9/11, FOREIGN THREATS, POLITICAL LEGITIMACY, AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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Inter arma silent leges ("In times of war, the laws are silent.") Ancient Roman maxim)

"Of all the enemies of public liberty, war is perhaps the most to be dreaded....armies, debts and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few....No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare" (Madison 1795: 491).

"In politics, the emotions that really sway voters are hate, hope and fear or anxiety" (Western 2007).

"Since 9/11, we have created the very government the framers feared: a government with sweeping and largely unchecked powers resting on the hope they will be used wisely" (Turley 2012: B4).

ABSTRACT: This article reassesses the political reaction in the United States to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in terms of economics and evolutionary biology. The fact that war and its threat were ever-present in human evolution resulted in two social propensities that render society vulnerable to political manipulation. External threats dramatically heighten social cohesion as well as loyalty to leaders. In pre-state social groupings, all members could clearly witness and judge the nature of an external threat. And because leaders had to spearhead any response, they were most vulnerable to injury or death. In modern highly complex societies, by contrast, the nature of threats is less transparent, and leaders can command far from immediate danger. Consequently, in modern times, leaders can be tempted, especially in times of economic dysfunction, to generate fear of an external threat to rally support and detract attention from otherwise inadequate leadership. This paper explores these dynamics in the context of post-9/11. It concludes with reflections on the potential of democratic institutions and practices to lessen the potential for political leaders to exploit their advantages by trumping up external threats.

KEYWORDS: Ideology, fear, democracy, free-rider problem, social cohesion.

CLASSIFICATION CODES: A12, N40, Z13, P16.

The terrorist attacks on the United States eleven years ago radically changed the American political landscape. The promise of a world at peace that came with the disintegration of the Soviet Union evaporated as the U.S. went to war against terrorism in such a manner as to alienate great

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numbers in Islamic societies while making Americans fearful of further terrorist attacks.

Politicians excited and exploited these fears, with the major consequence being greater acceptance of curtailed civil liberties for the sake of promised greater security.

How could the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 have had such an impact? The loss of almost 3,000 lives and the repeatedly televised account of the Twin Towers’ destruction certainly gave the horror poignant realism. But the number of lives lost in that horrible tragedy pales in light of about 16,000 homicides and 40,000 highway deaths each year in the U.S. What made the terrorist horror so much more powerful – so much more so that citizens could so readily be convinced to sacrifice some of their freedoms?

It should be noted that American history reveals other instances in which freedoms were sacrificed for the supposed cause of national security. For instance, as the Cold War heated up in the late 1940s, the Regents of the University of California forced faculty to sign loyalty oaths under threat of dismissal. They did so again during the McCarthy era. Most faculty did so, and those who refused were fired, with very little opposition from their colleagues. A ban was also placed upon communist speakers, also with little opposition (Schrecker 1988).

How can freedoms be so readily sacrificed? The beginning of an answer lies in the history of our evolution as a species. The fact that war and its threat were ever-present in human evolution

2. According to the National Safety Council, the chance of an American dying in an automobile accident is one in 84 over a lifetime. As Peter Woolley points out, “Automobile deaths are the leading cause of death for children, for teenagers and in fact for all people from age 3 to 33” (2006: A19). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in 2009, 5,474 Americans were killed and about 448,00 injured because drivers were distracted (Halsey 2012: A2. There are many self-financing technologies that could make roads safer, e.g., cameras that fine drivers for running red lights, excess speed, tailgating, changing lanes without signaling, and talking on cell phones or texting while driving. Although such behaviors threaten the lives of innocent people, these new technologies have been opposed on the grounds that personal freedoms would be violated. By contrast, expenditures on homeland security rose by $34 billion between just 2001 and 2005 (Hobijn and Sager. 2007), some of which financed far greater compromises of fundamental Constitutional rights.
resulted in two social propensities that render society vulnerable to political manipulation. External threats dramatically heighten social cohesion as well as loyalty to leaders. In pre-state social groupings, all members could clearly witness and judge the nature of an external threat. And because leaders would have to spearhead any response, they were the most vulnerable to injury or death. In modern, highly complex societies, by contrast, the nature of threats is less transparent, and leaders can command far from immediate danger. Consequently, in modern times, leaders may be tempted, especially in times of economic dysfunction, to generate or heighten fear of an external threat to rally support and detract attention from otherwise inadequate leadership. This article explores these dynamics and notes how instituting greater democracy in the workplace and communities might better equip citizens to more critically assess the attempts of political leaders to gain support for themselves and their policies by trumping up external threats.

**IS WAR NATURAL?**

Are human beings naturally war-like? Is war-like behavior a necessary part of the very nature of human evolution? Historical, evolutionary, anthropological, and archeological evidence suggest that war and war-like behavior has been an ever-present part of the human experience. Social commentators have long noted this. Aristotle, for instance, linked war-like behavior to our social nature. He claimed that not only are humans by nature social beings, but they divide themselves into “polities” or political units with radically different attitudes toward members and non-members. Violence against members is discouraged, often by violent punishment. Violence against non-members, by contrast, is often not only tolerated, but encouraged and rewarded as

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3. The book that launched inquiry on this question is Nobel Laureate Konrad Lorenz’s *On Aggression* 1966).

4. Jared Diamond observes that “…wars, even between mere bands, have been a constant fact of human history” (1997: 291; see also Wade 2006: 151ff).
well. Outsiders are generally depicted as not quite fully human.

