NO 'LOCAL' INSURRECTION OR TERRORISM ANYMORE:

THE DARK SIDE OF THE COBWEB

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ABSTRACT

World Society was the leitmotif of John Groom. It was a pluralist vision of International Relations set against Realism and state hegemonies. In this, it sought to establish an enhanced pluralism, citizen organisation and action, as a norm. It was a prescient forerunner of what we now commonly recognise as international civil society. Groom's other resonant work on third party and Track II mediation – citizen agency and intervention on behalf of norms of shared needs and equality - was an expression of that. However, all this took place within the context of an interlinked world system described as a cobweb. Not only did this model fail to predict the spiders and slaughter in today's cobweb, it shared an Enlightenment view of civil society as secular. This paper talks about religious spiders and the sort of atrocious but anti-hegemonic pluralism that is now vexatiously glued to all we do internationally. However, the paper recognises that, reconfigured, Groom's work laid first foundations for today's International Relations.

Keywords: Cobweb, Taleban, Al Qaeda, ISIS.

John Groom is often regarded as a disciple of John Burton. The two men were pluralists who were essentially in defiance of Realism and the notion of hegemonic world orders. In a romantic sense they were champions of the round table, the Camelot-istas of International Relations. This was certainly evident in the diplomatic career of Burton before he became an academic. His work as Australian ambassador to the San Francisco conference that established the United Nations was noteworthy for ensuring the Security Council did not have even more power than it was bequeathed. That the General Assembly emerged with

even some rights and powers was due to the distaste of people like Burton for the aggregation of hegemonies.[1]

Articulating this in academic terms, Burton did not use round table terminology. That would have been too regular and in itself artificial. So his 'World Society' was premised upon a 'cobweb model' of endless interlinkages.[2] Groom championed this terminology in his own works.[3] And, in his huge succession of edited volumes with Paul Taylor, he certainly emerged as a champion of the United Nations and other international organisations.[4] It was as a champion of the Commonwealth that I first came across him, when I was working for the Commonwealth Secretariat.[5]

John Groom emerged most fully from Burton's shadow, however, in his championing of Europe. This was in practical and professional as well as academic terms. His efforts to establish European consortia and committees of International Relations, very much as an antidote to the then US-dominated International Studies Association, reflected his affection and affiliation to the continent. This was clear in his Francophilia. He spoke a most elegant and discursive French. In fact, he spoke French as if he were speaking an essay. I remember once, at a conference in Grenoble, he had laryngitis and asked me to read his paper to the audience. I remember thinking as I did so, 'but this man is an essayist; he thinks and reasons as an essayist; like a French essayist. He writes like Montaigne. The logical objections and limits are swept aside in an act of literature.'

If I were to say that he was a great editor and essayist, this is meant as praise. And, for his role as a great Europeanist, the University of Tampere in Finland awarded him an honorary doctorate.

But, having said all that, the problem of the cobweb model, for all its highly visible norms to do with pluralism and against hegemony, for all its precursor work to what we now call global civil society and the organised citizens of the world, is three-fold:

1. It gets sticky in there.

2. The cobweb links anything that can be linked, but doesn't go anywhere.

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[1] https://activity.scar.gmu.edu/parents-of-field/john-burton downloaded 31 August 2017.

[2] John W. Burton, *Global Conflict: The Domestic Sources of International Crisis* (Hemel Hempstead: Wheatsheaf Harvester, 1987).

[3] William C. Olsen & A.J.R. Groom, *International Relations Then and Now* (London: Harper Collins, 1991).

[4] Especially Paul Taylor & A.J.R. Groom (eds.), *International Organisation: A Conceptual Approach* (London: Pinter, 1978).

[5] A.J.R. Groom & Paul Taylor (eds.), *The Commonwealth in the 1980s* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984).

3. Any self-respecting cobweb will have spiders and, as a result, corpses.

There is another problem and that is the cobweb's metaphysical self – or, more accurately, points of metaphysical imagery. If, at a certain sticky juncture, there is the Taleban as an actor in world society (and, through its links with Al Qaeda, it certainly became so), there is the key question of 'what is the Taleban?' Is the organisation as the US and NATO portrayed it? Is it how it saw itself? Is it the somewhat romanticised if evil creature that emerges from books like *The Kite Runner*, which was written as if trying too hard to be a Master of Fine Arts project in creative writing[6] – and the film version which was as exotic and orientalised as any other Hollywood recreation of any other part of the world?[7] How does the cobweb stand up to Edward Said's critique of orientalism? It's all very well to be pluralistic, but pluralism can misunderstand the 'Other' just as perniciously (or naively) as Realism.[8] Let us, however, first look at the deeper intellectual composition of World Society and its cobweb model.

