



The Lexus and the Olive Tree

by Thomas L. Friedman
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Focus

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Take-Aways

- Through the end of the Cold War, the greatest threat to United States security came from enemy states and competing superpowers.
- In the 21st century, the greatest danger comes from angry men empowered by globalization.
- Globalization has given individuals the motivation and means to attack the U.S.
- Many people see globalization as Americanization — a direct threat to their cultures.
- The angry men use the very fruits of globalization to attack the global system.
- They adopt technology while rejecting what they see as corrupt American values.
- Ramzi Yousef hoped to kill 250,000 people in his 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.
- Osama bin Laden's terrorist group tracks news on CNN, communicates by e-mail and broadcasts to followers over their cell phones.
- Bin Laden's group even has a media information officer.
- Terrorists feel they can't change the world, so they want to destroy as much as they can.

Rating (10 is best)

| Overall | Applicability | Innovation | Style |
|---------|---------------|------------|-------|
| 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |

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Review

The Lexus and the Olive Tree

In the wake of the horrific terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington there is a nearly universal response: “How could such a thing happen?” While it will take weeks, months or even years before that question is fully answered, journalist Thomas Friedman has taken a close look at the mindset of what he calls the “Super-Empowered Angry Men” who use terrorism as a weapon against the U.S. In describing the worldview that permits and encourages the use of violence against American civilians, Friedman identifies a scorching resentment of U.S. power, affluence and culture. This resentment has increased exponentially with globalization, which, ironically, has provided the angry men with the very tools and technology that allow them to personally strike at the U.S. After this week, there is no doubt that these men — and the violent rage that drives them — are now America’s greatest foe.

Abstract

All Roads Lead to Rome

At the height of the Roman Empire, it was said that all roads lead to Rome. But as the Romans expanded their roads into new territories, they discovered a funny thing about roads: They go both ways. The same roads that brought the Roman Legions abroad later carried the Vandals and Visigoths who sacked Rome. So it could be with globalization.

Through the end of the Cold War, the greatest threat to United States security came from enemy states and competing superpowers. Individuals or private groups did not have the resources or reach to seriously threaten the country with harm. But globalization has changed all that.

In the 21st century, the greatest danger the U.S. faces is the Super-Empowered Angry Man. Globalization is seen by many as the expansion of American imperialism, dominance and hegemony. This makes many people angry. At the same time, globalization is decreasing the importance of distance through efficient travel and communications and spreading powerful technology to all corners of the world. In short, globalization is super-empowering these angry men.

Violent Angry Men

Super-Empowered Angry Men range from the very violent to the not-so violent. The latter type was responsible for a hacker attack on the *New York Times* Web site on Sept. 13, 1998 that ultimately brought the site down. The attackers’ only demand was the release of a notorious computer hacker who was then being held in prison. But their real purpose seemed to be to show that they were smarter than the elites that ran the *Times* and to demonstrate that they could level the prestigious organization at their whim. They had attitude as opposed to ideology, seeking to topple the current power structure and show that the system did not control them.

Moving up the violence scale you find the Tamil separatists who attacked the Sri Lankan embassy in Washington in 1998 by flooding the embassy’s e-mail addresses with bomb threats and spam, which they called “E-mail to FTP anti-server missiles.”

“The greatest danger to the United States today is Super-empowered individuals who hate America more than ever because of globalization and who can do something about it on their own, thanks to globalization.”

“They are not trying to change the world. They know they can’t, so they just want to destroy as much as they can.” [The Economist]

“How can you shout, ‘Death to America!’ when you’re wearing blue jeans?” [Anonymous Iranian student]

“Ramzi Yousef was truly the Super-Empowered Angry Man — a detonator in one hand and a hard-drive in the other.”

This “suicide e-mail bombing” strategy was listed in a State Department report on global terrorism tactics.

Finally there are the violent Super-Empowered Men who do not waste time with e-mail. These men see a global power structure that will never admit them and must be destroyed. Included in this monolithic power structure are almost every capitalist institution, be it the *New York Times*, IBM or the U.S. government.

Rogues’ Gallery

These violent Super-Empowered Men include the Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) sect in Japan, the Osama bin Laden gang in Afghanistan, the Unabomber and the Ramzi Yousef group in New York.

The Supreme Truth sect killed 12 people in Japan by unleashing sarin gas into the Tokyo subway, but it had also amassed roughly one billion dollars in assets and purchased a helicopter to spread their gas. Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire, in August 1998 bankrolled the bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed more than 200 people. His group tracks news on CNN, communicates by e-mail and broadcasts to followers over their cell phones. One of bin Laden’s followers even referred to himself as the group’s media information officer.

Ramzi Yousef masterminded the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. He vented his rage against the West for what he — and prior generations — saw as violence perpetrated by U.S. against his society. He loved the idea of attacking the West using its own technology. Men like Ramsey take pleasure in the idea that they can take the best technological know-how and still maintain a fundamentalist lifestyle. While their methods are more destructive than the hackers, their motives are the same: To spit in the face of American globalization using the system itself.

Yousef is the quintessential Super-Empowered Angry Man. He wasn’t trying to establish an Islamic republic in New Jersey, he just wanted to blow up American buildings. His goal was to knock down both towers of the World Trade Center, hoping to kill as many as 250,000 people. Super-Empowered Angry Men do not want to change the world — they just want to destroy as much of it as they can.

