

## Limitations on a Victory in the War Against Terrorism

Following the events of September 11 President George Bush announced that the United States was launching a "War on Terrorism." Is a victory in the "war" against terrorism a feasible task? What will it take for the United States to declare such a victory? Will apprehending Osama Bin Laden and all other known members of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda suffice? Surely no treaties with the terrorist groups will be signed or surrender will take place like wars of the past. For every terrorist group we shut down we're sure to anger yet another. The United States will never be able to declare a decisive victory in the "War on Terrorism" for these reasons among many others. In Jonathon Boyarin's essay, "Waiting for a Jew," he describes different concepts such as the use of portable landscapes and multiple sects of the Jewish culture which can be related to the ideas of new wars and net forces found in Mary Kaldor's essay, "Beyond Militarism, Arms Races, and Arms Control." To completely understand the ideas of such terms as portable landscapes, new wars, and net forces we must also be able to understand that they are all part of a "transformational evolution" into what Kaldor calls "new war" that is contingent upon the use of terminology found in Steven Jay Gould's, "What Does the Dreaded 'E' Word *Mean*, Anyway? A Reverie for the Opening of the New Hayden Planetarium." It is because of the ability of these terrorist cells to utilize portable landscapes and net forces along with the United States' lack of ability to do what Kaldor what refers to as "globalize" their ideas, that this "War or Terrorism" will never end. Even right down to labeling it a "war" on terrorism limits the ability of America to reach its ultimate goal.

The first concept that must be understood is that of the "new" war and the limitations it places on a decisive United States victory on the War on Terrorism. Our world has long since moved past warfare which included mass amounts of troops lined up face to face on the battle field. As a result of the Cold War we have moved to what Kaldor refers to as a

period of "new" war. Kaldor writes, "In the new wars, battles are rare and violence is directed against civilians. Violations of humanitarian and human rights law are not a side effect of war but the central methodology of new wars" (387). This change is what Gould would describe as a variational evolution due to its lack of predictability. Had the United States not dropped the atomic bomb, would the Cold War have even occurred? The competition was fueled by desperate need to have the biggest most powerful weapons to declare superiority. What needs to be understood from this that there was no foreseeable way to predict this sort of change. Gould describes variational evolution in his analysis of Darwinian evolution. Gould writes, "the sensible and explainable but quite unpredictable nature of the outcome (dependent upon complex and contingent changes in local environments), the nonprogressive character of the alterations flow from the variational basis of natural selection" (328). The "new" wars are explained easily by the Cold War but the predictability of the Cold War or the "new war" would have been nearly impossible. These new wars place certain limitations on the United States. We can never declare victory of a certain battle or that we have secured a certain area. There aren't day to day battles, only wild goose chases through the mountains and desert. On that note it makes it difficult for the United States to report and definitive progress in the "War on Terror." It also makes it easier for the terrorist cells to declare a victory. With each act of terrorism, such as the acts of September 11, groups such as Al Qaeda can take credit for a victory because from their perspective, our streets, planes, subways, and high rises are in fact their battlefield. This interesting factor also makes it hard for the citizens of the United States to see any progress when accomplishments of the US seem so minor and every action of the terrorists as a huge accomplishment.

This ability of terrorist groups to be able to claim victory almost at will is largely attributed to their structure as a net force. They naturally have a widely spread out network as opposed to being centralized in a specific setting. Kaldor explains her definition of net