World Society and the Cobweb

The model was a real effort at an antidote to Realism and, in the Cold War context, should also be considered courageous. It was different from the wider 'paradigm' of Pluralism in its quite specific origins. The first real articulation of World Society came in 1974.[9] It appeared in a paper authored by Burton and Groom, and others in a collective later known as the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict – because of its unlovely rendition as an acronym, renamed in the 1980s as the Centre for Conflict Analysis. This centre in itself revealed the nature of World Society, as the ethos of the centre was to do with conflict resolution based on third party mediation and facilitation – with the clear idea that Track Two actors could participate in diplomacy and make equal contributions to those of the great powers. Into Pluralism was injected, via World Society, an idea of equality. There were two other attributes of World Society:

The first was its clear commitment to the possibility of peace. In this, a clear influence was the work of Johan Galtung.[10] It observed Galtung's distinctions between negative peace (the

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[6] Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Penguin, 2003).

[7] Directed by Marc Foster, 2007. Foster made the James Bond film, *Quantum of Solace*, a year later in 2008, using the same cinematic flourishes and signatures.

[8] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1981).

[9] John Burton, A.J.R. Groom, C.R. Mitchell, A.V.S. de Reuk, *The Study of World Society: A London Perspective*, International Studies Association Occasional Paper 1 (University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburg, 1974).

[10] Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6:3, 1969.

avoidance of war) and positive peace (peace without fear in the literal and unencumbered, unconditional sense of peace) and sought citizen action as a force towards positive peace. In this sense it was very much more idealistic than most variants of Pluralism.

The second was the implicit recognition that citizen action, however equal to state action it might aspire to be, could not accomplish full systemic and structural change in the world. The core assumption in World Society was the functionalism of David Mitrany.[11] But this assumed a world in which development was such that technical and technological cooperation in what were assumed to be sectors developed enough for cooperation could take place. It did not fully recognise, in the era before the woes of post-colonialism became clear, that functionalism was not easily possible among uneven partners in which one was so uneven that it was the recipient of foreign aid rather than a participant in technical cooperation. It did not recognise that poverty, memory of past injustice, religious antipathy, and cultural factors would demand rightly or wrongly violent justice – and not peace, and not cooperation, and not even equality, but subjugation of its 'Other' with a clear sub-text of vengeance.

Dennis Sandole perceived that there was a further World Society sub-text, and that was the influence of Ted Robert Gurr and his thesis of relative deprivation.[12] In that sense, with relative deprivation's fit with material functionalism, the factor of confessional violence – which cannot be fully 'fixed' by making deprivation less relative – was again marginalised in the key assumptions of World Society. Hence, when it came to later times – those after the Cold War between a developed West and a developed East with a developed Europe in between the megaliths of the United States and the Soviet Union, the theory of World Society in its original idealistic mode could not fit. In particular, the key assumption that the cobweb was a positive antidote to Realism found it hard work to accommodate a dark web in which new Realisms were being hatched and new antagonists to peace, and new variants of conflict, were being propagated.

The Taleban

Let us start with the Taleban. It arose as a militant protest against rapacious warlordism in Afghanistan in 1994, and won national power in 1996. It was in 1994 that Groom published with Margot Light their edited volume, *Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory*, in which I contributed the concluding chapter, 'Beyond the north-west: Africa and the east'.[13] I tried to say there was much out there beyond our bounds of rationality and moral

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[11] Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), p 134.

[12] Dennis J.D. Sandole, 'John Burton's Contribution to Conflict Resolution Theory and practice: A Personal View', *The International Journal of Peace Research*, 6:1, 2001.

