

Guest editorials

“The best defence of our security lies in the spread of our values”: Europe, America, and the question of values

On 29 October 2004 the European Constitution was signed by the twenty-five members of the European Union (EU) in a solemn ceremony held in the very same chambers on Rome’s Campidoglio where the 1957 treaty establishing the European Economic Community was instituted. Four days later, on 2 November, George W Bush was elected to his second term as the president of the United States.

These events mark the affirmation and consolidation of two radically different (geo)political subjects, with widely differing visions of political right—and rights. They also seem to mark a growing schism in the West that cannot be reduced to a Euro–American difference of opinions, for it also cuts through internal political debates in Europe and the United States. At issue are morals and values—and the role of politics and the state in legislating and promoting them.

The US election has been described by commentators on both sides of the Atlantic as the triumph of a moral message, of ‘strong values’. Indeed, few would question the role played by morality and appeals to ‘family’ and ‘national’ values in the Bush campaign. Patriotism and sanctity were mobilised as political forces. Recent events in Europe have also brought the issue of public and private morals and values into public debate—but in a radically different way from the American experience.

The elaboration of the European Constitution and the political debates that accompanied its signature have prompted a wealth of reflection on the question of morality and values. This reflection has centred on the role of such ethical issues within Europe and, in particular, on the place of ethical issues within the new political project enshrined by the constitution. We have examined elsewhere (Bialasiewicz, Elden, Painter, forthcoming) some of the spatial imaginaries of the constitution, focusing on two senses of political space that run through the document: the constitution aims both to enforce hard territorialisations with regard to issues such as migration, international security, and terrorism, and to inscribe an aspirational space of shared values, an “area of freedom, security and justice” (*Official Journal of the European Union* 2004, article I-3.2) where economic and social inequalities are combated, and rights and privileges distributed throughout.

The aspirational sense of the EU constitution is intriguing, because not only does it continue the grand style of some previous constitutions—such as the US Constitution, but in contrast to, say, the German Basic Law—but also it is precisely aspirational in the sense of its imaginative geographies. Transcending *established* national and regional identities in a single document is arguably requiring of a new kind of political subjectivity, and of a set of values that simultaneously include, exceed, and supersede the narrow particularities of its distinct and collective histories. Of course, the US constitution may be a cautionary tale here, in that interpretation, selective quotation, and precedent show that a framework is no guarantee of political practice. Nonetheless, the purpose and values of this European ‘project’—which, like ‘constitution’ implies both an achievement and a process—are, we believe, worthy of examination.

Europe and the question of values: text

One of the most important innovations of the constitution has been the incorporation of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, whose principles become binding above and beyond existing norms and legislation in effect within individual member states. But although the constitution enshrines the rights and protections stipulated by the charter, the document does not contain any broad pronouncements regarding 'Europe's purpose'. Indeed, the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention that framed the document were marked throughout by a strong reluctance to define the principles and values of European belonging in any detail.

The debates about the inclusion of a reference to Europe's 'Christian heritage' have been the most visible. But the convention's reluctance to state clearly the 'reasons for Europe' has been widely criticised—and not only by those hoping to see the codification of a 'Christian Europe'. Those on the European Left have also expressed dissatisfaction with the convention's perceived unwillingness to 'take a stand'—see, for example, Polly Toynbee's commentary (2004) in the heat of the negotiations over the wording of the final text.

Most critiques, popular as well as academic, have focused on the aspirational understanding of the European project enshrined in the document—Europe as "an area of freedom, security and justice" (*Official Journal of the European Union* 2004, article I-3.2) and a "special area of human hope" (a phrase used in the draft of the preamble to the constitution, but subsequently deleted). These understandings paid close homage to the distinctive visions of Europe and the European project set out by Jürgen Habermas (2001), in which Europe is characterised as an 'area of solidarity among strangers', and Claus Offe (2002), who writes of Europe as a 'regime of organised civility'.

