

Social Capital, International Communities and the Futures of Terrorism

Laurence Brown*

University of Queensland, Australia

There are moments in the history of the world which both divide and define. Such moments become the separating line between before and after. The events in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania on the morning the 11th of September 2001, together constitute one of those moments. The spectre of terrorism has haunted the world for many years with the most intense and grandiose displays previously taking place in the 1980s and 1990s. One glance at any current affairs program, metro newspaper or news station over the coming months will confirm that the twenty-first century has permanently changed the rules of engagement. The absent silhouettes of twin towers of the World Trade Centre on the Manhattan skyline remind us that nothing is the same anymore. This essay will not deal in detail with the most recent attacks, but rather more broadly with their consequences. At the point of writing, although retribution is yet to be meted out, days are growing ever more pregnant with thoughts of war, new and old, and of fear, in all its forms. The full details of the attacks may never be known and so specific responses may not, at this stage, be accurately divined. The desire for national security however, is a constant that need not be questioned. From time to time, a nation will change its methods for ensuring its security, but the goal itself never changes. With this in mind, this paper will look briefly at the background to the terrorism undertaken against the United States in the context of America's place in the international community and will suggest three alternative and possibly interlocking futures.

With the exception of special forces deployments, in the quarter of a century since the Vietnam War there has been a continual and steady, if not uniform, withdrawal by the United States from the military commit-

* **Correspondence:** Community Service & Research Centre, University of Queensland, Ipswich, Australia
Email: laurence.b@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au

ments that it had found itself enmeshed in as a result of the onset of the Cold War. The occasional flexing of America's military might since that time has become progressively more confused and with the striking exclusion of Desert Storm, has been without clear strategic purpose. This military retraction has also been matched by a diplomatic desire for unilateral or bilateral diplomacy in a conspicuous rejection of the elegant triangular diplomacy last employed by Nixon and Kissinger. In its place, presidents from Carter to Clinton have tried to prescribe peace solutions in the Middle East and Northern Ireland in safety from across the Atlantic. Concurrent with these developments, the variously creeping and surging stranglehold of the US on world markets has been nothing short of overwhelming. The early predictions of a severe and permanent contraction of the US economy following the depression of 1974 and the rise and rise of the Japanese economy had, by the late nineties, become reversed. Finally, the prestige of presidency has barely proved to have weathered the storms of Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Monica, albeit in a modified form.

Assuming a place of pre-eminence in the globalised world, the United States has, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, been at the forefront of promoting capitalist free trade, democratic governance, and the integration of most nations into the global marketplace. That it has undertaken the process of the democratisation of the globe is laudable, but like the Christian missionaries of old, the US has perhaps, been too keen to on-sell their own culture and rampant free-market capitalism as part of the message of salvation. This situation has caused an unfortunately disproportionate power relationship with the rest of the world. This was not so much a problem in the bi-polar environment of the Cold War, which provided its own stability and patterns of counterbalance, but in the roundness of a globalised world, America stands out as a target. Likewise, it would seem, the twin guardians of globalisation, the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, were themselves obvious targets.

Social (International) Capital

"There was an owner of a shoe store in the path of those fleeing the collapsing towers. He stood out the front of his store and passed out running shoes and tennis shoes to the women running by because he knew they couldn't run properly in high heels. That is a New Yorker. And there are millions of us." So spoke Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

The issue of international terrorism is one which may be presented in the form of any number of metaphors, but is probably best rendered in its most familiar form: the community. The international community as a whole suffers when terrorism strikes any one of its members and many if not all nations lose confidence in the community itself. In order to better facilitate the employment of this metaphor, we will apply Robert Putnam's principle of social capital in regards to the importance of networks and relationships in a community. (See: < www.bowlingalone.com >)

The social capital of a community is measured by the closeness of its members and the trust that they share. It values the potential worth of a community in times of personal or collective crisis and it can also be a predictor of the safety and security of the members of the community and their property. Loosely speaking, there can be said to be two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging. Simply put, bonding capital is the capital that is shared between friends and like-minded members. Thus, Great Britain and the United States, although natural enemies for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because of the weight of history, in the twentieth century shared a tremendous amount of bonding capital because of their common language, religion, democratic systems, and formal alliances. Bridging capital on the other hand, speaks to the relationships and networks formed between members who are of different minds, expectations, and perspectives. On balance, most workable communities are expected to possess a good deal of bonding capital in established networks, but it is the bridging capital that provides both richness and strength to any community. In a global community, where there exists much diversity, the need for such relationships should become obvious.