[13] London: Pinter.

compass – but did not mention Afghanistan. Up to that time, the only established IR theorist to have written anything about Afghanistan was Fred Halliday[14] – and it took until 2000 and the work of Pakistani journalist, Ahmed Rashid, before the Western world had anything like a fullish portrait of what was by then a rebel group in full international glare.[15] But I start with the Taleban since, notwithstanding the somewhat different rise and trajectory of Al Qaeda, and more recently ISIS, the Taleban is still there. It may be a somewhat different Taleban to the original model, but US foreign policy thinks it just the same. On 22 August 2017, President Donald Trump – against his campaign pledges – announced a new policy for increasing the military battle, and the US role in it, against the Taleban.[16] But has anyone come to any greater understanding of the Taleban? And what it means for the cobweb of spider's silk – and fire and death?

I wish to draw here a second parallel – having already suggested the cobweb acted as precursor to global civil society – and that is the parallel between the cobweb and globalism. If the spider controls the cobweb, the competition is on to control globalism, and insurgent groups are in the forefront of that competition. Three initial declaratory points emerge:

1. Globalisation is no longer a phenomenon shaped only by Western interests and Western corporations – the corporations constituting an international pluralism in their own right

2. Other interests, including those we label as insurgent, are getting curiously as good if not better at globalisation than we are.

3. The struggle should be over who controls the pace of globalisation, not who controls globalisation per se. The faster it happens the more likely there will be new points of engagement that tear us all away from sentimental attachments to established or settled ways. Insurgency, above all, pushes the pace – whenever it can, relentlessly.

The problem of insurgency is misperceived and misconceived, then misrepresented, if seen only in local or even regional terms. It is misperceived if seen in any sort of static terms or even fixed historical terms. History itself changes. A global world means what it says – and that is for good and for bad. Some preliminaries before returning to the Taleban:

When the Tienanmen Square killings occurred in 1989, and I was then young in my tenure as an academic in John Groom's department at the University of Kent, the world at large learnt

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[14] Fred Halliday, 'Introduction' in Raja Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan* (London: Verso, 1988).

[15] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

[16] Julie Hirschfield & Mark Lander, 'Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy', *The New York Times*, 21 August 2017.

about them from news broadcasts – some broadcast images, like the lone protester carrying only a shopping bag barring the way of a column of tanks, have become iconic. Images become politicised and then they become archived as art. But the protesters themselves began churning out fax reports to friends and contacts all over the world. The immediacy of grainy photographs, smeared with ink from low-grade home telephone/fax receivers, added to the plangent tragedies that were occurring at the other end of one's own telephone line. One sent out one faxed picture at a time and the more often it was re-faxed, the grainier it became. A mere 20 years later, in 2009, when Tehran was full of protests against a rigged election and the television cameras were banned, the world – including the television broadcasters – saw the clear visual evidence of violent suppression from high-grade cell-phone cameras. Immediacy had become crystalline, and nothing could be hidden any more. One person, effectively, can set into chain a global awareness that cascades, not from one fax transmitter to another single receiver, but from website to site, email to huge address lists. In less than an hour, one cell-phone video can be seen by several millions. And the captions for such images came via Twitter – short, condensed, urgent, and personalised. Globalisation of this sort, in real time, was also intimate.

This kind of personalised but globalised linkage has been the hallmark of post 9/11 'terrorism' and, indeed, allowed 9/11 to be planned. The assault on the Twin Towers was a triumph not just for 'extremism' but for technology. There is nothing medieval or isolated about the means of organisation and delivery. That we should assume medievalism in animating ideology takes an effort in elision. Here I discuss briefly the global and technological means of 'terror', or what others would call 'resistance'.

Part of this has long utilised the international monetary transfer systems, whether of banks or agencies like Western Union, or old-fashioned couriers. The collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce almost 30 years ago – one of the first high street banks in the West with a Middle Eastern origin – was partly because of the discovery of massive undercover laundering and transfer deals. These days, there is hardly a bank, Western or Eastern, that has not handled such deals. All that has happened is a greater sophistication in how non-banking operatives – high level lawyers and accountants, many in the City of London – establish complex cascading systems of companies that launder monies, initially laterally (from company to similar company for apparent services rendered) before vertically (to a finance or investment house for reinvestment or venture capital). Then it comes back down another chain. Corrupt senior politicians will utilise such methods for their billions; and Somali pirates will use a condensed version for their millions.