From both economic and evolutionary perspectives it is not surprising that war and war-like behavior have been so much a part of the human experience: From an economic vantage point, in a world of scarcity it is understandable that social groups struggle against each other, perhaps war with each other, for control or possession of limited resources. As Gat notes, “Violent competition, alias conflict – including intraspecific conflict – is the rule throughout nature, as organisms vie among themselves to survive and reproduce under ever-prevalent conditions of acute scarcity, conditions accentuated by their own process of propagation” (2006: 663). This competition occurs first for hunting and gathering territories and later for cultivable land. Further, war or its threat can provide for slave labor or tribute from subdued peoples.

From an evolutionary perspective, those groups which are most successful in increasing their

5. According to John L. Fuller, “It is almost certain that all human groups are descended from ancestors who fought intruders on their territory. It is likely that the genetic capacity for violence is latent in every human being, just as is the latent capacity for submission” (1978: 13).

6. Erik Erikson crafted the term “pseudo-speciation” to characterize our willingness to kill enemy members of our own species by depicting them as less than fully human (1969: 431).

7. Of war as a form of competition, David Barash writes, “When resources are abundant and widely distributed, competition is rare; as resources become scarce, however, competition increases” (1979: 194). Barash argues that societies that have been discovered by anthropologists to have been peaceful (e.g. the Bushmen of Africa’s Kalahari Desert, or the Eskimos) were uniquely situated in territories where competition through war for scarce resources could not have paid off (see also Gat 2006: 15ff). Barash addresses the naturalness of war by noting the fitness argument: “The fitness of individuals within a group suffers most when that group is forced to share resources with individuals of another group. The personal fitness of these individuals could therefore actually be increased by warfare, provided that the cost of waging war is less than the benefits received” (1979: 196-97;).

8. Pierre van den Berghe argues that “The real `take-off' point for the development of human coercion and intraspecific parasitism on a massive and organized scale was the domestication of plants and animals for food....No longer did loosely organized small bands simply raid each other, kill a few men, and steal a couple of women. Now much larger and better organized groups started conquering each other's land for keeps and exploiting each other's labor” (1982: 25). Along with the adoption of agriculture came differentials in group sizes and technology, and surpluses or appropriable resource wealth that would make plunder increasingly attractive for those possessing an edge of military superiority
command over scarce resources will have a survival advantage, permitting them to increase their populations, and thereby pass their genes and culture on to more progeny.

War, then, at least in the early history of humanity, was not the consequence of some self-destructive passion run amok. Instead, it was critical to the very process of human social and cultural evolution. Indeed, Darwin and others since have suggested that the very evolution of human intelligence is linked to the pervasiveness of warfare in the human experience. Larger, more sophisticated brains would better enable communication, the formation of social alliances, and the development and deployment of more sophisticated weapons. Wade notes that “chimp and human societies possess another salient feature in common, that of a strong propensity to kill their own kind. A willingness to kill members of one’s own species is apparently correlated with high intelligence” (2006: 148; See also, Alexander 1971: 99-120; Lumsden and Wilson 1983: 160ff; Gelven 1994; Wilson 1973: 20-22).

**THE ECONOMICS OF WAR**

But if war makes sense from an economic perspective, then what have economists had to say about it? In particular, what have they had to say about the relationship, or lack thereof, between socio-economic conditions and war or war-like behavior? Not only do we find very little of a theoretical nature; there is not even very much of a speculative sort.

There are some exceptions, especially among Marxists and other heterodox economic thinkers. For instance, Marx saw war as part of the process he called primitive accumulation in the early evolution of capitalism. Later Marxists and radical thinkers have depicted war as the likely outcome of imperialism – the outcome of capitalist state rivalry for resources and markets. In the 1960s and 1970s, the monopoly capital school of Marxism adopted a Keynesian inadequate-aggregate-demand framework and argued that spending for war is one of the few
ways that the capitalist state -- which they viewed as controlled by a capitalist class -- can spend to maintain aggregate demand in its attempt to avoid economic crises. However, insofar as these studies are somewhat exclusively directed towards uncovering war-like tendencies within capitalist society, they do not promise a more general theory of the relationships of socio-economic conditions and war.

Two other heterodox economists who discussed war are Thorstein Veblen and Joseph Schumpeter. Both saw war as essentially irrational: Veblen saw war as a cultural perversion, stemming from a military predatory stage through which humanity had passed. He viewed these atavistic “habits of thought” as persisting into the twentieth century. Schumpeter also saw war as atavistic behavior, and optimistically as something that capitalistic rationality -- which he saw much in the manner of Max Weber’s spirit of capitalism -- will move us beyond.

Within the mainstream of economics, the subject of war and socio-economic conditions has not been extensively addressed. When mainstream economists do discuss war, it is usually in terms of the behavior of individuals, as opposed to institutions. And the most thorough treatment from this perspective is a slim volume by Gordon Tullock entitled *The Social Dilemma: The Economics of War and Revolution*. What Tullock does is extend the neoclassical economic model to an analysis of the behavior of rivals in war. Central to this model is the

9. This thesis was most fully developed in Baran and Sweezy 1966. See also, O’Connor 1973.

10. Veblen was keenly aware of the manner in which patriotism might block progressive action: “It is quite impossible on Darwinian ground to foretell whether the ‘proletariat’ will go on to establish the socialist revolution or turn aside again, and sink their force in the broad sands of patriotism” (Veblen 1919: 442).

