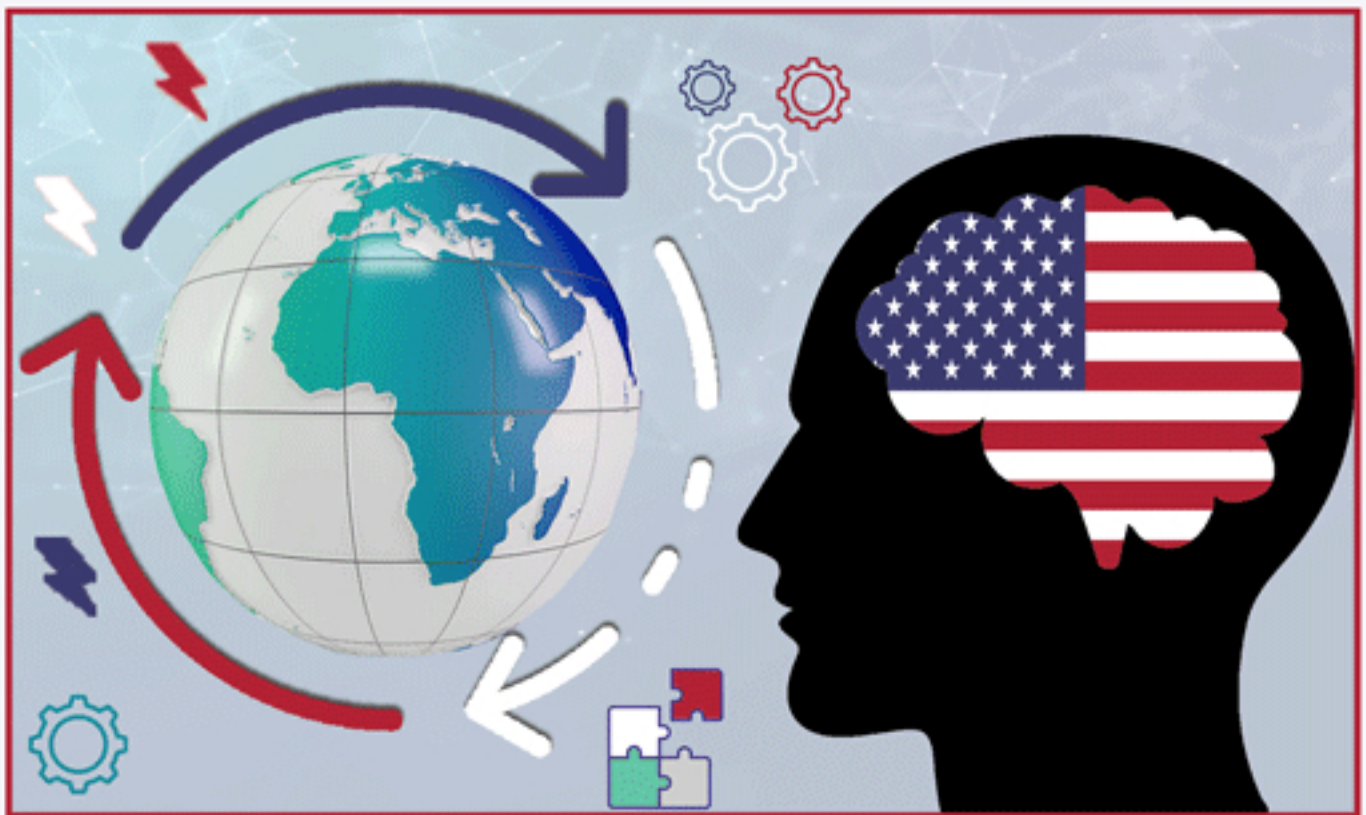




US Pragmatism Between Somatic Violence and Structural Violence in International Relations



Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay

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Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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Introduction: Defining Concepts

When analyzing the US values in international relations, we find that power and pragmatism are at the top. Pragmatism is an American “philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily.” Accordingly, judging the validity of a certain hypothesis or behavior in social and political interaction is based on material or moral benefits.²



Accordingly, the US policy does not divide societies, states and theories on the basis of absolute “ideals” such as goodness, truth, beauty, justice, equality, freedom, etc., but rather on the basis of relative benefits. It does not approach political regimes on the basis of their nature (democratic or dictatorial, civil or military, religious or secular, hereditary or representative, etc.), rather, on the basis of potential benefit. If a dictator is beneficial to US policy, there is no harm in defending and supporting him (as we shall see). When there is aggression, military intervention, alliance or blockade, the US approach would not be value-based, but rather it would be a pragmatic approach. Also, the US does not look at various forms of force from a pure value perspective, but rather it is pragmatic when approving these forces. Forces at all levels are acceptable to the US if they bring benefit, and are rejected if they bring damage.

