely ignored the new paradigms of security pioneered by Asian, European and US scholars and activists. Instead it prefers to stick to traditional military strategies, including the deployment of large numbers of US military forces to facilitate counterinsurgency. Peace and justice groups have already raised grave concerns about the large-scale deployment of US forces and growing cooperation between the Pentagon and the local militaries in the region, wary of US support for regimes guilty of brutal human rights abuses - such as in the Philippines and Indonesia - in the past.

Critics have instead called for alternative programs of sustainable development, alleviation of poverty and new efforts at cooperative security. Seeking purely military solution for social and economic problems is seen as a recipe for failure (Ichiyo, 2001; IPM, 2002). While recognizing the need to protect against security threats, these cooperative alternative security visions seek to create the conditions necessary to minimize reliance on force (Elsworthy & Rogers, 2002; Forsberg, 1984, 1994).

There is also the unresolved legacy of large-scale military conflict in East Asia.

Korea's central region is...one of the most heavily militarized zones in human history. Significantly more than 1 million troops and 20,000 armored vehicles or artillery pieces, as well as more than 1 million land mines, abundant chemical weapons, and fortified defensive positions, are found between Pyongyang and Seoul (the distance from the four-kilometer-wide DMZ to Seoul is roughly 40 kilometers and from the DMZ to Pyongyang about 125 kilometers). Forces in Korea are more densely concentrated than the Warsaw Pact and NATO units were in Central Europe during the Cold War. (O'Hanlon, 1998: 139-140; Sigal, 1998).

As in Korea, defense force posturing and arms acquisition programs in the Taiwan Straits are also mired in Cold War dynamics. Any move by one rival and their external allies is mirrored by the other. Each reinforces the worst case scenario fears in the other.

...based on historical patterns extended back nearly 200 years, the current rates of competitive growth of at least two key weapons systems by PRC and Taiwan match or exceed those of the great majority of pairs of states whose rivalry ultimately ended in war (Wallace, Job, Clermont & Laliberte, 2001: 186-187).

In addition to the threat of war in the Taiwan Straits, the vast growth in China's economy coming from its modernization efforts is raising regional awareness about the need for new mechanisms for economic and security cooperation, even as US plans for

the regional containment of China continue. The need for such alternative models of security is critical to prevent increasing conflict over resources that is likely to accompany what is an unsustainable model of development (Klare, 2001; Kalder, 1997; Haq, 1998; Bello, 1996).

There is also a clear need for a new sustainable model of human development and of people's security. This model would provide for the reallocation of the hundreds of billions of dollars spent on the military towards pressing needs of education, health care, literacy, as well as productive and useful employment, as Pakistan's Mahbub Ul Haq (1998) never tired of pointing out (DiGiovanni and Markusen, 2003; Arrighi, 1991; Haq, 1998; Sen, 1999). Imagine what a difference it could make if the trillions of dollars spent on military power went towards health, education and human welfare. The beneficiaries of such programs would include urban/rural workers and peasants struggling for economic survival, peace groups representing all sectors, union confederations and women's groups concerned with issues of war, peace and development.

Asia, Europe and the US: Alternative Regionalisms and a New Global System?

Unlike supranational regional integration in Europe (which is tied together through a combination of economic relations, the European Union and NATO) regional integration in East and Southeast Asia has been primarily an informal economic process. Despite the emergence of ASEAN plus 3 and the ARF, security issues are still primarily mediated exclusively through the US. To be sure, US leadership in NATO also gives it a dominant role in European security, but here the development of organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have given a more indigenous European character to security developments in the region, while further institutionalizing confidence building and transparency in this realm.

The current US hegemony in the global military order acts as a dampener on the development of alternative mechanisms of cooperative regional and global security. Such mechanisms must be developed, though, if more peaceful and socially just Asian and European regionalisms are to be created. Such developments could be a crucial step towards greater cooperation between Asia and Europe, as well as part of a larger effort to transform the global system into a more peaceful, democratic and egalitarian directions (Yuan, 2000; Singh, 1999; Haq, 1998; Bello, 2001a; Allen, 1999).