Many detractors, in the academic world and beyond, have criticised Habermas's and Offe's visions as dry and dull, and lacking, the spiritual inspiration that encourages allegiance and grants legitimacy [see, for instance, Larry Siedentop's (2001) well-publicised arguments]. Charles Turner's (2004) recent invective against Habermas is a case in point, accusing the German theorist's vision of the European project of a 'lack of imagination' and asking provocatively: "where is the dignified part of a European constitution, the spirit of European laws?" (page 309). And, indeed, beyond some very important institutional innovations, the constitution is marked by a rather weak articulation of Europe's purpose—it certainly does not share the glorious pronouncements of other such documents.

But perhaps this ambivalence and ambiguity is precisely Europe's "geopolitical originality", to cite Michel Foucher (2002, page 9). Numerous European intellectuals and politicians have argued that Europe should see its role, to use Tzvetan Todorov's phrase, as a *puissance tranquille*, a 'tranquil power', guided by "weak values, not glorious abstractions" (2003, page 42). In one of his final public addresses in May 2004, Jacques Derrida similarly called for "a Europe that can show another politics is possible, that can imagine a political and ethical reflection that is heir to the Enlightenment tradition, but that can also be the portent of a new Enlightenment, able to challenge binary distinctions and high moral pronouncements" (2004, page 3).

These are, of course, aspirations, and it would be quite easy to discount such ambivalent definitions. They are anything but weak, however. They are based, rather, on a very clear stand—and a clear political (and geopolitical) stance: precisely the refusal to resort to what Bruno Latour (2003) in an editorial in *Le Monde* described as a 'unique and unitary morality'.

Europe and the question of values: practice

Speculations and aspirations aside, the question of Europe's values was thrust into the spotlight precisely at the moment of the signing of the constitution. We would like to comment here on some events that preceded the signing of the constitution and that, in many ways, overshadowed the ceremonies of the signature—events that threw into sharp relief the issue of values. They also revealed a marked divide between the moral–political view of the world espoused by the current US administration and the European battleground of ideas. This is not merely a comparison of the incomparable—a single administration versus the spectrum of a society as whole—but perhaps a recognition of the need within the European project to constitute itself in a deliberately less certain, less specific way.

We are referring to the institutional crisis within the EU that flared up just weeks before the signing of the constitution, as the approval of the newly proposed European Commission hung in the balance over the homophobic pronouncements of Rocco Buttiglione, the Italian nominee for justice and civil liberties commissioner. In the ensuing uproar, morality and politics took centre stage.

Buttiglione, a devout Catholic and close friend of Pope John Paul II, was minister for European affairs in Silvio Berlusconi's government, and Italy's nominee to the new European Commission, intended to take office in the autumn of 2004. His nomination to the post of justice and civil liberties commissioner was a problematic choice from the start, given his strong religious convictions: the commissioner would be in charge, after all, of guaranteeing the rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (part of the new EU Constitution) and of combating discrimination of all kinds: racial, gender, and that linked to sexual preference.

When Buttiglione quite matter-of-factly referred to homosexuality as a 'sin' during his confirmation hearings, what had been murmurs of dissent among some European parliamentarians turned to widespread outrage. The Italian aide made matters worse by further expounding his views on the role of women (marriage, in his view, existed to allow women to have children and to grant them the social protection of a man) and, just weeks later, on single mothers ["children who only have a mother but no father, are the children of a not-very-good mother" (Marozzi, 2004a)].

Although Buttiglione was quick to argue that his comments had been "taken out of context", and that the affirmations regarding homosexuality and women were his own "moral convictions" and would not influence his conduct in his political-institutional role, MEPs—as well as a large part of public opinion across Europe—remained unconvinced (Marozzi, 2004b). In an age when personal conduct is assumed to be a guide to suitability for positions of public office, there was an unwillingness to accept as unproblematic Buttiglione's insistence on what he described as the Kantian distinction between 'sin' and 'law', if only for the vision of moral regulation that it presumed. As he argued before the commission panel: "I personally believe that homosexuality is a sin. I did not say, however, that I think it should be criminalised—then, my nomination would have been problematic" (*La Repubblica* 2004).