Propaganda in US politics is a tool to legitimize pragmatism. It justifies and encapsulates US political behavior, and show it as if it is “to guarantee higher values such as democracy, human rights, sovereignty, independence, etc.” Thus, when analyzing the US politics, one must separate between its pragmatic approach and its idealistic propaganda.



The theories of Bruce Russett on the relationship of democracy with international peace are an example of wrapping US pragmatism with a cover of values. The core of his theory has two bases:³

- ➡ 1. Somatic violence between democracies is less than nondemocracies.
- ➡ 2. There is direct correlation between autocracies and internal somatic violence.

Michael Nicholson and other political scientists refuse to limit the concept of violence to the traditional form, which Russett calls “somatic violence,” and inflicts only direct physical harm (direct killing by war or otherwise), rather Nicholson adds to it what Johan Galtung calls structural violence.⁴ It is when conditions are set to prevent individuals from meeting their basic needs,⁵ like poverty and poor environmental conditions as a result of pollution, exploitation of ethnic differences for political motives, and the adoption of sanction policies for political motives, etc. Therefore, we can ask: Aren’t death due to colonial policies, multinational corporations, proxy wars, environmental pollution, and economic blockades, considered forms of violence that would lead to death, with a higher rate than somatic violence that the US propaganda talks about? Shouldn’t structural violence be included in measurements, and shouldn’t the responsibility of parties be determined, rather than limiting the measurement to somatic violence, especially when measuring the relationship between democracy, tyranny and wars? Actually, Russett’s theory is selective, highlighting somatic violence and concealing structural one, whose circumstances will be explained later. Accordingly, **the US pragmatic perspective is based on the absence of structural violence while highlighting the somatic one, and this is consistent with the political propaganda that legitimizes the US political behavior, whereas the structural violence indicators do not serve that pragmatism, as we will demonstrate quantitatively.**

Based on the above, a set of problems of structural violence in the international community can be put forward to clarify the idea:

- 📌 1. The geostrategic region, or the region that knows an increase in military expenditures is a region devoid of somatic violence, but it creates a regional “structure” that would begin somatic violence, and Lewis Richardson’s model of the arms race has proven that structural violence is the basis of somatic violence.⁶ If we take Israel as an example, it ranks first in the world in the Militarization Index from 2007 to 2022.⁷ Is this an indication of a peaceful situation or it is a military structure preparing for somatic violence? The US perspective considers Israel a “democratic” state in an authoritarian region in which the rate of somatic violence is the highest. However, the fact that it



ranks first in the world in terms of militarization is marginalized, even if it prepares the environment for somatic violence, instead it is highlighted as a democratic state with a peaceful tendency according to Russett's model.⁸



2. Is the region that has international military buildup a peaceful one, or what, according to the Russett's model? Is the region in which extremist ideologies grow peaceful? Is the threat with violence a violent act or not? Does the possession of nuclear weapons constitute a threat to international peace?, etc. Most American literature tries to perpetuate the idea that the cases of somatic violence between democracies is much less than that between dictatorships, while pragmatically ignoring structural violence that these democracies produce, leading to more severe somatic violence, as we will explain.

To prove that Russett's hypotheses are invalid, we monitored, in a previous study, specific indicators and compared them to what was the international situation in 2012.⁹ In this study, we would like to strengthen these indicators with other new indicators, on the one hand, and compare their trajectories during the 2012–2022/2023, on the other hand.

The US Pragmatic Absence of Structural Violence

The analytical model of Russett's theory of the relationship between international violence and dictatorial regimes on the one hand, and the relationship between international peace and democracy formed a framework that gradually changed into what Thomas Kuhn called paradigm, and was adopted by the broader sector of US theorists.¹⁰ Since every political concept has a central idea, the analysis of the concept for its sub-connotations helps to discover the validity of the prevailing impression about this central idea. It suffices to study the following values adopted by the US, which are introduced as if they are absolute ideal ones, to find out that they are pragmatically used and supported by political propaganda, and that the US paradigm is not quite accurate:

