

The Real Story Behind America's War

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Since 11 September, the "war on terrorism" has provided a pretext for the rich countries, led by the United States, to further their dominance over world affairs.

By spreading "fear and respect", as a *Washington Post* reporter put it, America intends to see off challenges to its uncertain ability to control and manage the "global economy", the euphemism for the progressive seizure of markets and resources by the G8 rich nations.

This, not the hunt for a man in a cave in Afghanistan, is the aim behind US Vice-President Dick Cheney's threats to "40 to 50 countries". It has little to do with terrorism and much to do with maintaining the divisions that underpin "globalisation".

Today international trade is worth more than £11.5bn a day. A tiny fraction of this, 0.4 per cent, is shared with the poorest countries. American and G8 capital controls 70 per cent of world markets, and because of the rules demanding the end of tariff barriers and subsidies in poor countries while ignoring protectionism in the west, the poor countries lose £1.3bn a day in trade.

By any measure, this is a war of the rich against the poor. Look at the casualty figures. The toll, says the World Resources Institute, is more than 13 million children every year, or 12 million under the age of five, according to United Nations estimates.

"If 100 million have been killed in the formal wars of the 20th century", wrote Michael McKinley, "why are they to be privileged in comprehension over the annual [death] toll of children from structured adjustment programmes since 1982?"

McKinley's paper, *Triage: A Survey of the "New Inequality" as Combat Zone* was presented to a conference in Chicago this year and deserves wider reading (he teaches at the Australian National University). It vividly describes the acceleration of western economic power in the Clinton years, which, since 11 September, has passed a threshold of danger for millions of people.

Last month's World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha in the Gulf state of Qatar, was disastrous for the majority of humanity. The rich nations demanded and got a new "round" of "trade liberalisation", which is the power to intervene in the economies of poor countries, to demand privatisation and the destruction of public services.

Only they are permitted to protect their home industries and agriculture; only they have the right to subsidise exports of meat, grain and sugar, then to dump them in poor countries at artificially low prices, thereby destroying the livelihoods of millions.

In India, says the environmentalist Vandana Shiva, suicides among poor farmers are "an epidemic".

Even before the WTO met, the American trade representative Robert Zoelliek invoked the "war on terrorism" to warn the developing world that no serious opposition to the American trade agenda would be tolerated.

He said: "The United States is committed to global leadership of openness and understands that the staying power of our new coalition [against terrorism] depends on economic growth" The code is that "economic growth" (rich elite, poor majority) equals anti-terrorism.

Mark Curtis, a historian and Christian Aid's head of policy, who attended Doha, has described "an emerging pattern of threats and intimidation of poor countries" that amounted to "economic gunboat diplomacy".

He said: "It was utterly outrageous. Wealthy countries exploited their power to spin the agenda of big business. The issue of multinational corporations as a cause of poverty was not even on the agenda; it was like a conference on malaria that does not discuss the mosquito."

Delegates from poor countries complained of being threatened with the removal of their few precious trade preferences.

"If I speak out too strongly for the rights of my people," says an African delegate, "the US will phone my minister. They will say that I am embarrassing the United States. My government will not even ask, 'What did he say?' They will just send me a ticket tomorrow so I don't speak for fear of upsetting the master."

A senior US official telephoned the Ugandan government to ask that its ambassador to the WTO, Nathan Irumba, be withdrawn. Irumba chairs the WTO's committee on trade and development and has been critical of the "liberalisation" agenda.

Dr Richard Bernal, a Jamaican delegate at Doha, said his government had come under similar pressure. "We feel that this [WTO] meeting has no connection with the war on terrorism," he said, "[yet] we are made to feel that we are holding up the rescue of the global economy if we don't agree to a new round [of liberalisation measures]."

Haiti and the Dominican Republic were threatened that their special trade preferences with the United States would be revoked if they continued to object to "procurement", the jargon for the effective takeover of a government's public spending priorities.

India's minister for commerce and industry, Murasoli Maran, said angrily, "The whole process is a mere formality and we are being coerced against our will -- the WTO is not a world government and should not attempt to appropriate to itself what legitimately falls in

the domain of national governments and parliaments."

What the conference showed was that the WTO has become a world government, run by the rich (principally Washington). Although it has 142 members, only 21 governments in reality draft policy, most of which is written by the "quad": the United States, Europe, Canada and Japan.

At Doha, the British played a part similar to Tony Blair's promotion of the "war on terrorism". The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Patricia Hewitt, has already said that "since 11 September, the case is very overwhelming for more trade liberalisation". In Doha, the British delegation demonstrated, according to Christian Aid, "the gulf between its rhetoric about making trade work for the poor" and its real intentions.

This "rhetoric" is the speciality of Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, who surpassed herself by announcing £20m as "a package of new measures" to help poor countries.

In fact, this was the third time the same money had been announced within a year. In December 2000, Short said the government "will double its support for trade-strengthening initiatives in developing countries from £15m over the past three years to £30m over the next three years".

Last March, the same money was announced again. Short, said her press department, "will announce that the UK will double its support for developing countries' trade performance."

On 7 November, the £20m package was announced all over again. Moreover, a third of it in effect is tied to the launch of a new WTO "round".

This is typical of the globalisation of poverty, the true name for "liberalisation". Indeed, Short's title of International Development Secretary is as much an Orwellian mockery as Blair's moralising about the bombing. Short is worthy of special mention for the important supporting role she has played in the fraudulent war on terrorism.

To the naïve, she is still the rough diamond who speaks her mind in the headlines: and this is true in one sense. In trying to justify her support for the lawless bombing of civilians in Yugoslavia, she likened its opponents to Nazi appeasers.

She has since abused relief agency workers in Pakistan, who called for a pause in the current bombing as "emotional" and has questioned their integrity. She has maintained that relief is "getting through" when, in fact, little of it is being distributed to where it is most needed.

Around 700 tonnes are being trucked into Afghanistan every day, less than half that which the UN says is needed. Six million people remain at risk. Nothing is reaching those areas near Jalalabad, where Americans are bombing villages, killing hundreds of civilians, between 60 and 300 in one night, according to anti-Taliban commanders who are beginning to plead with Washington to stop. On these killings, as on the killing of civilians in Yugoslavia, the outspoken Short is silent.

Her silence, and her support for America's \$21bn homicidal campaign to subjugate and bribe poor countries into submission, exposes the sham of "the global economy as the only way to help the poor", as she has said repeatedly.

The militarism that is there for all but the intellectually and morally impaired to see is the natural extension of the rapacious economic policies that have divided humanity as never before. As Thomas Friedman wrote famously in the *New York Times*, "the hidden hand" of the market is US military force.

Little is said these days about the "trickle down" that "creates wealth" for the poor, because it is transparently false. Even the World Bank, of which Short is a governor, has admitted that the poorest countries are worse off, under its tutelage, than ten years ago: that the number of poor had increased, that people are dying younger.

And these are countries with "structural adjustment programmes" that are meant to "create wealth" for the majority. It was all a lie.

Giving evidence before a House of Commons select committee, Clare Short described the US as "the only great power [that] almost turns its back on the world". Her gall deserves a prize. Britain gives just 0.34 per cent of GNP in aid, less than half the minimum laid down by the United Nations.

It is time we recognised that the real terrorism is poverty, which kills thousands of people every day, and the source of their suffering, and that of innocent people in dusty villages, is directly related.