

This paper is one of a series of individual essays written within the conceptual constraints provided by "Forms for a Future." The collection of essays will become the individual episodes of the audio/video podcast.

'... Forums for A Future...'

Part 7: Contemporary Social Issues
Podcast (#22) The Iraq War and World Political Order

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Prelude

I am Ed Renner. Welcome to my Podcast, "Forums for a Future."

Forums for a Future is based on a university honors course I taught at the University of South Florida in 2007-2008. Three textbooks provide background reading for the individual episodes. They are:

- Thomas Friedman's The World is Flat
- Jarred Diamond's Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed
- Gwynne Dyer's Future: Tense. The Coming World Order

The syllabus for the podcast series, text copies of all of the individual podcasts, and directions for subscribing to the series, either directly or through iTunes, are available on my web site at: kerenner.com, that is: www.k-e-r-e-n-n-e-r.com.

The first 16 episodes are in audio format. They provide an academic conceptual foundation for the series. After having taken nearly a one-year break to teach "Forums for the Future," I am now ready to continue the series, but this time in both audio and video formats. As a way to get started on the continuation, I have created a three-part transition. Episodes 17, 18 and 19 provide a brief introduction of the conceptual foundation for those new to the series, and a quick review for the original subscribers. Starting with Podcast #20, the continuation of the podcast is an open-ended series of positive approaches for addressing the many specific contemporary economic, social and political issues that challenge our capacity for making the necessary changes for having a future in the 21st Century.

The Key Concept

In today's podcast, number 22 in the series, the key concept is that the Iraq War provides a focal point for understanding the political implications of globalization. Specifically, the need to relinquish old beliefs and to adopt different constructs than those that prevailed through the

“nationalism” of most of the Modern Era, ones that can embrace and contain the emergence of a new world political order.

The End of Wealth As We Have Known It

We have already seen in the previous episode (Podcast #21) the crippling economic consequences of the financial cost of the Iraq War, at \$10 billion per month in direct costs and a projected \$3 trillion in total when all of the indirect costs are included, such as the long-term medical care for the wounded and maimed (Note 1). These costs, along with the false assumption that tax cuts and deficit spending could be indefinitely sustained through consumer credit and leveraged lending, broke the financial back of the US. It started slowly in 1968 as a public policy, and was increasingly embraced by the credit-card consumerism of the American public over the past 40 years, escalating to the defining end point of the Modern Era. This delusion of unlimited growth reduced the power and stature of our country at the very time when those resources were absolutely essential for addressing the social and cultural issues of fixing a planet at risk and making the adjustments required for a transition to a new era.

The Political Implications

But the contribution of the Iraq War to the economic crisis is only half of the story. The other half is equally dangerous and debilitating. It is the damage done to the world political order and the devastation of the capacity to respond to global political challenges. The re-examination of the political consequences of the Iraq War has taken two forms: The first has been a superficial analysis implying strategic failures such as the lack of an occupation plan. This perspective is largely the application of 20th Century military concepts to new circumstances, rather than recognizing the need for alternative political constructs.

The second re-examination -- one that is substantial, not superficial -- starts from the premise that there are fatal conceptual flaws in how our political policies and institutions currently function, and that significant structural political changes are required for the Post-Modern Era.

This is what historical inflection points are about.

Inflection points are times where civic discussions create a new political context for moving beyond “more of the same thinking” to something fundamentally different. To make this transition requires us to re-examine critical core beliefs and values, and to entertain drastically different alternatives.

Discarding Dysfunctional Beliefs and Values

There are several ideas that provide the basis for discarding the dysfunctional beliefs and values from the past and replacing them with ones appropriate for the new era, an era based on a breaking point where the future is discontinuous with the present. There are three big “throw-away ideas” -- ideas that have politically dominated the end point of the 20th Century.