Continuing this line of inquiry therefore, it may not surprise one to discover that levels of safety and security are higher in communities, not with increased levels of policing, but with greater levels of social capital. The more everyone knows and understands everyone else and is prepared to cooperate with others, the safer and more secure things are. One should ask the question then, how does one deal with a bully in the neighbourhood? Should one lock the doors and hope that the shadows pass by? Should one go running for the local tough guy to straighten things out? What happens when it is the tough guy that has been bullied? Surely this poses questions about the effectiveness of our deterrence and response strategies.

The Three Futures

"This is not a time for us to hide in bunkers." So spoke US Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

Regardless of the path taken by the leadership of the United States, inaction will not be an option. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks there are three logical options for the US to follow in relation to the rest of the international community. Each of the three will doubtless have elements which will wax and wane over the coming months and years. There will be no clear course of action that necessarily excludes the others. It may even come to pass that each option is tried in turn before solutions are found. Most likely however, we will see the employment of the first and a decision regarding the second and third in the coming years. Certainly, the possibility that solutions will not eventually be found does not bear considering.

The Democratic Coalition

"This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but the free and democratic world and terrorism." So spoke British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

After the fashion of effective bonding capital, the comments made by the British Prime Minister just following the attack are not at all unexpected. There is a natural tendency to gravitate towards that which one understands for security and comfort during times of great stress. It is generally referred to as 'running home'. There may be over the coming months a strong reliance by the United States on those nations which it feels both comfortable and safe with. These will generally constitute the world's great democracies being the UK, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, and Israel.

Together these nations will likely form a coalition of forces dedicated to meting the current global threat. This is a well-established method for international problem solving of a violent nature and deals exclusively with staunching a haemorrhage or countering an effect. It is pitifully ill-equipped to deal with causes or to develop preventative solutions. This powerful limitation means that the coalition, for all its high-minded members, will not resemble a convention of trouble shooters so much as it will an international lynch mob. Just like the possies that were formed in the old west of America, the townsfolk would get together under the

leadership of the marshal and mete swift justice before returning to their normal lives.

The bonding capital shared by the democratic nations is linked by finance, history, and politics, each being effective motivators to strong community. At first glance, the strengthening of these relationships, and perhaps the nodding addition of the rest of NATO, Russia, or even a collection of Middle Eastern states into the mix, may seem like an appealing proposition for the prospects for global security. There are however, some serious ramifications to be considered with such an alliance. Its formation, formal or tacit, regardless of the amount of rhetoric to the contrary, would invariably cast a number of people groups into the naturally opposing role of the 'other'. These would likely be the very people groups that require most attention and understanding. By abandoning the principle of active bridging capital in favour of a democratic coalition with the mute approval of others, there is a strong possibility if things were then allowed to return to 'normal', that more problems could be created than solved. To nations such as Pakistan, there would be little in the way of positive futures beckoning. To join the fight and be damned, or to remain neutral and be damned, offer precious little difference by way of interpretation to religious extremists or American presidents. To actively oppose the coalition would be folly on a scale unheard of in recent memory.

Problems would exist furthermore, with the unsubtle nature of large scale military deployments. Certainly intelligence sharing between member nations of the coalition could reduce the prospects of further terrorist attacks in the short term, but there will always be other threats and other national interests in the future. The concept of the coalition really only offers a short to mid term solution to issues of national and global security. Worse still, if coalitions continue to be formed periodically by different groups for the purpose of meeting a specific threat, they will never change the structure of the international community but will merely continue the lynch mob tradition.

This scenario, which at the time of the attack was an obvious option and by now has begun to foment, was always the most likely as it is the only method of crisis resolution that has been at all successful in the past. That its employment is necessary to meet the current threat should not advance its claims to long-term effectiveness. The employment of this solution will not effect lasting change and should be rejected as a means of problem solving-regardless of apparent short term gains.

Fortress America

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended. ... Make no mistake the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these attacks." So spoke US President, George W. Bush.