Those pirates at their height also had, in the City of London, 'agents' who were able to access the navigation logs and locations of ships sailing around the Horn of Africa. When seizure was made, the negotiations for ransom were conducted via agents and other third parties. Ransom was either electronically transferred and immediately laundered in a complex series of transactions, or delivered by forms of executive mercenary directly to the seized ship. The money then entered the laundering chain before being reinvested in equipment and, often,

development projects in the neighbourhoods of the pirates. It was illegal but ingenious, in some ways restorative of a degenerated environment, suitably vengeful in terms of pillaged livelihood based on fisheries, and highly technologised. It depended on the world financial system of transfers as much as any legitimate flow. It began as unsanitary and became sanitised.

When John Groom was at the height of his powers, Afghanistan was beginning its impact on the world. Associated with the Al Qaeda attack of 9/11 on the Twin Towers, if only as the host of Al Qaeda, the Taleban became a byword for notoriety. It arose in 1994, and the huge conference of the special group of the European Consortium of Political research was convened by Groom in Paris in 1995. It was the 'break out' conference for European International Relations. My co-edited book on the seven sessions I convened in Paris with Osmo Apunen on 'Other' IR came out in 2001, the year of the Twin Towers.[17] In more ways than one, the mountain warriors of Afghanistan haunt this paper.

The image of the mountain guerrilla in Afghanistan or the borderlands of Pakistan – technologised only by his AK47 – is dated and, in fact, was always inaccurate. Heavy duty global communication facilitated the 9/11 attack. It was not dependent on a bearded fanatic in a facility-free cave. Cell phones are only one aspect of the planning and coordination arsenal. Careful surveillance and rehearsal are others, and – insofar as Afghan personnel are linked to internationalised struggles - are fed into computer simulations before attacks are launched. Certainly, although unrelated to the Afghan struggle, the 2008 attack on Mumbai seems to have been planned in this way – with detailed knowledge of the internal configuration of the main hotel target and deployment in anticipation of how security forces would respond. For every technique of counter-insurgency, from 'hearts and minds' to engagement-free drones, there are insurgency techniques of education and indoctrination, and terror bombing delivered, like drones, to the heart of target areas.

What would an Afghan model look like? It might be instructive for planners to model a guerrilla organigram on the functionality of a grouping that is on 'our' side, assuming for the time being that one might mirror another. Let us take a purely imaginary provincial governor, let us imagine of Kandahar; he has a purely imagined brother who is the Afghan president; he has a provincial militia which acts against the Taleban and does so with reasonable effectiveness, even with non-Geneva-compliant brutalities; in return, he receives financial feeds from the CIA, who also turn a blind eye to his thriving intercontinental export business of colourful poppy products. None of these feeds and export revenues leaves a lengthy forensic trail, certainly not one that has been unlaundered along the lines described above, but the export business does require international partnerships – meaning relationships and financial shares with organisations in trans-shipment zones. So, let us imagine that the poppy products reach Western Europe via Pakistan, Equatorial Guinea, and Croatia. In at least one

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[17] Stephen Chan, Peter Mandaville & Roland Bleiker (eds.), *The Zen of International Relations* (Houndmills; Palgrave, 2001).

of those locations, refinements and processing of the exports will occur. They are subject to 'beneficiation' to render the export into a 'retail commodity'. So that the chain of interactions and complex exchanges is significant and sophisticated and parallels those of a formal and legal enterprise and, indeed, surfaces regularly to participate in legalised aspects of the transaction and financial chain. In turn, our imagined governor will import benefits for himself and equipment for his militia – the latter via a complex chain of purchases from arms dealers who themselves live in a world best described as shady. In this sense, no Taleban commander invents a model for his own use and benefit. He borrows one, which has emulated ones in long use in other parts of the world and in which, for instance, Western organisations like the CIA have long been instrumental. If intelligence agencies transact above and underground worlds, why be surprised when others do?

And, of course, the Taleban foot-soldiers demand benefits too. These are catered for. The footwear of choice are American basketball trainers, Jordans and Converse hi-tops – and their commanders have been known to wear Gucci boots under their traditional costumes. If international fashion is part of an insurgency, there is no reason to suppose anything is wholly localised.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Italian mediation of the Mozambican conflict saw the Rome government and the Vatican persuade the RENAMO guerrilla negotiators to remain talking by buying them all Armani suits and taking them to Serie A football matches. Escorts of a preferred Berlusconian age would also have featured. Apparently, the football matches were the clincher.[18] Successful counter-insurgency in Afghanistan should include the saturation of the southern provinces with Manchester United souvenirs and replica shirts. The trick might not be to seek local modes of addressing 'local' dissatisfactions, but to further internationalise taste and interest. Provision of the best wireless broadband service in Transcaucasia, the militant distribution of i-phones, and the provision of 500 pornographic websites in Pashtun language, might weaken resolve faster and better than 500 drones. This is not 'soft power' as much as simple subversion.

