

# **BENJAMIN BARBER**

Principal, The Democracy Collaborative

## **Take Back America Conference**

Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

### **Plenary Session: Security in a Changed World**

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We are here to “take back America.” But the America we fight to reclaim is no longer just ours. In the new world of interdependence, it belongs to the world, in whose name it must be repossessed. Not that this is President Bush’s agenda. He appears to think the world belongs to America. Which puts George Bush and his administration and the America they affect to represent, on a collision course with history. The goal is to achieve security in a world of chaos and terrorism without surrendering liberty. The question is how that is to be done without denying the new realities of interdependence.

The Bush administration has chosen to do it by military means and to do it alone. Multilateral where possible, but unilateral wherever necessary. With United Nations support if easy and costless, otherwise in spite of the United Nations. And so, in confronting terrorism and prosecuting wars abroad and security at home, this administration has conjured the very fear that is terrorism's principal weapon. For fear is a product of imagination. Terrorists, otherwise bereft of power, have bored into the American mind and seeded its recesses and crannies with anxieties for which the Technicolor terror-alert codes are our new TV goblins.

The trouble with this militant unilateralist approach to security is that it cannot and will not work in the real world in which America is seeking to survive – perhaps even to flourish. Instead, insulated from the Old World by two centuries of near-mythic independence, but stunned today by a sudden consciousness of vulnerability, the administration is clearly failing to read the message of mandatory interdependence that defines the new 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. Bush's hawks pursue a reckless militancy aimed at establishing an American empire of fear more awesome than any the terrorists can conceive. They are promising to disarm every adversary, to deploy the mother of all bombs, to remove the taboo against the tactical use of nuclear weapons, to strike first, not second, to “shock and awe” enemies and friends alike into global submission. The beacon of democracy the world once most admired has abruptly become the maker of war the world most fears.

To be sure, there are those who think this is all to the good. The issue for America and the world alike is not only whether America can deploy new strategies of preventive war and still stay true to its defining democratic values, but whether these strategies can actually succeed in securing it against terrorism. The fibs and lies and fabrications

aside, the only reasonable rationale for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq was to combat terror. After all, no nation can be expected to sacrifice its safety on the altar of its nobler aspirations. Machiavelli taught the prince it was better to be feared than loved and President Bush's hawks have taken this lesson to heart.

Yet scaring the other side into submission through a demonstration of overwhelming American might against adversaries who may or may not have linkages to terrorism but whose defeat manifests American resolve and willingness to take on every potential enemy has also wrapped Americans in a cocoon of fear. Passive spectators to Bush's wars, Americans can more easily feel the trepidation and dependency of unwilling witnesses to some patron's well-meant war than the courage and resolve of citizen-soldiers participating in the battle. To be sure, when the War on Terrorism was first declared, many Americans hoped to participate in its sacrifices. Action and engagement were intuitively understood to be the keys to overcoming fear. Yet we were told not to worry – to reclaim normalcy and head back to the mall. This is the first war in history funded by tax cuts, the first driven by a patriotism incarnated in the act of shopping. Starting with Kuwait, and on to Afghanistan and Iraq, this is the first era in which democracy's wars are being fought by a professional army made up of those least represented in the democracy for which they are fighting, and where the citizens being protected are insulated from even the indirect costs of war.

Secretary Rumsfeld has said that citizen soldiers are inadequate to the demands of smart war in all its technological splendor. Yet the rationale for citizens serving in war is grounded in democracy itself, and is not to be dismissed by technical considerations. War is always democracy's last resort, and in order to keep it that way, citizens are asked to make the ultimate sacrifice in common. Without the conscript army of the 1960s, America might still be in Vietnam today. With only a single member of Congress with a child serving in the military today, Congressional support for war unending has become frighteningly unproblematic. When Congressman Rangel suggested that if America was to fight an endless war against terrorism it ought to reintroduce the draft, his plea was dismissed as a political ploy. In truth it conjured an apparently unwelcome vision of the true meaning of democratic sovereignty where citizens both decide for war and peace and then take direct responsibility for their decisions. War without citizens is tantamount to democracy without citizens, which is no democracy at all.