11. The power of nationalism has generally been underestimated by those optimistic about humanity’s future. As Isaiah Berlin put it, they believed “the phenomenon of nationalism would ...be destroyed by the irresistible advance of enlightenment, whether conceived in moral or technological terms – the victory of reason or of material progress or both – identified with changes in the forces and relations of production, or with the struggle for social equality...” (1998: 588). War involves fear, about which Edmund Burke observed: “No passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear” (cited in Begley 2007: 38).
assumption that actors are rational, self-interested maximizers, and that decisions are made at the margin. For those familiar with this fundamental framework of neoclassical analysis, Tullock’s analysis of economics and war holds few, if any, surprises.

War and war-like behavior are depicted as rational for one or more parties. By rational it is meant that war follows some sort of at least rough and ready calculations of the estimated costs and benefits of varying degrees of war-like behavior. This can be complicated. Bluffing, or mere war-like behavior, can be rational, potentially even more so than actually going to war. For instance, a weaker power, knowing it would lose a war, might nonetheless pretend that it would fight. Only by threatening the stronger power with losses, should it attack, might the weaker discourage the stronger from actually attacking. Duopoly and oligopoly models of the firm, as well as game theoretics, are readily adapted to fit the interactive strategies of military rivals.

Within this model, war is a negative-sum game. That is, whereas war might be rational for one or more parties, it is irrational for all participants taken together. What the winner wins is always less than what the losers lose. Moreover, because war costs resources, if it can be avoided, these resources can in principle be allocated to meet other needs.12

The economic model of war set forth by Tullock – the one implicit in neoclassical economic thinking – is useful as far as it goes. Its particular strength is that it makes clear how we expect rival parties to behave in terms of crafting their strategies toward one another, in terms of how they behave at the bargaining table. In fact, this basic framework of analysis has been

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12. There is an interesting sense in which war may not have been a negative-sum game within the evolution of the human species taken as a whole. As noted above, Darwin and many other evolutionary biologists since have suggested that the very evolution of human sociability and intelligence is linked to the pervasiveness of warfare in the human experience
widely used by students of international relations and politics.\textsuperscript{13}

The limitation of this model, however, is that its focus is exclusively upon the interactions between the rival participants. Although progress at the bargaining table is surely necessary, it is quite possible that it is not sufficient. The neoclassical model does not shine light on whether there are measures that might be pursued in addition to bargaining with the enemy, measures that might address socioeconomic conditions within a society. The neoclassical model focuses on the individual decision maker as a rational self-interested maximizer. The model sheds no light on how individuals are socialized – on how their preference functions are formed. It does not tell us how or what individuals come to understand as their self-interest.

Moreover, although the model of rational maximizing behavior may characterize the strategies rivals take toward one another, it appears limited in two further interrelated senses. First, it presumes that the self-interest of political leaders and that of their constituents are essentially the same.\textsuperscript{14} Second, when it comes to actual conflict, the model of rational maximizing behavior does not seem to fit the varied accounts of how individual participants behave in battle. More pointedly, when members of one side behave as purely self-interested actors, they decrease their side's chances of success. The reason, of course, is the free-rider problem. If individuals self-interestedly shirk their fair share of the battle effort, a breakdown in cohesion threatens. Success in battle, and especially those upsets where a physically weaker side

\textsuperscript{13} See, for instance, Gilpin 1981 for an especially heavy reliance on the analytics of neoclassical analysis. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's \textit{The War Trap} (1981) is another well-known example, although the reliance on microeconomic theory is more often implicit than explicit.

\textsuperscript{14} Curiously, given his important role within the Public Choice School, Tullock makes only passing mention of the possibility that the self-interest of leaders might differ from those they lead, and even here, the case is that of a dictator choosing to wage a foreign war for either domestic political survival or to increase the domain of control (1974: 88, 99).
trounces a stronger opponent, typically is found to involve a certain *esprit de corps* -- an especially strong commitment on the part of individuals to the group – precisely what the neoclassical model is wont to explain.

This suggests, then, that whereas war may be rational for a group, it requires non-rational motivation on the part of individual actors. But if this should be the case, how might it have come about in terms of human evolution?

**GROUP COMMITMENT AND LOYALTY TO LEADERS**

As noted above, war and war-like behavior are understandable from both evolutionary and economic perspectives. Through evolution, war and war-like behavior were selected. Some scholars have held that war-like behavior was not genetic, but instead that it was culturally selected. However, the dominant view among evolutionary biologists and ethnologists today is what they term “gene-culture co-evolution,” by which they mean that there are, as Charles Lumsden and Edward Wilson have put it, “reciprocal effects of genetic and cultural change within the human species” (1983: 206). Cultural change prompts genetic change and vice-versa. Thus, as Barash puts it: “It is pointless to debate whether human beings are innately aggressive, especially because genetic and experiential factors are so intimately involved in the determination of such behavior” (1982: 352).

Just as war-like behavior has been selected, so too, it would appear, have two correlative social tendencies: The first is the extraordinary commitment of members to the group during war.

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15. The classic argument that war is a cultural, not an instinctual phenomenon, was made by Margaret Mead (1940). Indeed, much of the twentieth century was dominated by the “Standard Social Science Model” (SSSM) that depicted human nature as a sort of *tabula rasa* onto which culture wrote the script, suggesting full cultural plasticity. As Dawson puts it, “The SSSM teaches that culture is free to do very much what it pleases” (1999: 84). Supporting this view concerning war, noted anthropologist Richard E. Leakey and Roger Lewin argue that although “war is an outrageously successful activity....[and] an advantageous pursuit in a material world....it is a product of cultural invention, not a fundamental biological instinct” (1979: 217, 236).
or its threat. This is hardly surprising, since a group for which such commitment is weak would be at a severe disadvantage in a struggle for resources, and therefore would be at a disadvantage in terms of survival, in terms of passing its genes or culture on to progeny. It is even plausible that our very sociability, at least to some extent, was selected as a result of the benefits of social cohesion during threat from external aggressors.