I exaggerate to make a point. If our physical presence in Afghanistan is the problem, then no alteration of the modalities associated with our physical presence will make any difference. If we are not physically present, but electronically so, then it will be we who have emulated guerrilla techniques of international persuasion and recruitment. Times have moved on. The guerrillas resemble little those of Chairman Mao. That we should fight them as if they were is a failure of imagination.

My key point is that all 'local' conflicts which draw an international reaction did so in the first place because they had international repercussions based on international outreach. Otherwise we would not be there. We then fight the outreach both at source, on 'location', and in our own locations, raiding mosques in London to ferret out 'bad preachers'. But it is

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[18] See Stephen Chan & Moises Venancio, *War and Peace in Mozambique* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998).

the link **between** locations that is the key: the modes of internationalisation are the same modes to combat it. Discreet theatres of operation lead to nothing except discreet results (or failures). And all this begs key questions about our historical background responsibility for our own problems. Operation Restore Hope in Somalia did more harm than good.[19] Arming, via Pakistan, the Mujahadeen to fight the Soviets led to rapacious Mujahadeen government that led to the uprising of the Taleban.[20] The list is long and well-rehearsed and, in many salient respects, well-argued. But, if history cannot be restaged, taking events into new historical epochs might be the better option. Counter-insurgency thus needs to make a generation-jump – just as insurgency already has.

Let me briefly return to Tehran. There are many universities in that city, and they provided many of the demonstrators after the false elections of 2009. But, if one were to study International Relations at them, then one would study in the same way as in the West.[21] The same authorities, the same key texts, the same philosophical *animateurs* of Kant and Hegel, the same faddish but fascinated involvements with Foucault, and the same US rendition of the subject into broad schools of 'neo-realism' and 'neo-liberalism'. John Groom's work on international organisation is certainly there. The learned objections to Samuel Huntington's division of the world into clashing civilisations, as they emanated from Tehran, relied on a footnote apparatus that was far more extensively Western than any 'Eastern' compilation of sources Huntington used.[22] In short, Tehran always knew us far more than we knew Tehran. This certainly applied to the 2009 demonstrators. How surprised we were when those demonstrators burst onto our screens. In Washington, the suddenly guilty thought was, 'why, we were about to bomb them, and now we learn they are people just like us.' The demand on the streets seemed to suggest that they wanted the right to become more like us. This is true but limited. President Ahmedinejad, who 'won' the 2009 elections, had a demand in some respects exactly the same. If balance of power and deterrence worked for you for decades, why should we not apply your own doctrine in our own region? North Korea's Kim Jong Un, under all the culturally-based rhetoric, might in 2017 be making exactly the same point.

The disquisition above suggests an era and practice of global communication and financial transfers. These, in themselves, cannot arm an insurrection. They can help direct it. But the

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[19] Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial legacy in Somalia – Rome and Mogadishu: from Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

[20] https://www.warhistoryonline.com/featured/jihad-with-us-arms-the-soviet-afghan-war.html downloaded 31 August 2017.

[21] As recounted to me by Professor Mahmoud Sarioghalam, Professor of Political Science, Shaheed Behesti (Melli) University, Tehran, in 1994. More recently, see also: http://ut.ac.ir/Files/Files/UNIVERSITY_OF_TEHRAN_PROSPECTUS_2011-2012.pdf , pp 116-122.