1. Democracy

The political and social dimensions dominate US writings, especially concerning democracy, consequently, the US and Western countries occupy leading positions in related global indices. Countries in the Democracy Index are arranged on the basis of these dimensions, however, the US does not occupy the same rank in the Economic Democracy Index,



and global conditions confirm such ranking. In 2022, the US ranked 26th on the Democracy Index among 167 countries,¹¹ while on the Gini Index, which measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution, the US ranked 50th. We find, for example, that Iran, Algeria, China, Russia and Ethiopia, which are classified as totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, are more economically democratic than the US, based on the quantitative measurement models provided by Western institutions, led by the World Bank or others.¹² Here we wonder which of the two dimensions has the priority to be adopted? And we find that pragmatism intervenes to highlight the more useful dimension to the US and ignore the less useful in political propaganda. It is noted here that poor distribution of wealth is a kind of structural violence that paves the way for somatic violence.

2.Arms Sales and Race

Quantitative studies have shown that 85% of international conflicts were preceded by arms race,¹³ and that the sources of arms are mostly democratic countries. For example, in 2017–2021, the share of exports of arms of seven countries, classified as “political” democracies, constituted 65.4% of total global exports of arms.¹⁴ However, the most significant indicator is that in 73.9% of the world’s wars, during the same period, both war parties, or one of them, was armed by the US, and that it has provided weapons and training to 31 nations that Freedom House has defined, in 2021, as “not free.”¹⁵ Also, Western data show that:¹⁶



- ➡ a. As the number of wars increases, the profits of US arms production companies rise as a result of the increase in their arms sales. In 2021–2022, \$59.1 billion were the value of sales of weapons systems produced by four of these companies. This makes these companies push the US political decision to fuel more wars in order to ensure more profits.¹⁷ We have indicated in a previous study that, in 2001–2002, the profits of nine members of the Defense Policy Board amounted to \$76 billion, for having financial connections and contributions to arms production companies.¹⁸ All of this means that, from a “pragmatic perspective,” profits of arms trade take precedence over the values of peace. It is enough to look at light weapons in civilian possession, where the US has the highest national ownership rate, reaching 120.5 firearms for every 100 residents,¹⁹ hence it has the 28th highest gun violence rate in the world. Also, the US has the rate 4.4 deaths due to gun violence per 100 thousand people in 2014 and 5 deaths in 2018,²⁰ increasing

to 6.6 deaths in 2022.²¹ This confirms that the production and sale of individual weapons prepare for violence, and this is confirmed by US crime rates.

- ➡ b. Every 1% increase in the purchase of small and medium arms, doubles the percentage of victims in civil wars, where the main source of these weapons, by a large percentage, is “Western democracies.”²² In 12 of the world’s deadliest armed conflicts between 2015 and 2020, most civilian deaths (27%) were caused by small arms and light weapons, whose sales are mainly by western democracies.²³ A study focusing on six risk factors associated with the sale and transfer of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in local and regional communities, has concluded that the correlation coefficient between these factors, on the one hand, and the volume of light weapons sales, on the other hand, is clearly high. Looking specifically at SALW sales, they have accounted for roughly \$228 billion (17.5%) of the \$1.3 trillion in US arms sales authorizations since 2009 until 2024,²⁴ i.e., the structural violence, concealed in US political literature, is contributing to crime, wars and terrorism. The United Nations (UN) has reported that small arms and light weapons sales, which are led by the US and western democracies, cause nearly 100 thousand violent deaths annually.²⁵
- ➡ c. The increasing dependence of the belligerent countries on American weapons makes their response to US demands in their domestic and foreign policies higher, and this gives the US decision-maker more conviction of the usefulness of political pragmatism.

Therefore, to increase their sales and profits, it is in the interest of US arms production companies to increase wars. They seek a “pragmatic” cover to make it appear that it is selling arms to the forces defending democracy and not for profit, and this is the same conclusion made by Wright Mills, who put forward the theory of the military-industrial complex.²⁶ It sees that members of the US military and political leadership are shareholders in arms production companies, and the boards of directors of most arms production companies were officers or military and political leaders, and that both parties cooperate with the scientific elite in military studies and research centers. As a result, the profits of these individuals from their shares in arms companies increase as wars increase. Thus, wars are actually not in defense of absolute values, but rather to reap profits that are encapsulated in a system of propaganda.