Evidence of this group commitment under threat is everywhere in our cultural history: War provides for the most awesome acts of heroism. It is during war that individuals most readily sacrifice their lives for others. Nietzsche, and many others since, have noted that men are more tightly bonded together in combat than at any other time. This bonding appears to be intensely pleasurable, providing exhilaration in identifying with a group in conflict with others (Gat 2006: 662). Eminent war historian John W. Dower adds that “Psychological drives that may run deeper than group identity or thirst for collective revenge enter the picture, such as constructs of masculinity or the compelling attractiveness of ‘limit experiences’” (2010: 223). We also see the proclivity for group commitment in sports. For instance, rarely is anything really to be gained by spectators if their team wins, yet at times there is actual carnage among...

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16. This seems to be the case even when the threat emanates from forces or events not resulting from the hostility of others. Natural catastrophes, ship wrecks, and even “brown-outs” appear to elicit spontaneous group cohesion (Solnit 2009). The power of such group identity or solidarity has been described as follows: “Our experiments have led us to conclude that cooperation rates can be radically affected by one factor in particular, which is independent of the consequences for the choosing individual. That factor is group identity. Such identity – or solidarity – can be established and consequently enhance cooperative responding in the absence of any expectation of future reciprocity, current rewards or punishment, or even reputational consequences among other group members. We have eliminated all side payments...concerns with reputation...the possibility of reciprocal altruism. We nevertheless obtain substantial rates of cooperation” (Dawes, et.al. 1990: 99-100).

17. Keith F. Otterbein argues that political organization and war-making potential have developed in a process of mutual re-enforcement. Indeed, centralized authority appears to correlate with military efficiency (1970). Diamond concurs: “...wars, or threats of war, have played a key role in most, if not all, amalgamations of societies” (1997: 291).
spectators not content with the run of the game. Clearly something non-rational is at play here.\textsuperscript{18}

Evolution may have selected a tendency always to locate an external foe.\textsuperscript{19} Societies rarely seem to be without one. For instance, in the U.S., the two great political purges of the past century (the Red Scare of the early 1920s and the McCarthy era of the 1950s) came in the wake of the two World Wars as the old enemies disappeared, and the need for new ones came into force. The payoff for this tendency to always identify an external foe is the social cohesion which better enables society to minimize the free-rider problem.\textsuperscript{20}

The second corollary of war that appears to have been selected has to do with the degree of loyalty given to leaders. This loyalty would appear necessary due to the need for spontaneity of response to enemy changes in strategy. In fact, it seems that leaders rarely achieve as high a degree of loyalty from their followers during peace as during war.\textsuperscript{21} As biologist John Alcock has put it, “paradoxically, war depends on the cooperative, group-bonding, authority-accepting

\textsuperscript{18}Veblen viewed sports as “activities of a predominantly predatory character” (1899: 173); see also Veblen 1917.

\textsuperscript{19}This is the argument set forth by Barash, 1994. Interestingly, he points out “the word ‘Satan,’ the chief evil spirit of Western religious belief...is derived from the same root in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Old English [wherein] Satan means adversary, opponent, enemy” (158).

\textsuperscript{20}Mary Coleman notes that

“psychopolitical analysis suggests that much of the time we have to have an ‘enemy,’ any enemy. Groups apparently attempt to heal internal conflicts and prevent intergroup violence by sharing a common group-fantasy about an enemy where we can collectively project our own (often disavowed) feelings of contempt and hatred for one another.” (1984: 125).

Barash points out that

“The medieval Catholic Church...was strengthened, doctrinally and organizationally, by its battles with the various medieval heresies – Manichean, Gnostic, Albigensian – as well as its later struggles with Protestantism...[And] the reluctance of Israeli hard-liners to make peace with the Palestinians and ultimately with all Arabs may thus actually be due less to fear for Israeli military security than to apprehension at the chaos that might ensue if Israel loses its Arab opponents” (1994: 134-35).

In the wake of Pearl Harbor, the Chicago Daily News proclaimed, “Thanks now to Japan, the deep division of opinion that has rent and paralyzed our country will be swiftly healed” (cited in Dower 2010: 139).

\textsuperscript{21}This relationship between hostility toward outsiders and submissiveness to a leader has been noted by Roger D. Masters. However, he appears to have the causality reversed: “Submissiveness to a leader -- an element of cooperation within the group -- often triggers hostility and violence toward outsiders” (1982: 218). Caspary notes that “It has been widely observed that soldiers fight -- and noncombatants assent to war -- not out of aggressiveness but obedience” (1993: 423).
aspect of human behavior” (Alcock 1978: 24-25).

Because leaders receive greater loyalty and respect from followers when external aggression threatens, they face an all but irresistible temptation: They can benefit if they can convincingly keep alive a perception of external aggression. They can even be expected to craft measures against other powers that will provoke a limited amount of real threat. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Right*, noted that “peoples involved in civil strife ...acquire peace at home through making war abroad” (1942: 295). 22

**LOYALTY TO LEADERS IN MODERN TIMES**

The social functioning of loyalty to leaders exhibits an important difference between early human society and quite recent history. It has been estimated that if we were to see the human past as a 24-hour day, then 23 hours and 50 minutes occurred prior to the Neolithic revolution, that is, prior to the adoption of agriculture about 10,000 years ago. During this long period it is generally believed that humans lived in bands of approximately 25 members. 23 It is also believed that such bands were essentially democratic and egalitarian, and that decisions were relatively consensual.

