

*The 20th Century Ended September 11\**

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Right and Left have reacted to the Sept. 11 events according to their usual idiosyncrasies: the former demanding more security measures and increasingly speculating about the Islamic danger; the later criticizing, often advisedly, the mistakes of US policy, but failing to wonder about the nature of global terrorism, which may give the impression that it implicitly justifies the attacks or that it condemns the victims. Neither of these approaches takes full measure of the events.

## 1

New York has been destroyed tens of times in Hollywood disaster movies. Sept. 11 was not a movie, but it looked like one: proof that reality now imitates virtual reality or that the simulacrum precedes reality. The constant re-play on worldwide TV of the collapsing Twin Towers short-circuited a whole system of representation based on special effects. At the same time, it constituted its peak. The spectacle of terrorism took over the terrorism of the spectacle.

The New York and Washington attacks are events of huge magnitude — a “pure event” (Jean Baudrillard) — not because of the number of victims (historically, there have been more), but because of the context and the target. Since 1812, the US has never faced an attack on its own territory. The objective of the terrorists, who did not care about their own lives or the lives of their victims, was first of all symbolic: to humiliate America by showing that its territory was no longer safe, and by hitting in a spectacular way the symbols most representative of American power. They obviously reached this goal. The consequences will be long term. Sept. 11 ends the transition period, from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the postmodern age. On Sept. 11, the US entered the 21st century.

Of course, there is no need to “feel American” to condemn the attacks. It is not just a question of “morals” or compassion for the victims. No matter what one thinks of the US or what emotions are felt at the sight of the collapsing towers — horror or secret jubilation — there are at least three good reasons to consider this terrorist act unacceptable. Political or religious fanaticism is unacceptable. A war meant not only to defeat an opponent, but also to exterminate an enemy considered evil, is unacceptable. The massacre of thousands of non-belligerents because of their nationality or for the sole purpose of terrorizing a population is unacceptable. Nobody “deserves” to die in such a manner. No cause is worth being served by all means.

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\* Translated from French by Kathy Ackermann.

## 2

On Sept. 11 the US faced a real human tragedy, which cannot be taken out of the political context that can explain it. Therefore, the first question to ask is not “How did it happen?” but “Why did it happen?” President Bush’s answers — who, unlike Rudolph Giuliani, did not appear particularly brilliant in the days following the events — showed his character. Calling “cowards” men ready to sacrifice their lives for a cause they believe in is inappropriate. Terrorists are monstrous criminals, but certainly not cowards. (There is less “cowardliness” in voluntarily crashing the airplane one is in than in dropping bombs from the sky on a civilian population). Claiming that the US was attacked because it is the country of freedom and democracy was no less ridiculous. Does anyone seriously think that one day the terrorists said: “Americans have too much freedom, let us punish them”? The terrorists did not attack the Statue of Liberty, but the symbols of American power. As for the incredible ultimatum the American President presented to the rest of the world, to join his “crusade” or risk of its own destruction, was simply unbearable. “Those who are not with me are against me” is an absurd totalitarian slogan. Hundreds of thousands of people in the world have no sympathy for George W. Bush, yet they do not approve of Bin Laden. People as different as Pope John-Paul II, the Dalai Lama or the Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar, who have condemned the attack, but have refused to participate in Bush’s retaliation, certainly do not sympathize with Islamic terrorism.

More seriously, when Bush presented the war against terrorism as a “struggle between good and evil” he did not realize he was talking like Bin Laden. Where the American president calls for a crusade, the terrorist leader calls for a “jihad.” One presents the Western world as Satan’s incarnation and screams: “Allah Akbar,” the other denounces terrorism as the Devil: “God bless America.” Since presumably they are both talking about the same God, it would be funny were it not so tragic. With this kind of invocations, where talks about good and evil reinforce each other, politics falls by the wayside, and gives way to the most apolitical religious wars. More precisely, it is a return to the worst of all wars, the “just war,” where, having been banished from humanity, the enemy can and must be destroyed by all means.

## 3

On Oct. 11, during a White House press-conference, Bush said: “I cannot understand that people can hate us . . . Like most Americans, I cannot believe it, because I know how good we are.” The Americans’ genuine astonishment that they can be hated (or merely criticized) reveals their extraordinary *innocence*. Many Americans have almost no knowledge of the rest of the world (less than a year ago most of them would have readily believed that Afghanistan was an island in the Pacific). They spontaneously believe that their way of life is the best or even the only possible one, and that those who think otherwise are ignorant, perverts or fools. That one could blame the US not for being the “land of freedom

and democracy” but for having constantly supported dictatorships (Noriega, Marcos, Pinochet, Mobutu, Suharto, etc.) and for presenting itself only as a caricature of democracy, is just inconceivable. Thus, they have great difficulties relating the Sept. 11 events and their previous leaders’ foreign policy.