[22] Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, 'The Contest of Civilizations and Interreligious Dialogue' *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.XI No. 3 (1999).

supply of hardware and munitions still requires physical operations. Here, isolation and quarantine – old fashioned techniques – are as useful as ever. However, certain borders are porous, and the inputs from Pakistan to the conflict in Afghanistan meant that the revised Trump doctrine on Afghanistan gave heavy warnings to Pakistan – notwithstanding the fact that the US and Saudi Arabia used Pakistan for exactly such arms transfers when they were supporting the Mujahadeen against the Soviets. With access to equipment supplies comes training, as in the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon, where the fighters resisted the 2006 Israeli invasion with Iranian doctrine.[23] So that what is fomented and organised transnationally, certainly financed via international transactions, has all the same a physical manifestation, both in weaponry and the effects of weaponry used according to certain battle doctrines. The problem lies in mistaking the physicality for the entire problem – in mistaking 'kill numbers' for reducing the insurrection. The key omission in John Groom's work was not just in the potential wickedness of the cobweb, its abnormative character, but the assumption that the cobweb was secular – whereas the disputes of the West with Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Hezbollah must confront at least religious factors and characteristics. In fact, this has been an omission of almost all contemporary discourse on civil society, ever since Hegel proposed the place of civil society. Mervyn Frost was for some years John Groom's colleague at the University of Kent, and his philosophical stance on global communitarianism was in some ways the Hegelian-based philosophical counterpart to the Groomian cobweb.[24] But in his influential works on global civil society and how it functioned on 'settled norms' Frost mentioned not at all religious norms. For Groom, as an historian by original training and as a Europeanist, as a scholar on international organisation, the absence of the Vatican in his formulations of how organisations worked in world society was startling. It didn't have to be Islamic – although in the present moment it is impossible to avoid questions of Islam. But even Groom's work with Paul Taylor on the first Gulf War was a secular analysis with very little religious in its apparatus or outlook.[25]

Religion and the web

I wish to be illustrative in what follows; I do not propose here to enter a long disquisition about religion of the sort I have attempted elsewhere.[26] I view the secularity of the world

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[23] For a detailed synopsis of Hezbollah's strategic preparedness, see Andrew Chadwick, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-2006-lebanon-war-a-short-history , 11 September 2012. For Iran's influence, see http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html?mcubz=1 , downloaded 31 August 2017.

[24] Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[25] Paul Taylor & A.J.R. Groom, *The United Nations and the Gulf War, 1990-1991: Back to the Future?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992).

[26] Stephen Chan, *Plural International Relations in a Divided World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

system – and world society – as a misapprehension. It is a misapprehension that has been with us since the Enlightenment and is precisely the provision of the Enlightenment that permits us to misunderstand today's world. Even today, highly distinguished scholars of Islam such as Olivier Roy ponder whether religion in fact plays the critical role claimed for it in terrorist attacks on European cities. It is, according to Roy, a cover merely for unrest and rebellion, for revolt and a romanticised sense of revolution – of the sort with which dissatisfied youth have inflected all of modern history.[27]

I am taking my argument with Roy forward at length[28] – but even he would not claim that Afghanistan and other quarrels in the Middle East were adolescent angst that adopted the nearest comprehensive ideology available. Here it might be instructive to look briefly at Al Qaeda – often conflated in a single breath with the Taleban, but which has always had an international agenda; Osama Bin Laden was active in South Sudan and elsewhere, long before he 'settled' in Afghanistan and, from there, almost used the Taleban as a kind of 'cover' – certainly as a protective host – as he planned and launched 9/11. The Al Qaeda he helped found and develop, and spur on with early successes, had not only a religious foundation, religious values, a religious ideology, but also a religious mission which sought to challenge existing world politics, the world system of states, and world society. It not only adopted the colours of being liberationist, but saw itself as holistically transformative – in a word, revolutionary.[29]

It might be instructive to recall some timelines. In March 2005, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, a London-based pan-Arab newspaper, published extracts from Saif al-Adel's document 'Al Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020.'[30] Saif al-Adel had been an Egyptian colonel, involved in the assassination of President Sadat, and also an early emigre to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Mujahideen

1. Provoke the United States and the West into invading a Muslim country by staging a massive attack or string of attacks on US soil that results in massive civilian casualties.

2. Incite local resistance to occupying forces.

3. Expand the conflict to neighbouring countries, and engage the US and its allies in a long war of attrition.

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[27] Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst, 2017).

[28] Stephen Chan, *Spearhead to the West: Global Islamic Rebellion, its Idealisation, Textual Command and Drive to Violence* (London: Hurst, forthcoming 2019).

[29] Osama Bin Laden (ed. Bruce Lawrence), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005).

[30] 11 March 2005.

4. Convert Al-Qaeda into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries without requiring direct command and control, and via these franchises incite attacks against the US and countries allied with the US until they withdraw from the conflict, as happened with the 2004 Madrid train bombings, but which did not have the same effect with the 7 July 2005 London bombings.