3. US Aid to Authoritarian Regimes Index

Available quantitative data on democracy in the world between 2012 and 2022 indicate that about half the world’s population live under an authoritarian regime (see Table 1),²⁷ while we have full democracies, which only account for 6.4% of the population in 2022, and it was 11.3% in 2012. Mega trends indicate that political democracy has clearly oscillated over the past decade, with a relative tendency towards decline.



**Table 1: The State of Democracy Around the World in 2012 and 2022
(167 countries)**

Regime Type	No. of Countries 2012	No. of Countries 2022	Share of World Countries 2012	Share of World Countries 2022	Share of World Population 2012	Share of World Population 2022
Full democracies	25	21	15	12,6	11,3	6.4
Flawed democracies	53	53	31,7	31,7	37,1	39.3
Hybrid regimes	36	34	22,2	20,4	14	17,2
Authoritarian regimes	53	59	31,1	35.3	37,6	37,1

When examining democracy by region until 2022 (see Table 2), we find that the general rate of democracy in the world fluctuates during the period 2006–2022, with a tendency to decline slightly. When comparing the seven regions of the world, we find that the Arab region is the least democratic, for the general average of the world until 2022 is 5.46 out of 10, while in the Arab world it is 3.18, i.e., 2.28 points less than global average. Out of 20 Arab countries, 15 (75%) were classified as authoritarian, while out of 44 African non-Arab countries, 23 (52.3%) were considered authoritarian.²⁸

Table 2: Democracy Level by Region in 2006–2022²⁹

Rank	Region	2006	2008	2010	2022
1	North America	8,64	8,64	8,63	8,36
2	Western Europe	8,60	8,61	8,45	7.23
3	Latin America and the Caribbean	6,37	6,43	6,37	5.83
4	Asia and Australasia	5,44	5,58	5,53	5.46
5	Central and Eastern Europe	5,76	5,67	5,55	5.36
6	Sub-Saharan Africa	4,24	4,28	4,23	4.12
7	Arab Countries	3,53	3,54	3,43	3.18
8	World	5,52	5,55	5,46	5.64

As for US assistance, it does not depend on the nature of the regime (Authoritarian or democratic), for the US provides military assistance to 73% world's dictatorships. According to Freedom House's rating system of political rights around the world, there were 49 nations in the world, as of 2015, that can be fairly categorized as "dictatorships," and the US provides various assistance (military, political and economic) to 36 of them.³⁰ In 2019, 50 political regimes were classified authoritarian, yet 41 of them (82%) received various aid, the most important of which was military aid. An American study shows that in 2020 there were 29 authoritarian regimes, 20 of which received full US support, while the other nine, they did not receive US aid at all because they are on the "enemies" list.³¹ This indicates that pragmatism is the criterion of relations with other countries, not the criterion of democracy and dictatorship. This has prompted an American writer to say, "If US support for dictators seems to be at odds with US rhetoric about spreading democracy, part of the explanation for that may lie in the use of 'democracy' as a code word for 'our side' regardless of any connection to actual democracy or representative government or respect for human rights."³²



On the other hand, during the Cold War, the US did not give importance to the nature of regimes—democracy or dictatorship—when establishing military alliances or regional organizations. During that same Cold War, Washington used military and economic aid to keep in power a large set of despotic regimes. In 1947, Washington organized the Rio Pact, an alliance of states in the Americas, most of which were authoritarian until the 1980s. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO, 1954–1977) and the Central Asian Treaty Organization (CENTO, 1958–1973) comprised mostly authoritarian states. South Korea and Taiwan were both US allies for decades before they democratized in the late 1980s. Portugal, Greece, and Turkey all spent many years under authoritarian regimes while members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).³³

4. The Economic Sanctions Index Between Somatic and Structural Violence³⁴

Available statistics on sanction policies by a country, a group of countries, or a regional or international organization on other countries indicate that from 1950 until the beginning of 1990s, the world has witnessed a remarkable increase in sanctions. Then, from 1992–2004 they decreased, and in 2005–2020 they increased. In 1950–2022, 1325 sanctions were imposed. The following table shows the number of times this policy was imposed by the "democratic" countries that resorted most to imposing this policy on other countries during the period 1950–2019:



Table 3: Sanctions on Countries 1950–2019³⁵

Nation or Organization	Times sanctions
US	366
EU	123
UN	81
Norway	51
Canada	47
UK	44
Iceland	38
Liechtenstein	38
Japan	37
Albania	36
Different entities (multiple countries from different agencies and regions) Such as the Arab League against Israel or Africa against the apartheid regime, etc.	464

Data have showed that the US imposed, annually, sanctions on more than one thousand entities (countries, individuals, or public or private organizations), from 2016 to 2020.³⁶ However, studies have proved that out of 115 cases of economic sanctions, during 1945–1990, only 35% were partially successful. In 1970–1990, a mere 13% of unilateral US sanctions achieved any success at all.³⁷ Various studies indicate that the results of the economic blockade, structural violence, mostly imposed by the US, are as follows:³⁸



- ➔ a. Life expectancy is reduced by 0.4–0.5 years during an episode of US sanctions.
- ➔ b. Women are affected more severely by sanctions.