forces as, "loose horizontal coalitions, unlike vertical disciplined armies of the past, a shared narrative, often based on a common identity, ethnic or religious, is an important organizing mechanism... what holds them together is generally an extreme political ideology based on the exclusive claim to state power on the basis of identity" (386). This description is confirmed by Boyarin's discussion of the success of the Jewish community due to its portable landscapes. Boyarin writes, "Any marginal group in mass society may be subject without warning to the loss of its cultural landscape, and therefore those who are able to create portable landscapes for themselves are the most likely to endure" (149). The terrorists have been able to create just that. Terrorist cells exist all over the world even within our own country. That is why they will continue to outlast the efforts of the United States to eliminate them. They can create their own portable landscapes yet the United States will remain forever immobile. America tends to progress through a more transformational evolution. America is very predictable in its actions and usually makes its intentions very clear. Gould defines this predictability when he describe the evolution of stars. He writes, "Theories of stellar 'evolution' could not be more relentlessly transformational in positing a definite and predictable sequence of changes unfolding as simple consequences of physical law" (329). The stimulus in the case of the United States would be the acts such as September 11 which cause the predictable response of the "War on Terrorism." The terrorists then have the upper hand in knowing exactly when to remain hidden as opposed to America which has to simply react to attacks of the terrorists.

Not only is America stuck within it's own borders as far as being a net force or creating a portable landscape, but it appears limited in its attempt to "globalize" their goals. In order to be successful the United States should gain world wide support in their actions which as we've seen was not a major priority in the war against Iraq which was largely played off such topics as ties to Al Quieda and maintaining weapons of mass destruction. Globalization in its general form is defined by Kaldor as, "increasing interconnectedness, the

shrinking of distance and time, as a result of the combination of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and air travel" (384). The simplest example of this is more and more companies such as McDonald's becoming global businesses. Our world has changed from one made up of a bunch of individual states to one that tends to act as one. Boyarin experienced much success in his search of his Jewish identity from his ability to globalize himself. After his experience he concludes his findings by writing, "We spend our own lives in moving back and forth among the worlds of others. As we do so, in order to avoid getting lost along the way we must become cultural pioneers, learning to 'get hold of our *transcultural selves*'" (164). In order for him to accomplish his goal he had to incorporate the things he valued and those values and regulations set forth by each different place he ventured. The United States fails to globalize itself in its ideas on foreign policy especially those on war and doesn't get in touch with its transcultural self. Eventually the citizens of the United States will take notice of just how much we act unilaterally and refuse to support such actions like the war in Iraq.

Citizens should also take notice of the terminology being used. Is this truly a war on terrorism? If so, it is surely not a war on all terrorist groups. By America calling this a war on terrorism it becomes a selfish singlehanded act. Aside from a mediating role America has not attempted to physically put an end to terrorism between Israelis and Palestinians. We have not taken an interest in stopping Russian terrorists. President makes statements such as, "you are either with us or with the terrorists," but yet we're not jumping to help any other victims of terrorism in only becomes important when it affects us. Kaldor elaborates on this in her description of how a humanitarian approach to acts of terrorism. She writes, "A humanitarian approach, of course, has to be part of a wider political approach. In wars, in which no military victory is possible, political approaches are key. An alternative political narrative, based on the idea of global justice, is the only way to minimize the exclusive political appeal of the networks" (397). As previously discussed there will be no decisive

victory in the War on Terrorism. Instead of the United States trying to adapt a world wide campaign for terrorism prevention and adopting a humanitarian approach we selfishly singled out only our attackers and offered no help towards any other victims of terrorism. The war we are fighting today would be more appropriately be labeled, "The War on Terrorist Activity on America." America shows no signs of adapting this humanitarian view rather than using words such as war, and until we do we can not expect to accomplish many of the goals we set forth such as preventing terrorism.

With the current approach the United States is taking it is impossible for us to achieve victory in the War on Terrorism. We do not have the ability to utilize things such as portable landscapes or the ability to develop a net force. The term war brings with it an expectation of a winner and a loser. It is now apparent that this situation cannot emerge from the War on Terrorism. The United States also fails to globalize many of their beliefs and strategies on foreign policy which will continue to act as a limitation to solving the problem of terrorism. Much like the proposed War on Drugs the United States will fail to win a war which will clearly have no end. The only successful method would be to collaborate a "world" effort on "world terrorism."

