

There are few innocent victims in a democracy

Mostly just the ignorant, the indifferent, and the uncaring

Among many there exists a common distinction between civilian and military populations. This distinction is often used as a standard for determining what is and what is not a terrorist attack. People, who bear no arms, should not be subject to armed attack from those who do, and any government that tolerates such attacks necessarily compromises its sole right to the use of force. Civilian populations yield this right to their governments in an effort to ensure a less chaotic social environment.

Indeed, what would life be like, if everyone carried a loaded gun and had the right to use it? Some argue that militaries are just this kind of society, and find nothing wrong. After all, one rarely reads about one soldier killing another soldier wearing the same uniform. Even when it does occur it is more often than not by mistake. Still others hark back to the days of the US American Wild West, the likes of Jesse James, and the great movie footage that has resulted. But surely, hasn't the United States something more to offer the world than wide screen, English language, too often very violent, cinematography?

Alas! Each soldier of each military shares a common enemy with every other soldier of the same military, and every soldier is subject to a highly disciplined pecking order that determines when and against whom his weapon can be employed. Moreover, soldiers routinely share the same or similar barracks; engage in well-practiced behavioral protocols, such as saluting; and participate in ritualized training exercises and manoeuvres. In short, everyone carries a weapon, but there are few civilians who prefer the highly restrictive social environment of military living over that of the more freely roving unarmed civilian.

Responsibility for how the weapons of a society are employed does not end with the distinction between those who are and are not permitted to carry and employ weapons, however. Important to note here is that both totalitarian and democratic societies distinguish between civilian and military populations; and all major societies utilize armed civilian police forces. Thus, it is not just a matter of who has the right to use force and when it can be employed, but also a matter of who makes the decisions about its use.

For many years the United States government has engaged in a foreign policy of letting each people decide its own government. Only when a foreign government engaged in direct confrontation with the US government, its citizens, or one of its allies, were the Armed Forces applied against it. This policy led to the armed support of Sandinista guerillas against the Nicaraguan government in the 1980s, arms shipments for the Taliban against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, a direct attack on a drug invested dictatorship in Panama, and more recently the collapse of Milosevic's Yugoslavia in the Balkans. Of course, the list does not stop here. As the world's leading arms supplier to other nations, there is hardly a region in the world where the United States is not involved, either directly or

indirectly, in military and political confrontation. Is it that USAmericans have a passion for violence, that their government has imperial ambitions, or is it that the United States is merely defending its overseas interests?

Though many USAmericans are proud of being the world's police force, many others would like to see US troops withdrawn from a large number of places throughout the world. Certainly many non-USAmericans harbor serious misgivings about having the US military as their international default arbiter and executive arm. In contrast, most people appear to support at least some sort of international government. What people appear to dislike most about US intervention is their sense of powerlessness in determining the way, and under what circumstances, the US government intervenes. This is because they have little or no power over those who request or oppose intervention -- namely, their own governments. Alternatively, they have no money and little influence in Washington to lobby against, or in favor, of intervention on their own behalf. Thus, in most cases, an objective act of military intervention is rarely achieved, and Washington does what it feels best for it and sometime even the USAmerican people.

Indeed, the US government, both Congress and the White House, have only to state that a foreign act of intervention is about defending democratic institutions, supporting individual freedom, basic human rights, transparency, the rule of law, and free enterprise, and the USAmerican people pretty much write their government a blank check. The underlying notion appears to be what is good for "America" is good for the world, and those who work in government are well-informed. Well, if the latter were true, there would be no need for elections and public discourse; moreover, the international press agencies could close their doors. Do you really need to hear my argument with regard to the former?

What is worse is that few USAmericans are sufficiently informed about the world beyond their own borders to make reasonable judgments about when and how their government should intervene. Among these, still fewer have only limited ability to directly influence the course of action that their government eventually takes. In a world that has as many standards as there are peoples and nations, the result has often been devastating.

On September 11, 2001 Osama bin Laden made it clear to the USAmerican people what was wrong: democracy, as the USAmerican people know it, is failing in its overseas mission. Unfortunately, Osama's message has been misinterpreted to mean more democracy is needed overseas, and it is the job of the USAmerican people to make sure that their own government imposes it.

Some 15 months after Osama's own self-appointed intrusion into US politics the world politic generally agrees that there is something fundamentally amiss in the world at large, and there will be more Osama bin Ladens down the road, if the problem is not corrected. So, why has Osama been able to evade capture by the world's most militarily and economically powerful nation, its allies, and other collaborating nations? Because Osama has many friends and is immensely popular among the people in whose dwellings and communities he seeks refuge.

While New York real estate developers haggle over what the "new world" trade center will look-like, and Washington continues its charade in support of an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement, US soldiers will soon be sacrificing their lives, limbs, and personal and familial futures on Iraqi soil. Unfortunately, it will not be in the name of democracy abroad; rather, it will be in the name of ignorance, apathy, and indolence at home.

Well, its your country "America", do with it as you will, but please do not think that democracy in foreign affairs works any better in Israel than it does in the United States. Most Palestinians live in close proximity to their Israeli neighbors, but few Israelis even care to understand that the land which they now occupy must be returned. Democracy is a good thing for those who preach it at home, but what about those who suffer from its all too apparent deficiencies abroad?

In principle there are no innocent people in a democracy, for democratic governments are accountable to those they serve. So, why is it that we must forever read about the tragic loss of "innocent" human life, while the Israeli people permit their own government to trample the fundamental freedoms of Palestinians?

The next time you read about a Palestinian suicide bomber who destroys himself and many "innocent" Israeli victims, please do not forget the much larger number of Israel hypocrites and their US supporters, who lament the constant loss of "innocent" life. It will easily replace your tears with anger, but not toward the Palestinians for whom many can feel only compassion.

The Palestinian people have never known democracy. What is Israel's excuse? What is yours?

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8 December 2002
(1311 words)