- ➡ c. Children are affected by the decrease of birth weights and increase in malnutrition levels, and thus an increase in child mortality rates.
- ➡ d. Sanctions lead to a decline in per capita income rates between 2.3–3.5%.
- ➡ e. An increase in poverty levels by 3.8% and a widening class gap in the countries under siege.
- ➡ f. Sanctions lead to more environmental problems.

This means that the siege policies (structural violence) by democratic countries, that lead to death or killing, are not classified as violence, although sometimes they exceed somatic violence that democratic political literature only take into account.

It is noted that the US propaganda lists a number of objectives for imposing sanctions, and when analyzing those, they could be all categorized within structural violence. The primary objective declared would be democracy; second, human rights; third, interventions; fourth, end war; fifth, terrorism; sixth, prevent war; seventh, territorial conflict; eighth, destabilize regime; and ninth, policy change.³⁹

5. US Military Interventions

According to US reports, the US launched at least 251 military interventions between 1990 and 2020, and interfered in elections (parliamentary or presidential) in different countries, 81 times in one way or another.⁴⁰ These interventions used the pretext of protecting human rights, terrorism, democracy, interests or national security threat. Sometimes its pragmatism coincides with its real



goals, but it was often a cover to legitimize its behavior. It is necessary to point out here that the US military intervention (at a rate of more than 8 times annually) leads to structural changes in the economy of the targeted country (particularly decreasing the economic growth, as in Iran, Venezuela and Cuba); social structural changes, especially the excitement of subcultures (as in Iraq and Lebanon); or political system changes (as in Afghanistan or Central America). All of these changes lead to structural violence that may cause very large human losses that outweigh somatic violence.



The US also bring about changes by preventing international institutions from taking certain positions, thus leading to the eruption of international conflicts. For example, if we look at the US vote in the UN General Assembly, it rarely goes along with the general international will. Furthermore, the number of times it vetoed in the Security Council indicates that it ranks second in the world in



standing against the international will. Perhaps, the Palestine issue is a clear example of that, where during the 1972–2021 period, the US vetoed 53 times against resolutions supporting Palestinian rights.⁴¹ Such a behavior makes structural tension in the Middle Eastern political region continue, and thus perpetuates structural violence.



Conclusion

Based on the above, there are two types of violence in the international arena, the first is somatic and the other structural, and the official American political literature focuses almost entirely on the former, linking it to a specific type of political regime, especially authoritarianism. On the other hand, this literature ignores structural violence, to which the US and most Western democracies contribute, which leads to more deaths than the total number of somatic violence deaths, associated with authoritarian regimes.

To cover up its role in structural violence, US diplomacy employs political pragmatism as a basis for the US behavior. However, this pragmatism is presented while wrapped with a series of morally inspired concepts, values, and laws to justify all strategic US

policies such as wars, military intervention, economic blockade, and aid to dictatorial regimes...etc.

Accordingly, I do not see that the US policy has double standards, for pragmatism is the central and only criterion of US policy, and any political conduct is based on benefits. It is in the US interest that this pragmatism, which is its sole criterion, not be exposed. Therefore, it introduces an intellectual and value system to make this pragmatism acceptable to other societies, and from a pragmatic perspective, propaganda is considered legitimate as long as it brings benefit. Even Theistic arguments, when pragmatic, they believe in God as long as there's an expected utility.⁴²

The Arab countries must realize the danger of US pragmatism, for the US has supported and abandoned political regimes, regardless of the nature of these regimes, whether they are democratic or authoritarian. An applied study reveals different models of political systems, whose policies were consistent with the US strategic goals for long periods.



However, when US priorities change, it abandons these regimes very easily, as happened in different periods of history, in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Panama, Chile, Guatemala, the Shah's regime in Iran, the Philippines and the apartheid regime in South Africa, etc. The US even intervened to prevent the elections, fearing that its opponents would come to power in any country.



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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