Since the collapse of the Soviet system, the US has been the only world power — a role rather difficult to play: superpowers have never enjoyed the peoples’ favor. Moreover, it has deliberately chosen to act as the world’s policeman (Globocop). Therefore, it considered it its natural right to deploy its troops and wage war anywhere in the world to defend its “legitimate interests.” For good or bad reasons — this is not the place to decide — it successively bombed Somalia, Nicaragua, Haiti, Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yugoslavia. “Human Rights” rhetoric accompanied most of these interventions, which nevertheless have resulted in the death of many “innocent civilians.”

It is estimated that, since the Gulf War, 5% of the Iraqi civilian population died, either because of “Western” bombings or because of the US-imposed blockade. Compared in scale to the American population, this figure represents 14 million people. During the May 12, 1996 showing of “60 minutes,” Lesley Stahl asked former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: “We have heard that half a million children have died in Iraq. I mean that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. Is the price worth it?” she answered, yes, “We think the price is worth it.”

Moreover, for decades the US has been the unconditional ally of Israel, whose presence in the Middle East is clearly perceived by the Arab-Muslim world as a neo-colonial phenomenon and as an outrageous injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people. Today, the Israeli government receives from Washington 5 billion dollars of economic and military aid a year. It has received over 85 billion dollars since 1949. Such figures are unprecedented.

Is it really surprising that, under such conditions, some Muslims (or non-Muslims) are not insensitive to Bin Laden’s arguments, and sometimes, under the influence of religious fanatics, opt for terrorism? That their perception of the US is based on or corresponds to reality only partially is irrelevant. American foreign policy has left behind enough ordeals and misery, enough bitterness, anger and resentment to be easily exploited by radical Islam. Like communism earlier, it instrumentalizes legitimate aspirations. In this sense, the New York and Washington attacks can be considered a “blowback.” This is not an excuse for terrorism, but only an attempt to identify its causes. To understand does not mean to legitimate, and even less to approve. To fail to explain terrorism amounts to making it incomprehensible and only a matter of emotional attitudes and pure moral condemnations.

Compared to previous forms of warfare, WWII introduced at least two major changes. The first consisted in the fading of difference between civilians and soldiers, combatants and non-combatants. The introduction of air power eliminated

the concept of the “front”: a plane can go wherever it wants and can no longer be stopped at the point of contact between two armies. With high altitude bombing, *fire* replaces *impact*. Airplanes can now reach any target for military strikes. At the same time, the targets are no longer exclusively military: civilian facilities also have strategic value. Moreover, the obviously ideological nature of the last war has resulted in the disappearance of what had been preserved until the dawn of the 20th century: the idea that armed struggle was compatible with respect (if not esteem) for the enemy. Thus, it came to be accepted that it was now legitimate to defend the right cause by attacking civilian populations. German cities were subjected to “carpet bombing,” and the Pearl Harbor attack, in December 1941 (2,400 casualties) resulted in a massive attack, a hundred times worse than the original one, with atomic bombs dropped on Japanese civilian populations. To which one must add the “collateral damage” caused by the inaccuracy of the strikes: in occupied France alone, 67,000 civilians died under English and American bombs.

In addition to terror bombings, there were also bacteriological warfare plans. Since 1942, England has manufactured five million daily food rations infected with Anthrax. They were supposed to be dropped over Germany in 1944 in order to contaminate the livestock first, and the German population later. The operation was cancelled because of the June 1944 D-Day landings. The Island of Gruinard, where the infected products had been tested, could only be decontaminated in 1990.

The second change (which joins the first) was the appearance of resistance movements all over occupied Europe, which have regularly been denounced as “terrorist” by ruling authorities. At the same time, foreign wars degenerate into civil wars. Developed during the Prussian and Spanish occupation against the Napoleonic armies, the partisan image of the underground fighter without uniform became popular. After 1945, more specifically during anti-colonial struggles, various armed minorities, “liberation” movements or guerillas posed as resistance organizations fighting against existing governments, which in turn branded them as “subversive” and terrorist. To various degrees, Zionist groups in Palestine, Nelson Mandela’s ANC in South Africa, the FNL in Algeria, to name only a few, resorted to terrorism. In retrospect, once they succeeded and achieved international recognition, the means they used seemed justified. It came to be accepted that, in some cases, terrorism is legitimate. Of course, it has also been argued that terrorism is not justified if social and political demands can be expressed otherwise. As to what constituted “good” and “bad” terrorism, opinions differed. Gradually, the assessment of the moral or immoral character of terrorism became a matter of propaganda or merely subjective judgment.