This is not to say America does not require a national security policy, or that isolationism, pacifism or mere good will suffice to establish such a policy. But even the administration has acknowledged that its new enemies are "stateless martyrs" (Rumsfeld) with neither conventional interests to be negotiated nor a conventional address to which deterrent threats can be sent. Terrorists are not states, not even rogue states; and overthrowing tyrannical regimes, even where they can be shown to host terrorists, will not destroy terrorism. For terrorism is a mobile parasite that moves from one host body to another, and the destruction of one host in Afghanistan or Iraq leads only to a further dispersion of the parasite to other hosts (Syria? Iran? Sudan? Indonesia? the Phillipines? New Jersey!?) Preventive war must be wages against terrorists directly, but cannot be justified against sovereign states, which are appropriate

candidates for deterrence and containment (which was in fact how the Bush team dealt with Saddam Hussein prior to the war). An appropriate preventive democracy military strategy targets terrorists rather than states, and utilizes international law and multilateral cooperation as its tools. Intelligence and police cooperation have already done more to net terrorists around the world than the two costly wars in which America has engaged. But such cooperation depends on collaboration and goodwill, and cannot be imposed on others by brute military force.

The great virtue of preventive democracy as an anti-terrorist strategy is that it rests on our strengths – law, cooperation, internationalism, transparency and self-government; whereas preventive war plays out on the turf of our adversaries, the turf of fear. America today seems, in many ways, a nation beset by fear. The Bush government uses fear to make its case for war, to dub its critics traitors, to silence dissent, to pervert the meaning of patriotism, to push for legislation like the Total Awareness Act (now renamed to stymie critics) that would destroy our privacy and destroy our dignity. If we Americans cannot find our way out of fear's empire - since fear is about perception, not reality - the terrorists win without firing another shot. When the administration manipulates fear by conjuring dangers that cannot be specified but are said to be unavoidable, when the terror alert codes bounce up and down in scarily whimsical ways based on private interpretations of private intelligence data, when it is announced that there WILL be a terrorist event utilizing weapons of mass destruction sometime soon by someone not yet known to us at someplace where crowds gather but otherwise unspecifiable, homeland security is not enhanced and terrorism is not stymied: rather, fear is aroused, and the terrorist's work is done for them. To fight fear with fear is to allow the invasive terrorist microbe to leverage our immune system to its advantage: it would be a sad irony if America was destroyed not by terrorism but by its own immunological hyper-reaction to terrorism. Preventive democracy utilizes our virtues rather than our vices to take on terrorism, changing the environment that makes terrorism possible while enhancing America's own virtues.

Most Americans are in fact a good deal less afraid than the administration and the craven media would make them. Perhaps they recognize that America cannot at once be as powerful as it boasts, and as vulnerable as it fears. Terrorism is a function of powerlessness, and hurts the powerful only as they allow themselves to be hurt. Democracy defeats terrorism because democracy makes imagination into a tool of empathy, and empowers citizens here and overseas to act rather than watch, so they cannot be taken in by fear's grim games. If spectatorship means passivity and a sense of vulnerability, citizenship means action and a sense of empowerment. The logic of liberty and the logic of security are linked through the instrumentality of citizenship. Preventive war cannot overcome terror, preventive democracy can. It empowers those terrorism would victimize and makes them relatively immune to the power of terrorism. But when extended to the powerless, it also empowers those who dwell on the margins in despair and anger – those whose rage and humiliation give power to terrorism. Preventive democracy prevents terrorism by empowering people and making the reliance on self-destructive violence unnecessary and counter-productive.