The rejection of Buttiglione's candidacy (and thus of the entire new commission) by the European Parliament in a vote just two days before the signing of the constitution was also a unique event—for the first time, the parliament took such a strong stand against the commission's recommendations and saw it back down. New Commission President José Manuel Barroso's decision to withdraw Buttiglione's candidacy (along with the candidacies of two other commissioners whose participation was contested by the parliament on different grounds) was hailed as the affirmation of the democratic voice of the EU Parliament and, as the parliament is the only directly elected organ of the EU, of European citizens more broadly.

Although some commentators, in Italy and elsewhere, read Buttiglione's dismissal as an anti-Catholic vote on the part of a "liberal European elite" (Giannini, 2004, page 2), that opinion was not shared even by Commission President Barroso himself, a Portuguese conservative and member of the centre-right European People's Party, who argued forcefully that "this is in no way a holy war. It is not a question of a Catholic/non-Catholic split, or one between secular and Christian Europe" (Gow, 2004).

What the decision marked, rather, was a strong conviction on the part of European parliamentarians from across the political spectrum—from the socialists and greens to a significant proportion of liberals and eurosceptics—that issues of morality did not belong to the commission, and to Europe.

Values in question

This decision appears in stark contrast with the events in the United States. Two recent satirical maps produced after the election have proposed different ways of seeing America's electoral geography: either the Democrat states join a new United States of Canada, leaving the rest as 'Jesusland', or the Democrat states are truly 'America' and the flyover states are now known as 'Dumbfuckistan'.⁽¹⁾ Although more educational attempts to challenge simplistic electoral cartographies can be found elsewhere (see, for instance, Gastner et al, 2004),⁽²⁾ these maps are revealing, in that they show both a link between Republican-majority states and religious values, and a link between those values and ignorance.

Karl Rove's electoral strategy was founded, it is generally acknowledged, not on reaching out to the middle ground of US electors, but on deepening the Republicans' core support, particularly among the alleged 4 million evangelicals who did not vote in 2000. According to the BBC, in the 2004 election "21% of voters said moral values were the most important issue for them and 78% of them voted for Bush. That equates to 19 million people, or almost a third of Mr Bush's supporters in the voting booth" (Clarke, 2004). Mobilising this sector of the electorate over such divisive issues as gay marriage and abortion—having simultaneous referenda on gay marriage in key swing states such as Ohio is said to have substantially increased turnout—shows the gulf between the electoral politics of the United States and Europe.

This gulf is causing unease on both sides of the Atlantic. Timothy Garton-Ash, who has been quite vocal in his concern about growing anti-Americanism in Europe, has called upon Europeans not to forget "our liberal cousins in despair" (2004, page 11); not to forget the *other* half of America within the blue-and-red cartographies of the vote. But the US establishment is also taking the goings-on in Europe very seriously. Europe's 'weak values' are, indeed, being perceived as an increasingly potent threat to America's world view—and world role. The *Financial Times* has recently noted how, in the weeks following the signing of the constitution, organisations such as the American Enterprise Institute, home of some of the leading US neoconservatives, and the conservative foreign policy think tank the Heritage Foundation, have begun to express growing concern that "vital American interests are being threatened by the EU's Constitutional Treaty" and the emergent "non-economic component of the European project" (Studemann, 2004, page 4).

In the middle of this is, of course, Tony Blair. Straddling the transatlantic divide, and yet trying to keep one foot in Europe, is a game of political Twister. But this goes far beyond the 'special relationship', the issue of Britain in Europe, and the War on Terror. It is also a question of values, because Blair's 'ethical foreign policy', his notions

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.projectsomewhere.com/10623,02,2-0-A-%20New%20Country,%20Dumbfuckistan.html>.

⁽²⁾ See, for instance, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/>.

of 'international community', and the project of the neoconservatives are not nearly as far apart as we might hope. On 5 March 2004, in his Sedgefield constituency, located just a few miles south of where we write, the British prime minister gave an important speech on Iraq, foreign policy, and the issue of values.