## 5

The word “terrorism” remains ambiguous. People in Northern Ireland, in Corsica or in the Basque Country who resort to armed violence are denounced as “terrorists” respectively by the English, French or Spanish governments, but

they consider themselves to be freedom fighters. One's freedom fighter is the other's terrorist. The use of the term is unstable and even reversible. The same Mujahaddin, who were regarded as "freedom fighters" when the Red Army invaded Afghanistan, suddenly become "terrorists" after they started to use the same methods against their former allies. Considered "resistance fighters" when NATO forces bombed Serbia and Kosovo, the UCK activists became "terrorists" after they attacked Macedonia, a NATO and US ally. One could go on. Things become even more complicated as terrorism, traditionally considered the weapon of the weak, has also been used by the strongest: recently, state terrorism has not been the least deadly.

This type of terrorism, however, is very different from what took place on Sept. 11. Hitherto, violent terrorist acts had clearly identified objectives: end foreign occupation, fight dictatorship, force the independence of a colony, make a revolution possible. Terrorists acted secretly, but did not hide either their political identity or their goals. Their operations took place in very specific geographical areas (or were related to a particular territory). Nothing of the kind occurred when the planes crashed on the Pentagon or the WTC. No one has claimed responsibility. The attackers did not make any demands. They do not belong to any clearly identified country, and their sphere of action extends in principle to all countries. The post-modern era marks the end of territorial logic. The image of the partisan, to which Carl Schmitt still ascribed a "telluric" character, also loses its territorial aspect. It takes on global dimensions. The perpetrators of the New York and Washington attacks should be considered global terrorists or "hyper-terrorists." Because of its "spectacular" dimension, this hyper-terrorism marks the defeat of the communication ideology and, consequently, of the preponderance of American representation in the media.

## 6

Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire with the Christ-like face, had been an obsession of the American services long before Sept. 11. He has been accused of being the inspirer of the attacks just hours after they happened. Even though the public has not seen any formal proof of his implication, it is not unreasonable to think that the NYC terrorists had more or less been in contact with his organization. Whether he was personally involved or not is irrelevant. It is naïve to believe that global terrorism relies on one single man, organization or country. Its main characteristic is total independence.

Today, there are several hundred terrorist organizations in the world. They operate as networks. These networks have very flexible, decentralized, non-hierarchical structures, often based on family or clan. They work in such a way that their efficiency relies only very loosely on the existence of particular cells. It would be a great mistake to think that the elimination of the networks could be achieved by eliminating a leader, no matter how rich or powerful he might be.

Such a belief only proves how little is known about the nature of global terrorism. The death or capture of one of their leaders has no major influence on their ability to harm or to survive. Bin Laden fulfills his function as a leader within a system, which does not require leaders. America has been hit by an invisible and nameless enemy. It has been attacked by networks.

The world has entered the era of networks. The new terrorist organizations are but one kind of network among others: banking and financial networks, industrial networks, information and communication networks, criminal networks, etc. The networks operate in an intermittent, fluid and informal way. It is all a question of flow (of money, symbols, images, programs), of speed, of connections. Networks link individuals or groups with common interests, independently of any territorial base. Far from weakening them, the distance separating them increases their power. In the world of networks, everything works in “zero time,” at the speed of electronic signals. Events happen everywhere simultaneously, abolishing time and space. Financial markets and international mafias use the same technology.

Networks are identified by their “fluid” character, guaranteeing their opacity, and by the fact that they do not have any center or periphery, which means that each point of the network is at the same time central and peripheral. Networks create a new “fractal” type of social relations. By establishing an immediate link between individuals living far apart, they create new supra-national identities. In this sense, they participate in the irreversible decline of the nation-states. The status of the state must change when, as in the case of criminal activities, it can no longer control business, communication, as well as financial and business exchanges. The concept of national sovereignty, related to a specific territory, becomes meaningless. The transition from the modern to the post-modern age corresponded to the transition from a world of nation-states, national borders, and relatively enclosed territories to a world of continents, communities, and networks.