5. The US economy will finally collapse by the year 2020, under the strain of multiple engagements in numerous places, making the worldwide economic system, which is dependent on the US, also collapse, leading to global political instability, which in turn will lead to a global jihad led by al-Qaeda, and a Wahhabi Caliphate will then be installed across the world, following the collapse of the US and the rest of the Western world countries.

According to Fouad Hussein, a Jordanian journalist and author who spent time in prison with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the deceased Al Qaeda leader in Iraq, Al Qaeda's strategy plan consists in seven phases.

1. **The Awakening.** This phase was supposed to last from 2001 to 2003. The goal of the phase is to provoke the United States to attack a Muslim country by executing an attack on US soil that kills many civilians.

2. **Opening Eyes.** This phase was supposed to last from 2003 to 2006. The goal of this phase was to recruit young men to the cause and to transform the Al Qaeda group into a movement. Iraq was supposed to become the centre of all operations with financial and military support for bases in other states.

3. **Arising and Standing up**. This was supposed to last from 2007 to 2010. In this phase, al-Qaeda wanted to execute additional attacks and focus their attention on Syria. Hussein believed that other countries in the Arabian Peninsula were also in danger.

4. In **the fourth phase**, Al Qaeda expected a steady growth of its ranks and territories due to the declining power of the regimes in the Arabian Peninsula. The main focus of attack in this phase was supposed to be oil suppliers; cyber-terrorism would target the US economy and military infrastructure.

5. **The fifth phase** would be the declaration of an Islamic Caliphate, which was projected between 2013 and 2016. In this phase, Al Qaeda expected the capacity of resistance from Israel to be heavily reduced.

6. **The sixth phase** was described as the declaration of an 'Islamic Army' and a 'fight between believers and non-believers', also called 'total confrontation'.

7. **Definitive Victory**, the seventh and last phase was projected to be completed by 2020. The world will be 'beaten down' by the Islamic Army. According to the 7 phase strategy, this final war is not projected to last longer than 2 years.[31]

These two different leaders both coincided on similar timelines ending in 2020, and their prognosis is shared to the extent that insurgents seem to fight with these stages in mind. The major problem is a misreading of the world economy, whereby international capital now has more than just a Western pole of power, and interacts with the Chinese economic outreach in a way which is both competitive, and mutually supportive. Each pole of power now needs and supports the other, so there will be no collapse of the US economy any time soon. But the ambition is clear, and that is a supplantation. What will be supplanted is a global economic system, the prevailing state structure, and all of world society.

Insofar as it is against the current Westphalian state system, its notion of a Caliphate is primitive in terms of how it would be global. Perhaps it would be a world-wide Caliphate of a curiously federal nature, i.e. a federation bound by norms and twin governments – like the Vatican in medieval times and its relationship with local states. Within this, the Vatican's world and writ was Catholic, and all society bent to it.

The advent of ISIS, originally a splinter group from Al Qaeda – and one with, again originally, much more of a local agenda than a global one, i.e. how best to fight the Syrian and Iraqi wars –finally differed fundamentally from Al Qaeda by forefronting the Caliphate. Now it was to be the beginning of global war, conquest and victory – not the end result of patient if violent undermining of the world system. But even this was not appreciated as the key *leitmotif* of ISIS when, very belatedly, analysts sought to study it.[32]

In the contests of today, this is the march of the spiders and the cobweb they drag forwards. ISIS is now studied more intently[33] but, as its 'state' dominions crumble, its outreach and capacity for violence increases.

The faultlines of the web

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[31]   http://www.spiegel.de/international/the-future-of-terrorism-what-al-qaida-really-wants-a-369448.html downloaded 31 August 2017.

[32] The very first effort at an investigative article was as late as March 2015: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/ - even though it had swept aside all Iraqi armies opposing it by early 2014.