The emergence of ASEAN, the ARF, the Asia Europe meetings (ASEM) and other regional groupings on security and economic ties holds promise for deepening cooperation and interdependent integration. Such forums have led to the emergence of the ASEAN and ASEM People's Forum bringing together civil society groups from around the region. Yet there needs to be much more energy put into projecting local activism and initiatives onto the regional level, as well as greater attention to the links between economic globalization and the forms of global militarization. To be effective, coalitions tackling entwined economic and military security issues must show the hope of alternatives. Here, the promise of redefining security, creating cooperate mechanisms for

resolving conflict that could free up military spending and redirect the resources towards meeting human needs is critical for future progress.

Many believe that the driving force behind the creation of ASEM was the fear on the part of European elites of being shut out of Asian markets. Yet the possibility remains that European and Asian leaders, working through ASEM and other forums, can begin to provide for alternative models of regional and trans-regional politico-economic and security cooperation. Of course, such steps will have to be pressed by the peace and social justice movements rooted in their organic constituencies, including labor and women's groups, if they are to be explored let alone to succeed.

At present, the US, with its comparative advantage in the field of "security" - including its large scale military industries such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin - and in speculative forms of financial capital such as hedge funds and derivatives, has been the most resistant to embracing new forms of global cooperation and regulation (Wade, 2000; Steinherr, 1998, 2000; de Brouwer, 2001; Gowan, 1999; Partnoy, 2002). And yet, such forms of regional and global cooperation - from proposals for establishing an Asian Monetary Fund to plans for cooperative security - are vital for global peace, social justice and substantive (and not merely formal) global democracy. Ultimately, such alternative regionalisms need to be articulated with a new vision of global democracy and peace, within which social, civil rights, including security for ordinary people, would be enshrined for the global citizenry as a whole.⁶

Endnotes

¹ On the reality of Western support for terrorism - the use of violence against non-combatants to achieve political purposes - versus its construction in ideological discourse as only being pursued by enemies of the West, see Reifer, 2001a.

² The noted economist Jagdish Bhagwati (2000), drawing on the work of C. Wright Mills on the power elite and President Eisenhower's notion of the military-industrial complex, first coined the term Wall Street-Treasury complex. Here, the term is enlarged to include the role of the Federal Reserve, the IMF and World Bank, while underscoring their relationship with the US military-corporate complex as a whole.

³ For an extensive cataloging and review of structural adjustment programs and their consequences in Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Latin America, see Walton & Seddon (1994).

Furthermore, as former State and Defense Department official turned peace and social justice activist Daniel Ellsberg (1990) notes (referring to Latin America but in a point that has more general applicability): "what Friedmanite/Reaganite "conservatives" have in mind when they aim at a "free market" is not just freedom of businessmen from government regulation but freedom from unions: they want not only "laissez faire" but capitalism without unions.

Even the notion of "laissez faire," government non-intervention, is conceived as selective. The IMF austerity programs...aim at "freeing prices" (from government price-setting, ceilings and subsidies) but freezing wages (a departure from genuinely "free market" determination of factor prices).

This is presented as a cure for inflation—though the immediate effect of removing price ceilings and subsidies and exchange rate and import controls is a massive hike in inflation...but whether or not inflation subsides eventually this results in a shift of income and wealth away from

workers to owners. It is resisted by unions, with strikes and demonstrations, and by consumers' and peasant associations, leading either to electoral downfall of the regime, if elections persist, or to persistent "chaos."

...the typical result is either the abandonment of the program, the abandonment of elections with an army coup, or the abandonment of civil rights, with officially-sponsored death squads "decapitating" the unions and peasant associations and human rights agencies—i.e., quite literally, torturing to death their leaders and organizers—terrorizing the populace, either under an army regime or a civilian "democratic" facade.

What is to be emphasized here is that while such state terrorist campaigns purport to be a response to "insurgency" their immediate targets, at the very head of their deathlists, always include urban labor leaders, along with others with the capability and function of organizing popular resistance to the austerity measures. The austerity programs themselves, along with these brutal means of enforcing them, reflect an elite belief, widely broadcast in propaganda, that union activity is almost solely to blame for the inflation that has made the austerity program necessary."

For Ellsberg's own insider perspective on US foreign policy, see his forthcoming memoir (2002) and related website, <http://www.ellsberg.net/>.

⁴ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has ten members, plus three (China, Japan and South Korea), while the ARF includes some twenty-three countries.

⁵ For a critical perspective on some of the crucial issues in the conflict, see Chomsky, 1974, 1999, as well as Finkelstein, 1995 and Carey, 2001.

⁶ For two contributions to radical democratic theory, see Unger, 1998 and Westbrook, 1991.