1. “Winning” in Iraq (but Losing Both the War on Terror and the Greater Prospect of World Order). The first step in addressing the political order required for the new era is to openly acknowledge the actual reality of the war in Iraq as ill-conceived and ill-advised. It may be hard for contemporary Americans to throw-off the false patriotism that initiated and sustained this misadventure of “winning” in Iraq (Note 2). John McCain in the 2008 presidential campaigns gave explicit voice to this dangerous misconception, while Barack Obama understood why it is a perspective we must let go of:

(insert video clip of McCain’s I want to win in Iraq
and my opponent want to lose)

“Winning” is a military term, referring to the conquest of one contestant by another. The military capacity for the conquest and physical occupation of Iraq was never in question. This is not the same, however, as “winning” in a political sense. By conservative estimates the US has killed more than 100,000 Iraqis, wounded or maimed 900,000, and made refugees of 4,000,000 more people. That is 1 in 5 Iraqis who have been directly harmed (this is the equivalent to more than 60 million Americans), touching virtually every family in the country, while their infrastructure, cities, economy and daily security has been reduced to rubble. It is no surprise the Iraqi people want us out of their county, for better or worse. We will never, in the living memory of its people, win their hearts or receive any credit for any good that may eventually result. Further we have given al-Qaeda their cause, thereby making the world a less safe place by undermining the capacity for the powers of the world to work together to create a more constructive world order, while derailing the world cooperation and financial capacity necessary for addressing a planet in peril.

The desired outcome is not, by any standard that matters, “winning” by extracting the last drop of blood of resistance. But, “not winning” (what McCain called “losing”), by any standard that matters, is about discarding the dysfunctional beliefs and values of attempting to create a permanent military presence in a democratic pro-western Iraqi government in the middle of the Arab world, and by replacing them with new constructs that recognize a completely different view of what is in fact reality. This is what inflection points are about. They are about those moments where the future is discontinuous with the present.

2. Delusion of the New American Century. The invasion of Iraq was no fluke. It was the deliberate and deceptive execution of an ideological political objective based on the extension of worn out concepts left over from the Modern Era, inappropriately projected into the 21st century.

After 9/11 a false and prefabricated case was made for the need to attack Iraq to make the world safe from terrorism. What is now clear is that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 and was never a serious threat to the US. Rather, the invasion was the cover for an entirely different and hidden agenda by the government to create a “New American Century” (Note 2).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war was seen by some as the opportunity for the US to establish itself as the economic leader of the free world and the only significant military power, positioning our country to usher in an era of economic globalization and friction-free market driven capitalism. World order was to be insured by the capacity of the

US to unilaterally provide blanket security for this process through its unchallengeable military capacity. This socio-economic-political conviction became the foreign policy objective to enter into the 21st century and secure the future under the Bush doctrine. Iraq offered what, at the time, seemed like the object lesson for the world: A quick and easy military victory, a warm reception by the Iraqi people freed from a repressive dictator, the establishment of a pro-US democratic government in the middle of the Muslim world, and a significant and lasting military presence in the Middle East through bases in Iraq – a county that just happened to have large oil reserves. The result was to be peace, security and stability and a seamless transition into the 21st century based on 20th century beliefs and values.

In reality, the final tally was “none of the above.” With the security agreement of 2008 the US is to withdrawal from Iraqi cities by June, 2009, be completely out of Iraq by December 31, 2011, to be subject to Iraqi political control in the interval, in a country not able to govern itself, with the US having a depleted and overtaxed military, little respect in the rest of the world, a crushing national debt, and a broken economy. But, even more disturbing is that this distorted thinking, was accomplished through a body of lies and misinformation fundamentally incompatible with the American democratic principles under the patriotic pretense of protecting and advancing freedom and democracy. The arrogance of this endeavor, and the damage to our civic foundation, is a price that is so large that it should stain the consciousness of the current generation for vigilance against such political excess that we cannot ever afford to allow it to happen again.

3. The Commercialization of International Politics. The final worn-out construct is that economic globalization and friction-free market driven capitalism are the centerpiece of the beliefs and values appropriate for the international politics of the 21st Century. Rather, the required conceptual shift is to replace these constructs that the creation of wealth and unlimited growth is the path of choice to the future, with social/cultural notions of sustainability as the basic conceptual unit – the currency of exchange – for domestic and international political policies.