"We know now, if we didn't before, that our own self interest is ultimately bound up with the fate of other nations. The doctrine of international community is no longer a vision of idealism. It is a practical recognition that just as within a country, citizens who are free, well educated and prosperous tend to be responsible, to feel solidarity with a society in which they have a stake; so do nations that are free, democratic and benefiting from economic progress, tend to be stable and solid partners in the advance of humankind. The best defence of our security lies in the spread of our values. But we cannot advance these values except within a framework that recognises their universality. If it is a global threat, it needs a global response, based on global rules. The essence of a community is common rights and responsibilities. We have obligations in relation to each other. If we are threatened, we have a right to act. And we do not accept in a community that others have a right to oppress and brutalise their people. We value the freedom and dignity of the human race and each individual in it" (Blair, 2004).

In the face of such transparent politicking with values, what should the response be? It is clearly not that issues of morality and values should be removed from politics. This is perhaps most obviously seen in that the response to Buttiglione is, of course, itself a moral critique, juxtaposing values of tolerance, antidiscrimination, and a resistance to judgment against his own moral certainties. But this is not merely a question of a range of moral positions. Rather, the issue is the thinking of morality as a system, transcendent and universal. Perhaps the legacy of Derrida's work should be a sustained 'political and ethical reflection' that does challenge the binaries and 'high moral pronouncements' of Blair, Bush, and Buttiglione, and yet does not abandon the terrain of moral politics to their positions. Morality does not have to be unique or unitary.

Luiza Bialasiewicz, Stuart Elden, Joe Painter

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Tsunamis and other forces of destruction

The horrific Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004 was followed by a tidal wave of major media coverage, leading a number of observers on the political left to note that victims of natural disasters fare better in the Western establishment press than do victims of catastrophes such as those imposed on Fallujah by the US military. Although I take the basic political point, this observation is only partly correct. The tsunami has indeed received monumental *amounts* of major media coverage, but that coverage has scarcely been better than the noncoverage of human suffering in the Middle East in conveying social issues crucial to an understanding of the human catastrophe wrought by the tsunami. Major Western media have focused, first, on the spectacular destruction caused by the giant wave—especially the damage to places peopled by Western tourists—and, second, on the outpouring of Western aid to victims of the disaster. Some coverage has raised the matter of why warning systems that might have saved thousands of human lives were not in place across the Indian Ocean, but even this coverage has largely fallen short of a social analysis that could explain the horrible death toll and what might be done to prevent such a calamity in the future.

Consider the two countries that were among the first hit by the tsunami: Indonesia—which bore the brunt of the human destruction—and Thailand. In both cases there are stories to be told of the social preconditions for occurrence of a human disaster of this magnitude, stories which I have yet to see in the mainstream media. I will mention two kinds of story lines that could be developed in discussing the disasters in these two countries, both of which have been absent to the same extent as stories that could be (but are not) told about Fallujah, Jenin, and other sites of death and destruction.

Missing story line number 1: destructive institutions and social structures

The tsunami struck quickly and especially viciously in Aceh province, the northern tip of the island of Sumatra. Most of Indonesia's more than 100 000 fatalities—with hundreds of thousands more injured or missing, and half a million people displaced (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake)—occurred in Aceh, a province that was already reeling from the Indonesian military's (TNI's)⁽³⁾ 'shock and awe' campaign against supporters of the Acehese independence movement, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM). The TNI campaign, which began in 2003 but in some ways merely

⁽³⁾ TNI—Tentara Nasional Indonesia.

intensified a struggle that had been growing since the 1970s, has taken more than 2000 lives in the last two years, with many more Acehenese subject to torture and extortion—all of this resulting in the traditional counterinsurgency outcome of driving more people towards the GAM and therefore justifying more TNI activity (Roosa, 2005).

Much of the mainstream media has vaguely mentioned this background of warfare in Aceh, but rarely if at all has the social basis for the independence struggle and its relationship to the vulnerabilities of the many Acehenese who died in the tsunami been discussed. A starting point here would have to be some recognition of the orientation and character of the TNI. Javanese subimperialism throughout the archipelago has been an issue since independence in 1949, but it was brought to the fore in a particular form by the rise of the Suharto regime in 1965–66. Gradually claiming power after organizing a US-backed and abetted wave of repression against the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and its backers—with anywhere from 600 000 to several million PKI members and landless peasant supporters killed (Anderson, 2001)—Suharto imposed a military dictatorship that ruled for 33 years with gracious backing from the US government, transnational corporations, and international financial institutions.