The most understandable instinct for the leadership of the United States will be to circle the wagons and to shoot first and ask questions later. The psychic trauma caused by such a terrorist attack would naturally dictate this early reality. As the dust begins to settle however, serious questions need to be asked and answered regarding America's place in the world as a superpower and its place in the community of nations as a good neighbour. If the militants and the isolationists were to win the day as a result of this tragedy, it would be a victory for terror, fear, and force. The US would withdraw even further from the world in order to protect its borders and its citizens. While there is an outbreak of international activity and cooperation at present, history shows us that this is likely to be a temporary arrangement.

Already, under the final years of the Clinton White House and during the first few months of George W. Bush's stewardship, both the President and Congress have moved towards reawakening the leviathan of National Missile Defence (NMD). NMD or as it is alternatively referred to, Star Wars II, is the plan to create a complex web of interceptors, either land, sea, air, or space based, that could stop or retard the flight path of an incoming nuclear missile. The immense cost of this program, which could eventually run to a trillion dollars, is not the only reason that such a system might be a poor choice for investment. There is also the suggestion that by even attempting the development of such a system, the United States would be signalling that it would prefer its military superiority to be both absolute and impregnable. This will surely invite opposition as the prospect of one community member's invulnerability is at the very least unsettling for all the others - including one's allies. To return to the old west analogy, there would be less concern simply if everyone wore a gun, than if everyone wore a gun and one person came also wearing a bullet proof vest.

Regardless of the perception that NMD is an attempt to make the US invincible, it is in reality far more benign and is symptomatic of a greater desire to secure comprehensive protection for the American people. As the nation in the world which is the most powerful in both military and

financial terms and one that has exercised both of these for its own ends, the citizens of the US recognise that they are a target. That the possibility of a nuclear ballistic missile attack is negligible at best is not the issue. The possibility that such a system, regardless of the financial cost and technical shortfalls, may just be able to stop such an attack is precisely the issue. As a result, it naturally follows, that it is specifically because the US is the most powerful nation in the world that it can afford to spend 'whatever it takes' to maintain its own safety that it will do so.

Sadly however, regardless of the expenditure, as the sorry events on September 11 have demonstrated, just like Okalahoma and others before them, there is simply no way of making a Fortress America truly impregnable from outside, or from within. It is the price of freedom and democracy that the US remain vulnerable. There are limits to the effectiveness of having twelve Carrier Groups roaming the world, a handful of nuclear powered submarines, immeasurable numbers of combat aircraft and silos full of ICBMs. The military is neither flexible nor subtle enough to ensure American security in a multi-polar world that is sprinkled with fundamentalists and extremists of all persuasions.

If the US were to take the further steps down the path of rearmament and diplomatic withdrawal, they truly would become the 'pitiful giant' that President Richard Nixon warned of during the Vietnam War. America would still possess immense power-probably more than ever in conventional and nuclear terms-but it would have less trust and freedom. Isolated and alone, a repose of its own choosing, the US would no longer resemble the 'light on the hill' that it has styled itself as since the time of the revolution. By closing in on itself, its international social capital would be severely depleted and even its closest allies would become increasingly concerned at even its most just unilateral actions.

The appointment of Governor Tom Ridge to a new cabinet position of Homeland Security (or whatever it eventually becomes) may, or may not be a step down this path. If the office proves largely to be a coordinating body with the express goal of increasing security effectiveness, then all may not be lost. If however, the office engenders suspicion towards the unknown and recommends massive budgetary increases in largely symbolic areas such as NMD or the like, then a Fortress America becomes ever more likely. While this future does not, at the moment, seem likely-with America's engagement with the rest of the world, including debt and trade embargo cancellations, at its highest level since the Second World War-there is an inevitable desire to 'return to normalcy', to borrow a

phrase from President Harding following World War One. If the actions against terrorists and governments become a protracted affair, the eagerness and devotion currently felt will begin to transform into fatigue and a longing for 'the way things were'. Under these circumstances-particularly if the terrorist threat is not yet eliminated-the choice to venture far from home less and less each day may become reality, as was becoming the case following the fall of the Berlin Wall twelve years ago. It is human nature to seek a 'peace dividend' that will translate as uncomplicated safety. History has proven otherwise.

Global Civic Society

"We will rally the world. ... This will be a monumental struggle between good verses evil, but good will prevail." So spoke US President, George W. Bush.