[33] e.g. Fawas A. Grerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

There are very few 'local' insurrections or insurgencies now. Even something once thought atrocious but confined to northern Uganda, the campaign of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, very early went regional. Khartoum was happy to allow it southern Sudanese operational bases in return for its side-actions in making life difficult for the secessionist SPLA. When the SPLA and Khartoum signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Kony was no longer necessary and, when indicted by the International Criminal Court, became a possible pawn. Thus, in 2009, in an alarmingly misdirected operation, but one involving a somewhat cynical alliance, US special forces commanding northern Sudanese troops attempted to surround and kill Kony. It was a disastrous failure and 2000 innocent people died. Even Khartoum and Kampala warned against the operation's prospects. But there was the unpublicised spectacle of one indictee of the ICC, Sudan's President Al Bashir, lending his soldiers to kill a fellow indictee, Uganda's Joseph Kony.[34] A local problem which was always regional went international for no other strategic reason than, perhaps, one of good public relations related to the exploitation of moral cause. But the slippage into global can be very rapid and certainly Kony became the *bete noir* in Western outrage.

But things, even with Kony, are always more complex than they appear – especially as they appear in their reductionist 'outraged' portrayal. [35] In the Islamic world, the critique of the West that has been formulated within an alarmingly consensual Islamic opinion would not have developed without a unifying confessional matrix; but, within this matrix, are issues of development and economic share. The Ayatollah Khomeini, in his Parisian exile, was heavily influenced by Palestinian neo-Marxist dependency theorists and Fanonian sentiments.[36] This was similar to the influences on the intellectual forbear of the Iranian revolution, Ali Shariati.[37] Both men, in somewhat different ways, saw the revival (in Shariati's case, the recreation along Church of England lines) of Islam as key to resisting the rigours of an imposed neo-liberalism – but also, above all, of the value and virtue of Islam in itself. They also sought – and this no longer seems merely naïve – a fairer international relations.

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[34] Information supplied to author by Ugandan military officers, never officially substantiated; but see subsequent efforts:
http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:d7bI4ONUQSEJ:foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/28/800-million-later-joseph-kony-is-still-a-threat/+&cd=5&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk , 28 June 2017; downloaded 31 August 2017.

[35] See an anti-reductionist but necessarily fictionalised account: Stephen Chan, *Joseph Kony and the Titans of Zagreb* (London: Nth Position, 2012).

[36] Nikki R. Keddie, 'Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective' in Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury & Mary C. Wilson (eds.), *The Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p 617.

[37] Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

But perhaps that moment when the fairer world might be negotiated has passed and World Society as a normative practice established upon secular values is no longer truly possible. Not that there is no cobweb, but one with spiders, and they move in and out of the web, between it and the dark web – the dark web meaning precisely the global means of internet penetration and disguise that allows dissemination, radicalisation, recruitment and deployment.[38]

What then of John Groom's world society? It's there. He was right. But it is not only secular, it is not always positive and not even benign. It is a site ironically of a competition towards great hegemonies, and a site of ideas and corrupt money circulation – and the plotting of deaths. Insofar as it challenges Realism as embodied by hegemonic states, e.g. the USA, it creates a pluralist world of savage competition in which these very states are challenged – not as a General Assembly might seek to challenge a Security Council, but as non-state actors seek to usurp the great states.

In short, the malign cobweb restores a sense of challenge in a world where hegemony resided in states being more powerful than other states, and where international law prevented legal personality for non-state combatants in their earlier challenges. Today's cobweb overturns that. It is the more truly pluralistic version where spiders seek out the enmeshed giant locusts. The spiders are not nice but, as Burton and Groom knew, the locusts were never benign.

The ironic thing is that, thus reconfigured, by the recognition of malignity in the cobweb, the model actually works. The web contains new efforts at Realisms, new Realisms to contest old Realisms, and it is normative/abnormative, confessional, aspirational, and often non-state (or challenging at least the state as a Westphalian creature); it is violent and atrocious. But it is pluralistic. It is against Realism as a hegemonic project by one or two or a balanced concert of states. It is an arena where Track Two, if properly educated in cultural and religious needs – not 'basic' needs but complex intellectually-expressed needs – can intrude and courageously do good. If this is the case, the worst one can accuse John Groom of is a certain post-war naivety which, alongside everybody else's naivety, did not and could not predict today's world. Add into the mix today's sorry but unavoidable worldliness – perhaps weariness – and the cobweb is something that has reinvented itself as a useful and necessary tool for International Relations, something far more illuminating than a Pentagon General's hopeless but unending effort to map a Cold War competition onto something far more complex, far more sticky, far more prone to entanglement, far more like a cobweb.

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[38] Abdel Bari Atwar, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).