This regime, and the TNI in particular, proved especially adept at generating revenues from natural resources on Indonesia's periphery. On certain accounts, Suharto's dictatorship might be seen as having been modestly socially redistributive of the enormous wealth generated through oil, timber, and other resource exports—at least if one can believe some questionable official statistics—but this redistribution did not include regional equity. In fact, in cases of oil-rich and/or gas-rich provinces such as Aceh, the Indonesian state has redistributed wealth from periphery to core, especially the wealth generated by operations such as ExxonMobil's natural-gas plant in Aceh, which is guarded by the TNI in exchange for the usual protection money and revenues for Jakarta—an estimated US\$1.2 billion annually in the case of the latter (Roosa, 2005). Although Suharto's ouster in 1998 raised hopes not only for demilitarization but also for political decentralization and regional control of resource revenues, those hopes have yet to materialize for Aceh. Moreover, with the recent election to the presidency of the former head of military security operations for Aceh, Susilo Bambang Yodhoyono, the chances for a just, peaceful, and redistributive solution to Aceh's problems seems further away than ever.

This is only highlighted by the behavior of the TNI in the wake of the tsunami. Whereas a cease-fire to allow more effective emergency relief was honored by the GAM—an organization whose leaders are admittedly not paragons of progressive idealism, given their ambition to recreate an Islamic sultanate—the TNI launched attacks on places it thought harbored GAM supporters, even as the emergency aid was beginning to stream in. Moreover, according to various reports from the field, the TNI spent the early days of the post-tsunami crisis blocking aid shipments to or from groups it found suspicious, and stockpiling much incoming aid for its own purposes (Roberts, 2005; Roosa, 2005). The number of deaths attributable to such TNI practices is impossible to calculate but is probably nontrivial.

This deeply institutionalized callousness is not an accident of personalities but a central feature of the Indonesian state, and especially of the TNI, in its relations with most members of Indonesian society. And, as this unsavory feature is partly a historical legacy of Western governments' unconditional backing for Suharto's rule, it is largely unmentioned in coverage of the relief effort. But, equally importantly, the fact that this government marginalized so many people in places such as Aceh is itself partly responsible for the magnitude of human destruction. In spite of Aceh's substantial natural resource wealth, many of the population have lived in conditions of poverty or near-poverty throughout the years of economic boom. Those who lived in

small coastal fishing villages eeking out a living from the sea were among these, and their susceptibilities to an event like the tsunami are part and parcel of this poverty. Minimal economic resources, lack of routine access to telecommunications or other technologies that might have provided early warning, even lack of education about the warning signs of a tsunami are all, in part, results of people leading marginal lives and surviving on marginal resources. To be sure, the proximity of the tsunami-generating earthquake to the Western coast of Aceh ensured severe damage: property destruction could not have been avoided under any circumstances, and the few minutes' advance warning that might have been possible certainly would not have saved everyone. But it is scarcely too much to suppose that a more humane and redistributive state might have prevented at least some of this human devastation through better development policies—including, yes, investment in a tsunami-warning system (Symonds, 2005)—and, certainly, through less prejudicial relief practices.

Thailand was hit less severely than Indonesia: the official death toll, as I write, sits at a little over 5000, with as many as 10 000 or more fatalities still considered possible in the long run on the basis of the number injured or still reported missing. Popular tourist resorts such as Phuket, Khao Luk Beach, Phi Phi Island, and Krabi Island were devastated by the tsunami, as were numerous coastal fishing villages. Unlike the Indonesian government, the Thai government has declared—and no doubt truthfully—its capacity to rebuild its shattered coastal businesses and communities without foreign assistance. Yet the historical performance and current disposition of the Thai state gives little reason for confidence that this very real capacity will necessarily translate into effective performance.