A third alternative that presents itself, not necessarily as a solution to the current crisis but as a longer term objective, is the formation of a global civic society. The reality is, the world no longer needs a superpower. We need all nations to assume responsibility for the development of an effective global society. One which respects the sovereignty of nations and cultures, but does so within a larger humanitarian framework that sees beyond the military and financial as the only national concerns. This means that it will be important to de-emphasise the necessity to focus on bottom line financial gain as the preferred outcome, but to employ a triple bottom line approach of financial, environmental, and social outcomes.

Ironically the process of building a civil society on a global scale will require the continued democratisation of the world-a process begun enthusiastically by America. Rather than transferring the consumer culture and the credit card mentality, which has attended and preceded democratic reforms however, there must be a cultural sensitivity that respects alternative systems, beliefs, and practices-where they do not cause or encourage harm to others. Such a process would also shine the light of investigation on the US and the other established democracies to examine their democratic practices and notions of civic responsibility. The unhealthy obsession with individualism to the exclusion of all other things in society must be tempered and balanced against the good of others. The value of the self is one of the great discoveries the world has seen, but that each person can be a fortress-self is an anathema to an effective community on any scale.

In order to build a functional global civic society, nations would not necessarily need to give up their sovereignty, but would need to adopt an attitude of cooperation with each other. No longer could one nation dominate the international community and expect the community to function at its peak capacity. Effective diplomacy creates not only new languages with which to dialogue, but forges new solutions that no one party could create on their own. While this would not and could not be a revolutionary or immediate process, even small steps along this road are enough to be encouraging because there is no other future which can offer the same level of security and disincentive for destruction.

People and nations in powerful situations seldom demonstrate wisdom in the face of change or the opportunity for reform. Many react in defence of positions that have long been bankrupt of meaning, simply because they fear the undermining of their own comfort or certainty—even when such change promises a better future. It takes far more courage to engage the unknown and to shine a light in the dark than it does to prepare for war or to board up the windows. To embrace the vulnerability that is concomitant with engagement, is to face fear and overcome it. This process is hardly a natural one and is an anathema to our most widely believed social theories. Yet, as human beings, our greatest achievements have come as a result of our ability to form complex social arrangements that allow us to explore other possibilities beyond bald survival.

This road forward for America will not be easy. Bridging capital is always the hardest to forge—even in times of calm. There will be many who will balk at the prospect of full engagement with the rest of the world. There will be others who will fear the loss of American pre-eminence in the world. Yet every power that has risen eventually fails. For those standing on the Capitoline at the height of Roman power and authority, the thought that one day, Rome would merely be the fading foundations of present day western culture and fodder for Hollywood blockbusters, would be incredible. And yet, the sun sets even now on the British Empire. Security through strength and power is a fallacy. One day even the greatest power will fail. Such is the system of regional dominance that has developed in the world. It should not always be so. Yet for this, it must be stressed, this has always been the path less taken. It is precisely because it is the most difficult road forward, that requires an iron will, education, courage, and hope, that it is the least likely of the three futures presented.

Conclusion

In the end, the horror of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon attacks have demonstrated that military and financial might alone are not enough to prevent the violent and destructive actions of a few committed individuals. Violence, or even the threat of violence, can never truly prevent violence. If our world is ever to become a place where, in the words of FDR, freedom of expression and of religion, and freedom from want and from fear, are to become a global norm then a worldwide civic society where the needs and desires of others are balanced with our own must be our chosen path. Mutual understanding and true community within the international community is our safest road forward.

That military action, in the form of a coalition however, will take place, is now beyond doubt. From the standpoint of *Realpolitik*, there is probably little choice. The success or failure of such actions will likely affect the probabilities of America's next steps. If there are massive reprisals for the actions of the coalition and the construction of a perpetual motion machine of attack and counter attack, then sooner or later the rules of engagement will be relaxed and we will see the international lynch mob in all its ingloriousness. This will be followed by a return to the old international order, complete with a Fortress America, and a Fortress Britain, a Fortress Australia, etc. For the United States, or any nation, under the influence of such fear and uncertainty, to react any differently, will require the raised voices of those seeking a different solution. If the clarion cry of war is met with otherwise mute horror, options will quickly become limited.