

FUNDAMENTALIST MENTALITY AND THE IRAQ WAR

by Peter A. Olsson, M.D.

U.S. President Bush's decision to launch the Iraqi "Freedom War" has stirred profound world-wide tensions, conflicts, and debate about the nature of war and its conduct. Fundamentalist mentality can be observed among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and even "anti-war" pacifists. Basically, fundamentalists experience their own way of thinking and believing as the one and only way. Fundamentalists, no matter how sweet, kind, or pious they act on the surface, are convinced that they have THE superior moral, ethical, theological, epistemological and spiritual truth. Fundamentalist mentality is more prevalent and seems to be more readily embraced at times of severe social turmoil, rapid social change, economic suffering, and oppression of minority groups.

The radical fundamentalists of any religious group is willing to confidently condemn to hell and kill those who do not believe exactly as they believe. The radical fundamentalist is his own final judge, jury, and "holy" executioner. There is no room for doubt or debate. They are their own gods themselves.

Human nature, national conflicts, and rational approaches to war

Rational and pragmatic people take a courageously different view from that of fundamentalists. For example, Freud (Freud, S. (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, S.E. Vol XXII, transcended his own pessimism briefly to comment,

Our best hope for the future is that intellect - the scientific spirit, reason - may in the process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man. The nature of reason is a guarantee that afterwards it will not fail to give man's emotional impulses and what is determined by them the position they deserve. But the common compulsion exercised by such a dominance of reason will prove to be the strongest uniting bond among men and lead the way to further unions." (p. 171)

Freud (1930), felt that there was a parallel process between the development of civilization and the development of a superego in individual development. He felt that the personalities of great leaders were crucial. ("Men of overwhelming force of mind," - Gandhi?, Christ? Mohammed? Buddha?, Moses? et.al. or Machiavelli?, Sun-Tsu?, Tiberius?, Churchill? or Ataturk?).

In this vein of a world-wide superego, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 217A(III) on December 10, 1948. This document entitled "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" is an elegant, profoundly ethical, and I would say

rationaly majestic statement for "all members of the human family." If carefully read, studied and steadily applied, this document could form an effective ego ideal for the international community. It offers more hope for the future of humanity than the abundant judgmental, fundamentalist interpretations of the Koran or the Bible.

Freud (1930) presents a telling critique of the "golden rule,"

The commandment, "love thy neighbor as thyself," is the strongest defense against human aggressiveness and an excellent example of the unpsychological proceedings of the cultural super-ego. The commandment is impossible to fulfill; such an enormous inflation of love can only lower its value, not get rid of the difficulty. Civilization pays no attention to all this; it merely admonishes us that the harder it is to obey the precept the more meritorious it is to do so. But anyone who follows such a precept in present day civilization only puts himself at a disadvantage vis a vis the person who disregards it. What a potent obstacle to civilization aggressiveness must be, if the defense against it can cause as much unhappiness as aggressiveness itself! "Natural Ethics," as it is called, has nothing to offer here except the narcissistic satisfaction of being able to think oneself better than others. At this point the ethics based

on religion introduces its promises of a better after-life.

But so long as virtue is not rewarded here on earth, ethics will, I fancy, preach in vain. (The Future of an Illusion Civilization and its Discontents, S.E. XXI , p141-142)

Then at the end of this paragraph of his discussion, Freud alludes to the damaging aspects of materialism:

I too think it quite certain that a real change in the relations of human beings to possessions would be of more help in this direction than any ethical commandments; but the recognition of this fact among socialists, [and contemporary Islamists!], has been obscured and made useless for practical purposes by a fresh idealistic misconception of human nature.

Freud rejects socialism but raises, I think, a valuable perspective on the materialistic perversions of "Western" democracy. I would call this our American "moneyocracy" waiting for effective campaign finance reform. Many Americans seem to shallowly equate freedom, free enterprise, and capitalism with democracy. Many capitalists become obsessed with materialism as reflected in our shopping malls, SUVs and Hollywood culture. While our Western "fundamentalism of capitalism" is appropriately criticized by radical Islamist clerics, these critics of America seem to ignore or hate the positive

implications of religious freedom and separation of church and state, which our American founding fathers intended and held in reverence. The spiritual commitment to democracy requires a sense of personal responsibility and commitment to the community.

In light of the worldwide reverberating instantaneous cybernetic television media, the political preaching of Osama bin Laden, radical Muslim clerics and our U.S. conservative administration, has become a new art form. Fundamentalist political preaching of the variety we hear and see in the politicized media is leading the world toward vicious holy wars.

Some conflicting views of war

Pacifism

All over the world, millions of people march in anti-war demonstrations to protest the Iraq war and the very notion of war itself. Pacifists would have everyone believe that war is always bad, whatever the context. Volkan says, "The idea that something in the human mind and in human development causes man to make war is usually denied as vigorously as the idea that human beings are endowed with aggressive drives" (1988, *The Need to have Enemies and Allies*, Jason Aronson, Inc.: Northvale, NJ, p125). Pacifism and the anti-war movement have a great appeal to many intellectuals, idealists, and liberal-humanists.

Pacifists see war as inherently irrational, abnormal, and evil.

Humanists believe that the freedom and inner potential of all human beings can be fully realized through reason and non-violent benevolent political-social processes.

Critics of the pacifist view of war come from many different theological and philosophical persuasions. Some of these thinkers point out that human nature involves strong aggressive drives that are capable of malignant expression that involve cruelty, criminality, murder, and other forms of evil.