One story of failed performance has already circulated widely in the mainstream media. The head of the Thai Meteorological Department, Supharek Tansrirat-tanawong, was alerted to the earthquake fifteen minutes after it occurred and was aware of the possibility of a tsunami. He and other Thai officials attending a seminar ultimately decided not to issue a warning to the provinces along the roiling Andaman Sea. Their reasons were reported in the Bangkok-based English-language newspaper, *The Nation*: “The very important factor in making the decision was that it’s high tourist season and hotel rooms were nearly 100-per-cent full. If we issued a warning, which would have led to evacuation, and if nothing happened, what would happen then? Business would be instantaneously affected. It would be beyond the Meteorological Department’s ability to handle. We could go under, if the tsunami didn’t come”, said a source who attended the meeting (Pravit, 2004). This mind-boggling decision has been justifiably condemned, and Supharek was subsequently removed from his post by Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

But this story itself too easily turns into a narrow morality pageant if it is not contextualized. Although Supharek’s decision seems both remarkably self-interested and shortsighted, there is a relevant institutional history and a broader social context that has not been explored in most discussions. From 1993 to 1998 the Thai Meteorological Department was headed by Samith Dhamasaroj, who spent a fair amount of time warning of the possibility that a tsunami could hit Thailand’s southwest coast and calling for the development of a tsunami-warning system. He was harshly criticized by tourism executives and government officials for ‘causing a panic’ and was moved to an inactive position (Sanitsuda, 2004; Sutin, 2005). Samith was even banned from entering provinces such as Phuket because, in his words, these provincial elites “said I was damaging their image with foreign tourists” (quoted in Pringle, 2005). Supharek’s dismissal for risking thousands of lives rather than tourist industry wrath seems fair enough, but who will ‘dismiss’ the business owners whose constant pressure on the Thai state leads its institutions to systematically prioritize their profits over others’ lives?

A few journalists have now noted Samith's previous tenure at the Meteorological Department, along with the Thai government's failure to heed his warnings, and, as a form of delayed recognition for an unheeded prophet, they have also noted Thaksin's decision to assign him the task of developing a tsunami-warning system. But none that I have seen note the relevance of Samith's previous travails for understanding the recent institutional failure under Suphacherd (who is now assigned to work under Samith), and none mention the broader social context of institutional behavior in Thailand.

Indeed, it is especially this latter issue that provides a crucial background for understanding the Thai state's failure to issue a lifesaving warning, and, as with the case of Indonesia, historical legacies are relevant. The contemporary Thai state was in many ways born of the marriage between US cold war agendas and Thai elite ambitions: specifically, the overlapping ambitions of high state officials and wealthy investors, these sometimes being the same persons. The US government threw in its lot with the Thai military leaders who staged a 1947 coup, thus beginning the project of building a regional cold war alliance in Southeast Asia. After another coup in 1957–58, US military and intelligence organizations were able to collaborate especially effectively with the Thai state in a particular brand of counterinsurgency-oriented development politics—a politics that led to rapid economic growth and deep socioeconomic polarization, with highly uneven and sometimes very tenuous improvements in the lives and livelihoods of much of the population, including the majority of farmers, fishing villagers, and urban industrial workers. This Thai version of a 'developmental state', forged through the cold war project, has evolved in a way that consistently privileges opportunities for capitalist profitability and economic growth over the safety and health of much of the population.

Consider just one indicative issue: Thailand's record of occupational health and safety. Much lauded for its world-beating manufacturing growth during 1986–96, the Thai economy was in fact both a dynamo of production and a graveyard for the broken bodies of production workers. Official statistics show an annual occupational death toll during these years that rises from over 500 to just under 1000, with up to 200 000 injuries per year by the end of the boom decade. Official statistics, however, underestimate the actual death and injury rates by as much as five times (Glassman, 2001, pages 71–74). Moreover, these statistics do not include the huge number of present and former workers who contract illnesses because of working conditions but who are diagnosed only later, often without the source of the illness being identified. For example, Thailand's leading occupational health and safety specialist, Dr Oraphan Methadilokun, estimated in 1996 that there were 150 000 former textile workers who suffered from byssinosis, a respiratory disease caused by breathing in fibers, and some estimates of the number suffering the disease are over 300 000 (Glassman, 2001, page 74).