Our genetic heritage was overwhelmingly determined during this pre-agricultural period -- the 23 hours and 50 minutes of our day of existence. 24 Accordingly, when group

22. It has been argued that pre-World War I Germany's ruling elite became increasingly war-like in part to deflect and mollify the growing challenge of Germany's working class movement (See Berghahn 1973).

23. Anthropologists have found that on average 25 is the optimal number of members for hunter-gatherer bands. This is due to the average food yield and the amount of territory a group could cover (approximately 25 square miles) and still cohere as a group (Leakey and Lewin 1979: 109ff).

24. Nevertheless, genetic changes did not come to an end. Indeed, it has been suggested that “It was only after people had become less violent that they were able to abandon the nomadic life of hunting and gathering...[and that] human societies have made vast gains in peacefulness, complexity and cohesion in the last 15,000 years” (Wade 2006: 178).
commitment and loyalty to leaders in times of danger were being selected in early human evolution, leaders were the most vulnerable to injury or death. They literally led the band into battle. Any temptation to reap loyalty and respect by showing courage before the enemy had to be tempered by the risk of serious personal injury or death.

However, over the last 10 minutes of human existence – the period since the adoption of agriculture – society has become highly complex: differentiated in terms of economic function through the division of labor and layered with respect to wealth, status, and power. There are two consequences of this greater complexity that are of interest for grasping the nature of modern bellicosity and war. First, what is rational for certain segments of society is no longer necessarily rational for all. This is hardly, of course, a novel argument. Marxists, and many other social observers as well, have noted that under capitalism, for instance, whereas capitalists tend disproportionately to reap whatever benefits there might be from war, workers disproportionately bear the costs: Until very recent times, workers were “drafted”; which means that they were not paid their asking price to go to war voluntarily. By contrast, capital was only rarely drafted. Instead, during wars, profits to capital tend to be abnormally high.

The second consequence of this explosion in social complexity is that the cost to leaders of yielding to the temptation to seek the loyalty and respect of followers by keeping alive the perception of a threat of external aggression has progressively declined. Over the last 10,000 years as societies have become increasingly complex, their leaders have progressively retreated from the front, and failure in war has become personally less costly to them. This does not imply that leaders can with impunity maintain loyalty by generating external hostilities. If they push too hard, a catastrophic war might result, robbing them of power and even life. On the other hand, if members of the group view the alleged threat as either not real, or as not sufficient to
merit the cost, then the leader loses credibility and possibly also power.\textsuperscript{25}

There is no need to embrace a conspiracy theory of modern war-like behavior, whereby leaders, consciously and in a calculatingly rational manner, weigh the political benefits against the costs of war-like behavior. They may, of course, do so. However, because such behavior was selected for in evolution, it likely that it comes forth somewhat spontaneously.

At this juncture, note should be taken of the important role of ideology. Since the evolution of complex language, ideology is likely to have been important in maintaining group cohesion and effectiveness in war-like behavior. But in the pre-neolithic era, a threat was generally visible for all to see. In more modern times, by contrast, a threat may be protracted or not always clearly in evidence. Here ideology becomes more critical for maintaining loyalty both to the group and to the leader. Indeed, ideology production becomes an industry, keeping alive depictions of enemies as not actually or fully human,\textsuperscript{26} as godless; as advocates of barbarian social institutions; as people of the “Evil Empire” or “Axis of Evil,” or as terrorists.\textsuperscript{27}

Alternatively, ideology may imbue the distant leader with supernatural powers such as quasi-godhood, divine status or divine rights.

For the past fifty years, the cost of a world war utilizing nuclear weapons has been potentially infinite. Thus, sophisticated atomic weapons are often credited with effectively

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{25} In general, this describes what occurred to U.S. Presidents during the Vietnam War and President George H. Bush during the first war in Iraq.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Note the racist overtone of Bernard Lewis’ statement that “I believe that one of the things you’ve got to do to Arabs is hit them between the eyes with a big stick. They respect power” (cited in Dower 2010: 135).
  \item \textsuperscript{27} As Dower expresses this: “Mendacity and deception are standard operating procedure in the cultures of war, as in politics more generally. Legions of wordsmiths and crafters of visual imagery earn their keep by churning out truths, half-truths, imagined truths, iconic images, catchphrases, euphemisms, exaggerations, evasions, and outright lies…” (2010: 125).
\end{itemize}
ending major wars. The infinite cost of a U.S.-Soviet war made it considerably more difficult for leaders to appeal to the external threat strategy.28

In very modern times it may be during periods of economic dysfunction that leaders are most tempted to use the external threat strategy to achieve support. That is, it may be during economic crises that leaders will be most tempted to craft limited measures against another power or powers in order to provoke a limited or manageable amount of real threat.29 The reason is that beyond its success in providing for defense and domestic law and order, the most important criterion for judging leadership today is its ability to maintain material or economic prosperity.

