

The Axis Of Evil And The Western Coalition

by David C. Grabbe

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," November 2006

In his January 29, 2002, State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush identified North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as countries that posed the greatest threat to the West in general, and to the United States in particular. In that speech, he put those countries on notice, labeling them an *axis of evil*:

States like these [North Korea, Iran, and Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an *axis of evil*, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, *the price of indifference would be catastrophic. We will work closely with our coalition* to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. (Emphasis ours throughout)

In the intervening years, Iraq was invaded and conquered (this conquest currently keeping much of the U.S. armed forces tied down), Iran has made great strides in its nuclear program, and North Korea performed conspicuous missile tests, apparently detonating a small nuclear device. Part of the axis has been neutralized (though at great monetary and political cost), and the other members constitute an ever-growing threat. President Bush pledged to "work closely with [a] coalition" to thwart the violent intentions of these nations, and to a large degree he has—but the usefulness of alliances and coalitions is now being tested and stretched as globalism wanes and tribalism grows.

The worth of an alliance was powerfully proved during World War II, when a coalition defeated the Axis powers of the time—Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan. As George Friedman explains,

The coalition . . . involved a range of nations that were prepared to *subordinate their particular national interests* to the broader interest of defeating the Axis powers. Military success in the war rested on the *ability of the coalition* to hold together. And reading backward, *had this coalition existed prior to the rise of Munich, World War II likely never would have happened.* Maintaining global stability required a coalition of states that shared a *mutual interest in stability* and would suppress, as soon as possible, nations that would want to upset that stability. (Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report, October 17, 2006)

As Friedman explains, the Cold War was successfully prosecuted along the same lines: Nations banded together, agreed on the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Russia, and were prepared to act economically, politically, or militarily (short of direct confrontation) to keep the common enemy contained.

These two successes, however, have spawned the thinking that an alliance or coalition is *always* the solution, even when members disagree on the actual problem. Witness, for example, the frequent charge against President Bush of acting "unilaterally" (i.e., as a single entity) on Iraq, despite mustering a thirty-nation "coalition of the willing." Clearly, the real objection is not his acting alone,

but that he did not wait for *approval* from other parties who had a stake in the matter—and he acted simply because he knew that other stakeholders (France and Germany, most notably) did not consider Iraq to be as threatening as America did. However, the international community continues to call for "multilateralism" and "coalition-building" as the solutions, despite not agreeing on the scope of the problem.

Predictably, similar national self-interest played out in the "six-party talks"—North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, China, and the United States—that completely failed to rein in North Korea. Since the Clinton presidency, the multilateral approach has been applied to North Korea, but most of the coalition, supposedly against a nuclear North Korea, does not believe Kim Jong Il is enough of a threat to do anything. South Korea wants neither war with nor destabilization of North Korea. Japan has major domestic and social issues with projecting its military power, and though open to sanctions, it is happy to keep trading with North Korea. "Russia," Friedman notes, "is about as worried about the prospect of a North Korean nuclear strike on its territory as the United States is about a French strike. The two countries may not like each other, but it isn't going to happen." Yet, both Russia and China desire to keep the U.S. geopolitically off balance, valuing this more than a non-nuclear North Korea. The multilateral approach has failed because those involved could not agree with the U.S. that North Korea is a threat.

Significantly, the same multilateral approach is being employed with Iran in particular and militant Islam in general. The international community—whether the EU, the UN, Russia, China, or a combination of all—is convinced that alliances guarantee stability. But so far, each major player, aside from the U.S., has a vested interest (read: oil and weapons trade) in the status quo of a stable Iran and an off-balance U.S. To them, militant Islam is not threatening enough to be worth countering. Like in the run-up to World War II, most nations are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to contain emerging and escalating threats.

Whoever remains after the next crisis will have the clarity of hindsight to realize, "This could have been prevented—if they could have agreed on the threat." For these reasons and others, God wisely warned ancient Israel against putting their trust in alliances and covenants with other peoples (Psalm 118:8-9; 146:3; Isaiah 30:1-3; Jeremiah 46:25). If only the modern nations of Israel would heed His counsel!