The tidal wave of thousands of deaths and millions of occupational injuries that hit Thailand during the boom decade—a catastrophe on the scale of the AIDS epidemic and far greater for Thailand in human terms than the tsunami—was met with complete equanimity by most (though not all) of the Thai establishment. When health activists such as Dr Oraphan attempted to speak out and address this issue, they were often ignored or silenced. Oraphan had her program shut down, and, according to her account, was criticized while investigating health conditions at the Seagate disk drive factory by the head of Thailand's Board of Investment, who told her "What you are doing is hurting Thailand! How dare you investigate Seagate. I can have you fired!" (quoted in Forsyth, 1994, page 30).

This is far from being the only case that one could highlight to illustrate the degree to which major institutions of the Thai state have systematically placed the lives of less

privileged Thais in the balance as they single-mindedly pursue profitable growth. The destruction of rural communities through the development of hydroelectric dams and eucalyptus plantations, an implicit sex tourism development strategy that has helped spawn an AIDS epidemic, a carelessly developed transportation system that extinguishes some tens of thousands of lives each year in traffic accidents, and the spate of other ‘accidents’ that have taken lives in strange and unpredicted ways (for example, the collapse of hotel buildings and river-boat docks because of shoddy and under-regulated construction practices) are all testimony to systematic and institutionalized behavior by elites who have priorities other than protecting the lives of the most politically, socially, and economically marginal human beings. Supharker’s behavior in risking thousands of lives to avoid the potential wrath of the tourist industry was not aberrant, it was the norm. What was aberrant was that on this occasion a large number of people to whom the Thai state normally caters—monied foreign tourists—turned out to be victims, turning Supharker into an international icon of poor judgment.

Missing story line number 2: the recrudescence of US imperialism

Institutional and social culpability in failing to reduce the risks to less privileged Acehenese and Thais (as well as foreign tourists) is a story line with significant implications for what needs to change if future catastrophes are to be avoided—and not just tsunami disasters. But this type of story does not conform to the preferred mainstream Western media image of a (mainly) natural disaster to which an aggrieved West is responding with humanitarian aplomb. For this reason, it is just as absent from the mainstream media as is any mention of humanly created tsunamis such as the destruction of Iraqi lives under US occupation.

There is another story line of great importance for the future of tsunami-stricken countries, which has also been fundamentally absent from mainstream coverage. The cold war states, whose socially polarizing development policies and institutionalized indifference to the vulnerabilities of marginalized people enhanced the tsunami death toll, were fostered under US military tutelage from the 1940s until the end of the cold war. Popular social movements against US bases and military dictatorships, which developed in Thailand and the Philippines in the 1970s, along with movements in opposition to Suharto’s dictatorship in Indonesia in the 1990s, placed military leaders throughout Southeast Asia on the defensive. By the end of the 1990s, Thailand had experienced almost a decade of somewhat more democratic rule, with the military leadership forced to the political background, and Indonesia looked prepared to embark on the same course.

These military leaders have not taken their demotions lying down, however, and after 11 September 2001 they have cooperated with Western governments to revitalize the US military agenda in Southeast Asia. This revitalized agenda has included: joint military operations in the Philippines, legitimized with reference to terrorist threats in Mindanao putatively linked to Al Qaeda, but aimed at reclaiming the equivalent of the US basing rights lost in 1992 when Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Airfield were abandoned under popular pressure; attempts to reestablish US aid and training to the TNI, including support for antiterrorism campaigns against groups such as Jemaah Islamiya (JI), but also including at least tacit support for TNI operations in places such as Aceh and West Papua; attempts to engage the Thai military in the ‘war on terrorism’, especially in southern provinces with putative Islamic separatist activity; and enhanced ‘security’ collaboration with Malaysian and Singaporean governments, whose draconian internal security laws allow the kinds of indefinite detention and mistreatment favored by the US government in dealings with JI and Al Qaeda members.