In the United States, the democratic deficit is worsened by the reliance on preventive war. That is manifest in what may be regarded as our two competing national anthems. *The Star Spangled Banner*, penned by Francis Scott Key watching the British bombardment of Baltimore in 1812, is the official anthem and has long been the martial coda of a sovereign and proudly independent United States, self-reliant and omnipotent, a collectivist Lone Ranger capable of imposing justice world-wide by dint of its own military hegemony. But there is also *America the Beautiful*, written by the poet Katherine Lee Bates as she gazed up at the front range of the soaring Rockies in 1893, a hymn reflecting democratic virtues which speaks to an America that acknowledges its interdependence and embraces the world to which it belongs. Bates was a practiced critic of America's first age of imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century, and she knew the secret of liberty's preservation. In the less-known second verse of her anthem, she wrote:

"America, America,  
God mend thine every flaw.  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law."

Dwight Eisenhower – it often seems to be the generals who know the truth about war - said 40 years ago that Americans must recognize there can be no peace without law and that there can be no law if we invoke one code of international conduct for those who oppose us, and another for our selves and our friends.

Our choice today is between invoking and obeying the international law that must girdle our anarchic interdependence or defying it as fearsomely as the terrorists have done. It is a choice to live under fear's empire or deny its sovereignty over us, a choice to cultivate smart children rather than smart bombs – a choice for preventative democracy over preventative war. To choose preventative democracy will be to embrace with new affirmative forms of democratic governance the interdependence that already governs our lives – if only in malevolent ways through predatory global capital, ecological disasters, global health plagues like HIV, SARS and the West Nile Virus, criminal activity in drugs, prostitutions, child pornography and the international weapons trade, and – of course – terrorism. America will be stronger not weaker when it embraces the interdependence under which we all necessarily live. Going it alone may flatter America's "patriots" or it may appall America's moralists. But the real difficulty is it does not and cannot effectively secure America against terrorism or the other looming plagues of interdependence. America has proved it can make war alone, but it has also proved it cannot alone make peace or forge democracy in the anarchic aftermath of war. Prevention in an interdependent world is a common task which no nation, however powerful, can achieve by itself.

On the way to a fresh foreign policy based on preventative democracy and the recognition of interdependence, an international coterie of citizens has adopted a new "Declaration of Interdependence" which will be promulgated on September 12, 2003, the first "Interdependence Day" to be celebrated in Philadelphia and Budapest as well as in

schools and universities in many places (for details see [www.civworld.org](http://www.civworld.org)). The Declaration reads as follows:

## DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

We the people of the world do herewith declare our interdependence as individuals and members of distinct communities and nations. We do pledge ourselves citizens of one CivWorld, civic, civil and civilized. Without prejudice to the goods and interests of our national and regional identities, we recognize our responsibilities to the common goods and liberties of humankind as a whole.

We do therefore pledge to work both directly and through the nations and communities of which we are also citizens:

To guarantee justice and equality for all by establishing on a firm basis the human rights of every person on the planet, ensuring that the least among us may enjoy the same liberties as the prominent and the powerful;

To forge a safe and sustainable global environment for all -- which is the condition of human survival -- at a cost to peoples based on their current share in the world's wealth;

To offer children, our common human future, special attention and protection in distributing our common goods, above all those upon which health and education depend;

To establish democratic forms of global civil and legal governance through which our common rights can be secured and our common ends realized;  
and

To foster democratic policies and institutions expressing and protecting our human commonality;

and at the same time,

To nurture free spaces in which our distinctive religious, ethnic and cultural identities may flourish and our equally worthy lives may be lived in dignity, protected from political, economic and cultural hegemony of every kind.

Interdependence Day falls on September 12, the day after the memorial to that fateful day on September 11, 2001 when terrorism came to America and changed the course of history by teaching us that unless all are free and equal, none may be free and equal, unless the poorest most desperate nations find a way to live democratically, the world's oldest democracies may perish. Declaring our interdependence and celebrating the possibility of rendering interdependence just and democratic for all is one way to begin the struggle to take back America by joining the world.