A number of events in recent times support this hypothesis. World War II grew out of the worst economic depression in the history of capitalism. The peace movement and détente came forth during the extraordinary world-wide economic dynamism of the 1960s. When economic progress began to falter in the 1970s, détente began to be drowned out by rattling sabers (See Russett 1983). Note also that during the 1960s there was widespread confidence in governments' ability to use Keynesian tools to insure macro-economic stability, whereas stagflation dominated the 1970s, abetting later in that decade and during the early 1980s, a resurgence of laissez-faire

28. In the 1980s, President Reagan talked of surviving nuclear war. According to Mary Coleman, “On at least five occasions in the last four years, Ronald Reagan has referred to his belief that Armageddon may well occur during the present generation” (1984: 127). In doing so, was he creating more space in which he could play upon the Soviet-menace strategy? We might also note the manner in which religious doctrines that hold forth the promise of an after-life, and especially those that come close to celebrating a forthcoming apocalypse, increase the potential for leaders to profit from aggressive war-like stances. Coleman notes that Reagan's use of the term Armageddon was in the religious sense.

29. This was a central theme in George Orwell's 1984. The three world powers maintained a constant semblance of hostilities in order to maintain the loyalty of their subjects and distract them from their lack of freedom and their sordid socio-economic conditions. Or in real history, note that the economies of both England and Argentina were severely depressed prior to the Malvinas/Falkland fracas of the early 1980s. Noted political scientist Sheldon Wolin has noted that “Wars, especially undeclared ones, invariably boost the powers and status of the president as commander-in-chief” (2008: 105).
doctrine, claiming that governments are essentially powerless to stabilize economies, thereby seemingly exonerating governments of the responsibility.

There are endless examples of how the threat of foreign aggression has served to legitimate political power. For instance, the rise of the first socialist country following upon the Bolshevik Revolution provided the capitalist power elites in western countries with a powerful ideological tool for de-legitimating the progressive aspirations of the working class. The foreign threat was far more than just an enemy country; it was an insidious ideology – communism. Communism was likened to a metastisizing foreign cancer that was ever-threatening to enter all parts of the social body, with disastrous consequences. It was godless, soulless, and if not successfully fought, it would make slaves of everyone. Progressive ideas were readily depicted as communist-inspired and those who advocated them as secretly working for the world-wide communist conspiracy. The Bolshevik Revolution granted capitalist interests an ideal foreign enemy.30

This foreign threat was continually used to legitimate intervention in the internal affairs of third world countries. Communism had to be stopped from expanding over the globe, even if it meant overthrowing democratically-elected governments, propping up dictators, or backing death squads. It is noteworthy that since 9/11, in a parallel manner intervention in Islamic societies has been carried out as essential in the war against terrorism.

A second successful, long-lasting modern example of how the threat of foreign aggression served to legitimate political power was the Soviet Union. From 1917 on, it was easy for the Soviet power elite to maintain the credibility of a constant external threat. No sooner

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30 Thirteen million Americans signed loyalty oaths as a condition of employment during the 1950s. So extreme was the fear that New York state required that applicants for fishing licences swear renunciation of communism.
had the Bolsheviks taken power than England, France, and the United States set out to undermine the socialist experiment, especially by arming and financing the White Russians. Throughout the 1920s there was a perceived threat that the socialist experiment would be undone by hostile capitalist countries. So strongly did Stalin feel this that in 1931 he announced: “We must make good this distance [to become a first-rate economic and political power] in ten years. Either we do so, or we shall go under” (Cited in Gurley 1979: 110). His words were to be prophetic -- the German Wehrmacht crossed their borders 10 years later. And then, at the end of World War II, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on civilian populations in Japan, providing Soviet leaders with a powerful example to present to their peoples of just how ruthlessly inhumane the capitalist U.S. might be in pursuit of its interests.

**A WAR ON TERRORISM: DIVERTING ATTENTION**

If it were the case today that leaders are tempted to generate or maintain a state of apprehension concerning external threats so as to detract from inadequate economic conditions, what might constitute these inadequacies in the United States in recent years?

First to be noted is that the administration of George W. Bush came into office with what many judged as questionable electoral legitimacy. But perhaps more important were the economic inadequacies. Most visible was the sharp collapse of stock market prices: In Bush’s first two years in office, the S&P 500 declined by 33 percent; $4.9 trillion in equity assets evaporated (In Herbert Hoover’s first two years, it declined by 29%). In Bush’s first two years in office, unemployment increased by 40%, from 4.2% to 6%. Between January 2002 and January 2003, the dollar declined by 20% against the Euro. Budget deficits, not yet accounting for either the cost of the war with Iraq
or enacted tax cuts, were projected to be at unprecedented absolute levels. The collapse of equity values and the weakened economy put states in dire budgetary straits, thus prompting cuts in programs that benefit the poor and vulnerable.

And then, there were the corporate scandals that involved not only major supporters of the Republican leadership and agenda, but also that very leadership.

Within this context of his questionable election as President, an economy in serious condition, and larcenous behavior by his cronies, the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers was an extraordinary stroke of good luck. As Dower put it, just as December 7, 1941 was “a political godsend for President Roosevelt…September 11 proved to be a windfall for President Bush” (2010: 138). Longtime advisor Karl Rowe noted that “Sometimes history sends you things, and 9/11 came our way” (cited in Dower 2010: 138). In Wolin’s words, “The administration seized on 9/11 to declare ‘a war on terrorism.’ The declaration not only transformed that event and the public support it generated into a warrant of legitimation that dispelled the clouded 2000 election, but casting terrorism in global terms, it also justified the mobilization of imperial power and elicited the support/docility of a fearful citizenry” (2008: 190-91). Thus, within the first two weeks, as Americans joined in solidarity, Bush’s popularity rating soared. He widely came to be seen by Americans as a great leader. A mere six weeks after the attack, he was thus able to push through Congress with practically no resistance a bill that would seriously compromise civil liberties: the USA PATRIOT Act. And suggesting that the source of his new popularity was well