Detonators and Hard-Drives

Nothing better captures the ability of the Super-Empowered Angry Man to integrate himself into the global system than the actions of one of Yousef’s followers after the 1993 World Trade Center attack. He went back to the truck rental agency where the group had gotten the truck that held their bomb and tried to get back the \$400 deposit he had left. This follower was of course arrested and ultimately led authorities to Yousef, and the computer on which he had stored the details of all his terrorist plots. A big part of the U.S. government’s case against Yousef was built on the flight schedules, projected detonation times and identification documents found on this computer.

What’s interesting about men like Yousef, according to Middle East expert Stephen P. Cohen, is that “they used to believe that they had to overthrow their own governments and get control of their own states before they could take on America. Now they just do it directly on their own as individuals.” Globalization gives them the ability, the logic and the motivation to attack the U.S. on their own. The logic is that states are no longer the

“This globalization that you speak about is just another American conspiracy to keep the Arab world down, just like Zionism and imperialism.” [A former Algerian prime minister]

“They love the idea that you can just cream off the technological know-how, charge it on your Visa card, and still live a fundamentalist lifestyle with the windows closed and a veil on.”

“You went to war more than any other country in this century and you have the nerve to talk about killing innocent people?” [Ramzi Yousef]

relevant powers, the U.S. and global markets are. Therefore, if you want to bring down the global power structure you don’t waste your time with Pakistan or Egypt, you go right for the U.S.

What grates on these men is not that the U.S. is technologically superior, but that the West claims to be superior in values. To the terrorists, American values are simply mindless consumerism and technology worship. Yousef made this address to the judge at his trial:

“You keep talking about collective punishment and killing innocent people... You were the first one who killed innocent people, and you are the first one who introduced this type of terrorism to the history of mankind when you dropped an atomic bomb which killed tens of thousands of women and children in Japan, and when you killed over 100,000 people, most of them civilians, in Tokyo with firebombings. You killed them by burning them to death. And you killed civilians in Vietnam with chemicals, as with the so-called Orange agent. You killed civilians and innocent people, not soldiers, in every single war you went to. You went to war more than any other country this century, and then you have the nerve to talk about killing innocent people. And now you have invented new ways to kill innocent people. You have the so-called economic embargo, which kills nobody other than children and elderly people...”

An Uninvited Guest

There is a backlash against globalization that is much different from the protests we see on TV. It is a rising resentment of the U.S. triggered by a global system that is heavily influenced by American icons, markets and military might. The U.S. has an economic system that has obliterated all others, leaving wealth, but sometimes ruin, in its wake. The U.S. does not conquer other nations, but globalization does something that people around the world see as equally insidious: It makes them like us.

The Iranian mullahs once called the U.S. the “great Satan” and the bastion of “imperialism and Zionism.” But today, they use a different term. They call the U.S. “the capital of global arrogance.” This is a subtle but revealing shift. Imperialism is a physical occupation. Global arrogance is when your power is so great that you don’t need a physical presence to occupy other lands and influence other lives.

To paraphrase Ronald Steel, the angry men see American globalization as an uninvited guest: You try to shut the door, and it comes through the window. You shut the window, it comes through a cable. You cut the cable, it comes over phone line. Cut the phone line, it comes in from a satellite. It’s there with you, on the billboard outside and on the workplace floor. You eat it, it gets inside of you. It creates gaps between generations and families. And it’s all America’s fault. Osama bin Laden says the U.S. must get out of the Arabian Peninsula, because it is “defiling the Islamic home.”

Former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral is no bin Laden, but he once said this about the distress he feels about Americanization-globalization: “I see the same thing happening now in India — the changes in our dress, eating habits. My granddaughter is four. She is always talking about bubble gum, not Indian food, or she says, ‘I don’t like Pepsi, I like Coke.’ She even speaks English more often than Hindi, and then she went to her mother and asked, ‘Doesn’t Grandfather speak English?’ I keep observing my

“What bothers so many people about America today is not that we send our troops everywhere, but that we send our culture, values, economics, technologies and lifestyles everywhere.”

grandchildren because it is an insight. The other day my granddaughter said that she wanted pizza. So her grandmother said that she would make a pizza for her the next day. My granddaughter said, ‘No, I want Pizza hut.’”

The Golden Straightjacket

From the perspective of much of the rest of the world, globalization is an American Golden Straightjacket of capitalism and culture. But other cultures, including those of Western Europe and Japan, have very different ideas about how markets should operate and be controlled. The European and Japanese believe in the state exercising power over the people and markets, while Americans tend to believe in empowering people and letting free markets decide who wins and who loses.

European governments blunt the impact of markets by regulating them to employ fewer people at higher wages. The Japanese government encourages the payment of slightly lower wages, but with the guarantee of lifetime employment. To people in many of these areas, the American system seems cruel, but they feel that they are nevertheless being forced to accept it.

Some experts trace the origins of globalization back to U.S. strategy after World War II, when it tried to create an international economy to avoid recession and counterbalance Soviet power and communism. As a result, there was already a foundation in place when the information revolution arrived. But this foundation had a largely American face.

While some people see America as offering attractive technology and personal empowerment, others view it with envy and resentment. Because American companies like Disney, Coke and IBM are among the most prominent global players, people around the world see little distinction between Americanization and globalization. They see little difference between American power, exports and culture.

And the type of power that America possesses — a power that draws immigrants from all over the world to flock to its shores — cannot be counterbalanced by any state. What could a combined Russia and China do to break the hold of Hollywood? This power imbalance is getting worse, and the angry men are watching.

About The Author

Thomas L. Friedman is the Foreign Affairs columnist for the *New York Times*. He has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his reporting as Times bureau chief in Beirut and Jerusalem. His first book, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, won the National Book Award in 1988.

Buzz-Words

Super-Empowered Angry Man / Globalization / Golden Straightjacket