Pragmatists say that good people sometimes must confront evil forcefully. C.S. Lewis, a usually gentle Christian writer says :

If one had committed a murder, the right Christian thing to do would be to give yourself up to the police and be hanged. It is therefore perfectly right for a Christian judge to sentence a man to death or a Christian to kill an enemy. (1952, *Mere Christianity*, Harper Collins 2001 edition:New York, .p118-119)

In this same discussion, Lewis adds :

The idea of the knight - the Christian in arms for the defense of a good cause - is one of the great Christian ideas. War is a dreadful thing, and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken.

"Just war" theory

"Just war" theory originates in Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologicae*, from the thirteenth century. Aquinas discusses the justification for war and the kinds of behavior and activity that are permissible in war. First, a just war can only be waged as a last resort. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified. Politically conservative supporters of President Bush maintain that by trying to get United Nations' support, Bush was forced into war as a last resort when the U.N. refused to enforce its own resolutions. The very integrity of the U.N. was called into question because of economic self-interest and political maneuverings of France, Germany, Russia, and China. From another angle, Bush seemed to place the Security Council in a classic double bind." Bateson described the double bind in family systems theory as a situation in which a parent places a child so that no matter what the child does, he cannot win. Few psychiatrists today believe such double binds causes schizophrenia as originally thought in 1956, but they can cause intense neurotic anxiety and acting-out behavior, in this instance, acting-out in the U.N. "family of nations." In his overt statements Bush sought to work with the U.N., but at another contradictory level (with troops lined up for attack), Bush clearly indicated that he would proceed

militarily regardless of U.N. wisdom or decisions. Many observers feel that Bush and his cabinet's statements and voice tone were arrogant, dismissive, and condescending toward other world leaders who had dug in their heels and continue to do so in aggressive and passive aggressive ways. This acting-out toward the "super-power" father figure is one of the classic responses to a double bind in a human family system.

Secondly, a war is just if it is waged by a proper authority. The arguments from the Bush administration emphasize that Saddam's regime was so corrupt and abusive to its own people and the threat of weapons of mass destruction was such a danger, that it had lost claim to legitimate sovereignty in the world community. The U.N. disagreed with this contention of US authority robustly. Weapons of mass destruction will probably be found but their status as a clear and present danger will remain in dispute.

Thirdly, a just war can only be fought to redress a wrong and with right intentions. The cause must be for justice and not self-interest. Many Arab states and other countries have accused the U.S. of desiring Iraqi oil, but countries doing the accusing such as France (which gets 40% of its oil from Iraq) suffer from counter-accusations in this regard. The much debated post-war

period will reveal much about oil-justice for the Iraqi people.

Fourthly, a just war must have a reasonable chance of success.

The U.S. and its coalition is demonstrating relatively impressive military success.

Fifthly, the ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace, and the violence used must be proportional to the injury suffered. The Bush administration points to the low coalition casualties and "humanitarian" implication of precision bombing as evidence of proper respect to the avoidance of non-combatant suffering. The Arab media has endlessly reported tragic civilian casualty anecdotes and pictures. The embedded reporters have described heroic efforts of coalition forces to avoid civilian casualties even to their own peril. Keeping the peace after the Iraq war is becoming a new war chapter in itself. The "fog of war" involves both psychological propaganda and sand storms.

Just war theory, like all theories, is helpful but provides no ultimate answers.

Preemptive "holy wars"

In 1998, Osama bin Laden wrote a book called *America and the Third World War*. In his book Bin Laden extends items from

earlier fatwas and expounds on a global war that I see as analogous to the "preemptive war" policy statement of the conservative Bush administration after September 11, 2001. The shock and awe of 9/11 was a defining moment for Bush as president and America as his country. The preemptive war policy had been gradually forming in the minds of Under Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and Security Advisor Rice, but, after 9/11 , preemption became a way to "Get the terrorists and their sponsoring states before they get us". It became a jihad or crusade of powerful but fearful America. Islamists and Americans each had their plans for preemptive war.

After careful study and vast detail of documentation, Bodansky concluded:

Bin Laden in essence calls on the entire Muslim world to rise up against the existing world order to fight for the right to live as Muslims - rights he states, which are being trampled by the West`s intentional spreading of Westernization. For the Islamists there can be no compromise or coexistence with Western civilization.

(Bodansky, Y, 1998, Bin Laden : The Man Who Declared War on America,. Prima Publishing of Crown division of Random House, Inc.: New York, p 388)

Metaphorically, the meaning of declarations of Jihad against "crusaders" and preemptive wars against "the axis of evil" terror states begins to get blurry. It becomes dependent upon which man or woman on which street in the world it is discussed.

Bush's Orwellian slip about an American "crusade" and the implications of Bin Laden's terror cult's "jihad" are chilling. If WWII is a war on terrorism, it will not be won by smart bombs, missiles, and bullets. It will be won by effective political, diplomatic, and foreign aid policy-making. Volkan. Montville, and Julius (1991, *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships, Volume II: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work*, Lexington Books of D.C. Heath and Company: Lexington, MA, and Toronto) discuss novel concepts about "unofficial" or "Track II diplomacy.

In this spirit, it is fascinating to imagine what impact it would make if every educator, therapist, and clergyperson in America became an active "pen-pal" with their counterpart in Islamic countries about the implications of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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