Even before December 2004, the US military and its allies were moving gradually towards a new cold-war-style alliance. After the tsunami struck, however, the US military wasted no time in upping its visibility within the region even more dramatically. Several days after the destruction of Aceh, it was announced that a US Navy aircraft carrier battle group was sailing towards Aceh with relief supplies (Talmadge, 2004). Though this was justified as a humanitarian act, the fact that the Bush administration originally committed only a paltry US \$35 million to the global relief effort suggests that perhaps there are other priorities. Indeed, sending the US military provided an opportunity for US and TNI leaders to resume in some form the kind of collaboration that had been the norm before the TNI's 1999 orgy of postreferendum violence in East Timor led the US government to suspend military aid (Ratnayake, 2005). The prospect that ongoing tsunami relief efforts will provide an opportunity for restoration of US military–TNI ties cannot be dismissed, and the prospect that this will be damaging to the longer-term welfare of many Acehenese is already attested by the aforementioned behavior of the TNI in the early days of the relief effort, when the TNI was the primary player (Roosa, 2005).

Perhaps even more strikingly, the US military announced shortly after the tsunami hit that it was deploying 1000 US troops to U-Tapao airbase southeast of Bangkok and using the base as a 'command center' for the relief effort in Thailand (Sirinapha, 2004; Talmadge, 2004). In spite of his statement that Thailand did not require international assistance for the relief effort, Prime Minister Thaksin acquiesced in this rather naked US attempt to heighten the US military presence in the country. Unlike the case of Indonesia, where in principle an argument could be made for use of air-force and naval transports to reach remote coastal villages in areas still inundated with water, no particularly good reason can be given for bringing the US military back to U-Tapao as part of the relief effort. Thailand's coastal damage is not as extensive as Aceh's, Thailand is likely to have adequate personnel to deal with the relief effort (though perhaps it could benefit from some emergency international medical assistance), and, even if the airlift of relief supplies is required, I would guess that Thailand's own military and commercial airplanes and helicopters would likely be more than adequate to the task. Understandably, many Thais quickly denounced the escalation of US military activities at U-Tapao as an attempt by the base-hungry Bush administration to use Thai suffering for its own nonhumanitarian purposes. Indeed, if trends that were already apparent before the tsunami continue, the remilitarization of Thailand—first justified in the name the 'war on terror' and now justified in the name of humanitarianism—may well be the end result.

Remarkably, US military opportunism has not been limited to solicitation for its former cold war allies. In early January, US warships headed to Sri Lanka. What their mission there will be in the context of Sri Lanka's long-standing civil war is not clear, but that it might portend a more aggressive US military stance in South Asia is by no means impossible (Ratnayake, 2005).

Overall, in the wake of the tsunami the US military has deployed 20 warships, as well as warplanes and helicopters, along with 13 000 troops to the Indian Ocean region, all in the name of humanitarian response (Ratnayake, 2005). But outgoing US Secretary of State Colin Powell let slip the likely motivations behind the deployment when he noted that participation of the US military in relief efforts "dries up those pools of dissatisfaction that might give rise to terrorist activity" (quoted in Van Auken, 2005). In short, the US military is once again being deployed as part of the 'war on terror' (Van Auken, 2005).

Like the stories that could be told of institutionalized culpability for the appalling human toll of the tsunami, these kinds of stories about the opportunistic use of Asian

suffering by US leaders do not feature prominently—if at all—in mainstream reporting. Certainly the military's activities have been mentioned, but any analysis of broader US military ambitions in Asia that underpin these activities is out-of-bounds. Should US–TNI relations be restored and lead to increased repression and violence in Aceh, should the remilitarization of Thailand proceed unchecked and regenerate cold-war-like internal tensions and violence, or should Sri Lanka become a new staging ground for US military operations, then the reasons for this will be as much a mystery to those reading the mainstream press as will be the fates of those who have been devastated by forces of destruction like those unleashed in Fallujah.

Jim Glassman

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