32. The Patriot Act has permitted prosecutors to get around curbs on wiretaps and searches where they claimed that they were investigating “agents” of foreign powers. The act enables the violation of people’s rights without their being aware. For instance, in the name of national security, the FBI could get permission from a secret federal court to inspect someone’s reading and computer records at a library, and prohibit the librarians from revealing that such a search had taken place. Attorney General John Ashcroft scolded those who objected: “To those who scare
understood, “The Bush Administration went out of its way after September 11 to excite rather than calm public fears...[characterizing] the event as the first stage of a ‘war’ rather than as a heinous crime” (Stone 2004: 554). 33

The broadened scope of warrantless surveillance advanced by President George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11 has been yet further expanded by President Obama. 34 Regrettably, as legal scholar Jonathan Turley puts it, “Citizens have largely accepted the false premise that privacy is the enemy of security and have supported ever-widening surveillance powers. The problem is that privacy remains an abstraction, while crime, or terrorism, is a concrete threat” (2011: B3). Priest and Arkin report that “The top-secret world the government created in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, has become so large, so unwieldy and so secretive that no one knows how much money it costs, how many people it employs, how many programs exist

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33. Further evidence that 9/11 was seized upon by the Bush Administration for ideological purposes as opposed to a genuine concern for Americans’ safety is provided by the response to the threat Hurricane Katrina posed to New Orleans. A report, “A Failure of Initiative” undertaken by the House of Representatives found 90 failures in the response of government. The 600-page report found Bush aides guilty of passivity to the threat, disregarding ample warnings. Not only did they not execute emergency plans in a timely manner, they also failed to share information with other governmental services that might have resulted in far fewer deaths. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff turned on the government’s emergency response systems “late, ineffectively or not at all” (cited in Hsu 2006: A14). This resulted in a delay in the flow of federal troops and materials by as much as three days. “About 56 hours before Katrina made landfall, the National Weather Service and National Hurricane Center cited an ‘extremely high probability’ that New Orleans would be flooded and tens of thousands of residents killed” (Hsu 2006: A14)

34 On December 31, 2011, Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act that permits the indefinite detention of U.S. citizens (Turley 2012: B1). On March 22, 2012, he approved guidelines permitting the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to retain information about U.S. citizens for up to five years, as opposed to the earlier 180 days, even when there is no evidence that these citizens have any contacts with terrorist organizations (Horwitz and Nakashima 2012: A1). As Turley points out, “President Obama has claimed, as President George W. Bush did before him, the right to order the killing of any citizen considered a terrorist or an abettor of terrorism. Last year, he approved the killing of U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awiaqi and another citizen under this claimed inherent authority (2012: B4).
within it or exactly how many agencies do the same work” (2010).

However, as 9/11 drifted further into history, the social solidarity it provoked and the accompanying loyalty to leadership were destined to weaken. Periodic alerts of potentially imminent attacks, along with elaborate, half-baked instructions as to how to survive such attacks, helped keep the sense of threat alive. And to give it renewed strength, attacking one of the “axes of evil” could extend the gambit.

But was there more at stake than augmenting political power? Did the attention drawn to a war against terrorism serve to divert attention from another agenda? This is the view expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter: “Constant reference to a ‘war on terror’ did accomplish one major objective: It stimulated the emergence of a culture of fear. Fear handicaps reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue” (2007: B1).

But what policies was the Bush administration intent on pursuing? Beginning with the Reagan administrations, public policy had begun reversing the legislation of the previous four decades that had made the U.S. a far more egalitarian society. Bush embraced these same views concerning the economy as had Reagan and his father. Thus, in the very first days of the Iraqi war, both houses of Congress began addressing tax cuts proposed by Bush that had little legitimacy other than further significantly enriching the rich. The biggest tax cut in the nation’s history was passed in 2001, resulting in a dramatic increase in inequality. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 handed over about $1.7 trillion to the rich and added that bill to the deficits between 2001 and 2008 (Tampa Bay Times

35 It also added to and justified huge defense spending. To put this into perspective, U.S. military spending is about four times greater than all expenditures on social programs (Wolin 2008: 239).
2009). By 2008, income inequality had returned to levels not seen since the 1920s which in turn had been one of the principal legacies of the robber barons and the gilded age.

The trumped-up fear of terrorism also served to increase inequality by providing employers with another weapon to use as leverage against labor.36 In the name of security, government granted them justification for not hiring and for weeding out radical workers who might question our nation’s policies. As Corey Robin reports, where “government lacked the evidence required by the Bill of Rights to prosecute individuals with suspicious associations and beliefs...It asked private employers to use their power of hiring and firing – which is not subject to the Bill of rights – to punish these individuals” (2004: B4).37

**CREATING A LESS AUTHORITARIAN, MORE CRITICALLY-MINDED CITIZENRY**

Nine-eleven was an unexpected windfall for a President who began office in a weakened state. It legitimated a unifying and empowering response to a foreign threat that had not been easy to exploit since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, during the Cold War, the strategy had to be used with great care, lest if overdone, there be nuclear annihilation of all humanity. But with that threat greatly lessened, leaders could again play the foreign menace card, especially against non-nuclear forces, practically with impunity. And if their war mongering were to provoke yet further terrorist acts, that too would enhance their power.

Within this context, it is difficult to be optimistic. The increasing wealth of a small elite

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36. Employers generally represent the interests of capital and thus the interests of the rich. In 2007, the wealthiest one percent of Americans owned 49.3 percent of stocks and mutual funds, the richest 10 percent, 89.4 percent, leaving the bottom 90 percent with only 10.6 percent (Wolff 2010: Table 9: 52).