Positive Thinking for Change

Three new ideas are needed to dominate the transition to the new era of the 21st Century, ideas which offer a discontinuous break from the past.

1. Redefining the Terms for Engagement. When nation states were in conflict in the Modern Era they had a geographic boundary, ultimately reduced to the Soviet Block and NATO. Geographic spheres of influence are no longer the terms of engagement.

In return for Iraq’s acceptance of the 2008 security agreement the US had to agree not to use Iraqi soil to launch military attacks across it borders into neighboring Arab countries. The large numbers of civilian casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan has given new meaning to the forewarning and precursor of the phrase: “rice farmer by day, Viet Cong by night,” as one of the lessons from Vietnam. The result has been broad popular resistance to US military operations to “fight the Global War on Terror” in these and other allied countries to such levels to either force a withdrawal, threaten the collapse of the established government, or the creation and support of

puppet regimes sustained by financial and arms aid, and a military presence. In the process, the US has run out of money, deployable troops, and good will abroad and increasing at home.

This level of world disharmony is in contrast to the worldwide universal support received immediately after 9/11, including in the street of Tehran. The delusion of a New American Century quickly snuffed out this glimpse of an opening for redefining the terms of engagement from a military response to one of international cooperation to address a cascade of events that threaten the planet. These events, symbolized by the conspicuous consumption of the US and its reverberations through US defined agendas of free-trade, military power and social values, have created ever widening gaps in wealth and income within and between all of the nations of the world. Air, climate, food, water, shelter and safety are the common wealth of the world, and require in a political sense a Commonwealth of world citizenship (Note 3).

2. Creating a New World Order. The framework for a political Commonwealth *is building and strengthening world citizenship, not citizenships of the world.* This new world order can only be accomplished by *achieving and respecting the power of balance*; it cannot be won by holding the balance of power as envisioned by the delusional dream of a New American Century. There is no amount of military power that the US can muster that can enforce the degree of order and security required for that misplaced arrogance in the 21st Century without sacrificing the very freedom and democracy that is appropriately held to be the cradle for the innovation and imagination that has and will continue to drive human progress. It is the creation of world citizenship that is the precondition for creating a new world order. It is not the arms industry or the economics of globalization and friction-free market-driven capitalism. A civic foundation for a planet at peril is the political construct for building a bridge to the future. No country is better situated to assume this role than the US. Perhaps the presidential election of 2008 is an inflection point for relinquishing a desperate decade of holding on to constructs from the past and embracing the change we have been waiting for.

3. Reclaiming International Leadership. Information and knowledge are the new “capital” for the new era, but not as “money” in the economic sense of wealth. The most important struggle in the transition from the Modern to the Post-Modern Era will be to keep this new form of “capital” as a common wealth, and not follow the old path of allowing it to become investment and proprietary wealth in the form of money. Our current and essential challenge for the future is to create new constructs for *establishing and enhancing knowledge as public domain, not a commodity for financial gain.* We now know what we need to know, and what we have to do, to have six billion plus people live sustainable on this planet. The social and cultural belief and value that will make this possible is to keep knowledge and information – in their broadest possible social, political and economic definitions – in the public domain as the currency for the next chapter in human progress as common wealth (Note 3). Profit and money are to be made through the delivery of this promise and capacity, not through copyright, patent or ownership. There is no other path.

Conclusion

The credit-card consumerism that defined the economic engine that drove us to the end of the Modern Era is over. The threshold we must cross is finding new ways to think about how the

economic, political and social (our core beliefs and values) are to be simultaneous reconfigured to reflect a new reality. It is a reality that for the first time in human history an Era will span a single lifetime – it is the Age of the Millennials. This is a huge psychological challenge for which we have no charts. The next podcast will look at our sense of self in the Post-Modern World, and how we might start to think about how we think about ourselves. If we really are the change we have been waiting for, we need to be thinking about what it means to live with constant fundamental change as the only constant.

Notes

1. Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict, Norton, 2008.
2. Gwynne Dyer, Future: Tense -- The Coming World Order, McClelland & Stewart, 2004.
3. Jeffery D. Sachs, Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet, Penguin Press, 2008.