

“INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY” IS A PROPAGANDA TOOL

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RJ *Western efforts aimed at providing international aid, including fighting various social and political illnesses all over the world, have recently been subjected to a crushing critique. This critique is also now more vocal in the West. Has the West not lost its passion for diagnosing other societies and sometimes prescribe coercive treatment? Is the “white man’s burden” not a thing of the past?*

I think you are making a distinction, quite rightly, between Western governments and Western citizens. Many of these citizens are openly critical of the foreign policies their

governments follow, although for various reasons they are not successful in getting governments to change these policies. I would also make two qualifications to your question. First, it is essential to speak about the United States as the leading power in the West (I would speak of it as a neo-imperial power). NATO, established after World War II with the leadership of the US in the face of what was seen as the Soviet threat, should have been dissolved after the collapse of the USSR, but it remains in place now as an instrument of US global policy. Second, I do not believe that the military interventions by the US and its allies against other countries were motivated by the desire to “solve other countries’ political and social problems.” **They were largely aimed at solving Western problems (how to push NATO further into Eastern Europe, how to pursue a global “War on Terrorism,” and how to destroy Saddam Hussein’s regime for geo-strategic reasons).** NATO was eager to intervene in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan but not in Rwanda and Congo, Saddam Hussein’s brutal regime was supported by Western powers militarily in his war against Iran, but when he became a threat to US allies in the region he was removed. There is also the unfortunate fact that the military establishment in every industrially advanced nation welcomes the opportunity to try out new weaponry and tactics in actual armed conflicts. And in the US, the civilian administration has

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unfortunately allowed itself to be pushed more and more by the military.

RJ *Many ratings of international*

organizations declare some countries to be in complete non-compliance with the standards that are, in their view, commonly accepted in the world. Does this really indicate an “illness” or does it merely reflect the political agenda of these organizations?

This is true in the sense that many countries in what used to be called the Third World do not allow free and fair elections — many don’t have elections at all. But this calls for several comments.

1. Many of these countries are allies of the United States — for example Egypt and Saudi Arabia — but the US has no intention of exerting any real pressure on them in spite of their autocratic regimes.
2. There are many cases of governments based on genuine elections that the US has undermined — for example, the CIA organized coup against the Mossadegh government in Iran, and the CIA backed coup against the Allende government in Chile.
3. The US has rejected the free and fair elections in Palestine that gave a democratic victory to Hamas, and instead of encouraging Hamas to come to the negotiating table it gave open support to the leaders of the PLO — who are corrupt and unrepresentative — and financed the government they control and trained their repressive security forces.
4. Finally, there is the question of the criteria defining “universally

accepted democratic standards.” Many critics in the US have argued that, despite regular elections, the government that emerges here is hardly representa-

tive of the majority’s wishes. The system of financing elections, and of lobbies, gives enormous power to corporations and organized interests, also providing them access to large amounts of money. In addition, both the Bush and the Obama Administrations have ignored the Constitution (by setting aside habeas corpus), violated international law (including the Geneva Convention) by initiating or extending war, by allowing torture to go unpunished and possible war crimes to go uninvestigated – and they have both generally favored the rich against the poor. Opinion polls often reveal crucial differences between what the people want and what the government does. Yes, elections are regularly held in the United States, but is that all that defines democracy?

RJ Has the international community become truly international, or does it still simply harbor the ideas of the Western world?

The term “**International community**” is a **propaganda tool**. Thus the NATO war in Kosovo was described by Western states as an action undertaken by the “international community,” although the members of NATO hardly represent the majority of the world. The same applies to the continual use of this term by the United States and its close allies in the present dispute with Iran about enriched uranium. Should we continue to consider the United States and Israel as members of the international community even though they are not signatories of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court that attempted to establish a global legal authority?

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There are many multilateral treaties but none of them can really be said to represent “the international community.” **The only body that can be said in a sense to represent it is the**



United Nations – not the Security Council but the General Assembly.

RJ It is often said that we live in a post-American and a post-Western world. Can we expect the emergence of some forces on the global arena that will take on the responsibility for diagnosing other countries and prescribing treatment?

I do not think that we are yet in a post-American or a post-Western

eventually give us a multi-polar world rather than a substitution of the American empire by a Chinese empire. That would not be a happy outcome for the world.

RJ The Islamic Ummah, just like the Western rating agencies, proposes its own method of “treatment” of social illnesses. Will it, or any other organized force of non-Western origin, take on the responsibility for such a treatment, as was the case with Amnesty International, Transparency International, etc.?

There are several human rights organizations in countries with Muslim majorities, but their work is often hampered by the fact that they are based in countries with repressive regimes – countries that are often allied to the United States. ■

Talal Asad was speaking with Yulia Netesova