37. Robin also notes that even “the American Civil Liberties Union had signed an agreement promising the government that it would not employ anyone appearing on official watch lists of suspected supporters of terrorism” (2004: B4). Needless to say, individuals might be put on such lists in a highly arbitrary manner and they have no recourse. Without due process they are merely guilty.
has given them not only increased political clout but also far more control over the media. And the media have become strikingly less free. Reporters without Borders, a news media advocacy organization, annually constructs a Worldwide Press Freedom Index. In 2002, the U.S. ranked 17th among the world’s nations. By October of 2006, it had fallen to 53rd (Bostany 2006: A15), although by 2011, it had risen to 47th (Reporters without Borders 2012). If the history of freedom is viewed as the history of the struggle to constrain the power of the state and those special interests that disproportionally influence and benefit from it, then the United States has regressed over the past several decades, so much so that democracy itself is in jeopardy. It is being eroded by the restrictions on freedom in the war on terrorism on the one hand, and on the other, due to rising inequality, by the disproportional political power of the rich.

Democracy is essential for both freedom and peace. It imposes upon all citizens the necessity of freely deciding the future of their collective existence. Its value is evidenced by the fact that no two democratic nations have ever warred against each other (Gat 2006).

However, whereas the concept of political democracy is widely embraced, there is yet little appreciation of broadening democracy into the economic realm, especially into the workplace, where workers spend about half their waking hours, five days a week.

A number of economists such as Alfred Marshall and Veblen addressed the centrality of work in forming human attitudes and character. In the U.S. today, nine out of ten workers are

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38. There have been attempts to limit the control of monied interests in politics. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (better known as the McCain-Feingold campaign finance act) restricted, among other things, the use of a candidate’s name in corporate-and union-sponsored television ads 30 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election. The intent was to curb the power of monied interests to fund ads that purport to be about issues but that are in fact merely attacks on candidates. However, the Supreme Court overturned this provision of the act on June 25, 2007, on First Amendment grounds, thus making clear that free speech extends not just to citizens, but to corporate interests as well. At about the same time, it also curbed the free speech of high school students (“Bong Hits for Jesus”).

39. In Marshall’s words, “the business by which a person earns his livelihood fills his thoughts during by far the
bossed about -- they must bow, often unquestioningly, to the authority of firms’ owners or agents. They must take and execute orders uncritically. And because they have no control over the management of the firms in which they work, these firms may relocate, often leaving the workers’ community devastated. And because communities can be devastated so readily, citizens have less interest in participating in their community’s affairs.

Because of the centrality of work to everyday life and the fact that these workplaces are authoritarian, creative and critical habits of thought are not as actively cultivated in everyday life as might be the case if workers were more empowered.40 The same could be said for many local communities.41 Bossed-about workers and passive community members transmit these uncritical authoritarian attitudes on to their children. Being “bossed about” inhibits workers’ potential for being creative, and “like conformity, submission to authority undermines independent cognition.” Further, “the low quality of work experience contributes more than do other aspects of the class system to people’s self-doubts, lack of trust, authoritarianism, and conformism in their moral standards.” By contrast, “self-direction on the job improves cognitive capacities and leads to valuing self-direction itself” (Lane 1991: 175; 295; 327). A move toward workplace and community democracy might hold the greatest promise of inculcating non-authoritarian, critical ways of thinking. Lane reports that research reveals that “self-directedness in work... is associated with non-authoritarianism, assumption of moral responsibility for one’s own acts, trust

40. Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler have found that routinized, repetitive, and closely supervised jobs encourage authoritarianism and moral irresponsibility (1983).

41. Kornhouser found that in a “mass” society where individuals are “atomized” or without a sense of belongingness that accompanies membership in communities, people are more vulnerable to manipulation by charismatic leaders and the mass media, and hence more readily attracted to totalitarian movements (1959).
in others, self-esteem, and lower anxiety.” Further, authoritarian workplaces are often stressful. Stress is not only detrimental to health, but it also reduces cognitive complexity (1991: 242; 175).

As has long been recognized, democracy is the best school for inculcating free, critical, responsive and responsible decision-making.

Humanity’s hope for peace and freedom lies in our capacity to grasp the full nature of the social irrationality at play when leaders trump up fears of external enemies. Hope lies with the very intelligence which has brought us to this point in our evolution. Human intelligence stands the greatest chance of advancement when humans are free, self-reliant, and democratically called upon to participate in making decisions in all domains of their lives.

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42. Biological anthropologist Richard Wrangham believes that humans in fact are becoming more peaceable: “I think that current evidence is that we’re in the middle of an evolutionary event in which tooth size is falling, jaw size is falling, and it’s quite reasonable to imagine that we’re continuing to tame ourselves...This puts humans in a picture of now undergoing a process of becoming increasingly a peaceful form of a more aggressive ancestor” (2002; cited in Wade 2006: 177).

43. Evolutionary biologist David Barach has also argued that our hope for survival depends upon use of “our understanding and our reason to overrule our dangerously outmoded whisperings from within” (1979: 198). Intelligence was, of course, itself selected for in evolution. Donald Goldsmith and Tobias Owen combine the reflection that “our example on Earth seems to show that natural selection does favor the development of intelligent, self-conscious life” with the following disturbing question: “Does intelligence carry with it the seeds of catastrophe, leading the species that have it to their destruction?” (1980: 197).


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