Networks spread like a virus. The electronic virus, transmitted by *hackers* through computer networks, the virus responsible for the most talked about diseases (AIDS, foot and mouth disease, mad cow disease), the Anthrax virus used as a bacteriological weapon, the information precipitating the chain destabilization of the global financial markets, the inflammatory speech traveling around the world through the Internet, all operate according to the same paradigm. Hyper-terrorism is a product of globalization. Like multinationals, NGOs, or drug cartels, it has no nationality. It uses the planet’s “gray zones,” where there are no political and legal structures, where no one controls anything any longer. Confronted with problems, terrorists do what General Motors, Nike, or Pepsi do: they go somewhere else. Thus, the Western system of free trade and free circulation turned against itself.

The attacks in New York and Washington have been called “acts of war.” But it is a new type of war. In traditional wars, the main objective is usually to occupy,

defend, or conquer land. This is no longer the case, since there are no fronts anymore. In traditional wars, states, or at least clearly identifiable political entities, confront each other. But no one has claimed responsibility for the Sept. 11 attacks. The parallel with the Pearl Harbor attack is deceptive: the question then was merely to identify the role played by the Japanese. Thus, it is better to compare the Sept. 11 events not to Pearl Harbor, but to the Sarajevo attack which opened an era for a new type of belligerence. The end of the Cold War did not end all conflicts (and even less “history”), but it precipitated their metamorphosis. In the war against terrorism, states do not confront *private* armed organizations, but non-governmental *political* entities — a faceless and nameless enemy. It is a global war: a “netwar,” to use a term introduced by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla as early as 1993.

Even though during the Gulf War 90% of the military means used were still traditional, in this war conventional retaliation and nuclear deterrence do not work anymore. The attacks have already shown that the anti-missiles project announced by the US, at the risk of starting another arms race, was useless. They also marked the end of the “zero casualty war,” which, thanks to massive high altitude bombings, minimized the number of American casualties, and gave the impression that the enemy was at one’s mercy.

During earlier wars, one looked for a balance of forces (or a balance of terror). Now, the key is asymmetry. This asymmetry between heavy structures and fluid logistics (and not dissymmetry, which only conveys a quantitative inequality) is noticeable in all fields. Asymmetry of players: on one side, states, on the other, trans-national groups. Asymmetry of objectives: terrorists know where to hit; their opponents do not know how to retaliate. Asymmetry of means: on Sept. 11, within a few minutes, battle ships, atomic bombs, F-16 and cruise missiles became obsolete in front of a few dozen of fanatics with knives and box-cutters. With minimum means, the New York and Washington attacks shook up America and caused, directly or indirectly, damages of up to 60 billion dollars. (The same asymmetry exists in the Palestinian Intifada: stones against tanks). The main asymmetry, however, is psychological: there is a huge gap between those who fear a lot of things more than death and a world in which individual life, pure immanence, is considered as something unsurpassable. While some think about retirement, others think about paradise. For terrorists, death is a reward. Faced with the death wish as the absolute weapon, the Western world is necessarily disarmed.

War against terrorism is the first post-modern and “furtive” war, the first war of globalization. It no longer has any limits, either territorial or in the choice of means. The main feature of globalization is that it cannot be subordinated to, controlled or regulated by any superior power. For the first time in history, it establishes a world without borders. In the era of globalization, there are no longer “sanctuaries,” or safe countries. Since there are no more borders, the battlefield expands over the whole world. The airplanes hijacked by terrorists on Sept. 11 were American planes (American and United Airlines) on domestic

flights. Their pilots had been trained in the US, where some of them had been living for several years. Nothing shows better the fading of borders between inside and outside than the growing confusion between the tasks of the police and those of the army. Confronted with terrorism, the police are forced more and more to resort to military means, whereas armed interventions are increasingly portrayed as “international police operations.” The traditional distinction between friend and enemy does not make sense anymore, because now there is no way to know who is a friend and who is an enemy, who is “inside” and who is “outside.” The one that looks like a “friend” might well be an enemy. Ultimately, in a globalized world there are no longer any foreign wars, but only civil wars

After the elimination of a lot of other traditional distinctions (between civilians and soldiers, front and rear, etc.), even the distinction between war and peace disappears. “Hot peace” replaces “cold war.” It is the generalization of an exceptional situation: the exception becomes the rule, while violence (governmental or trans-national, institutional or wild) becomes the *modus vivendi* of a growing number of individuals and groups. Wars start without a declaration of war. On the other hand, once the arms are silent, peace becomes another way to pursue hostilities (sanctions against Iraq, Milosevic’s trial in The Hague). It is the reversal of Clauswitz’s formula: politics and peace extend war by other means. Global war tends to last forever. War is not declared and never ends.

## 8

One is necessarily the enemy of whoever designates one the enemy. The collapsing of the “fortress America” proves that no country is safe from hyper-terrorism. Finally, it is every country’s duty to ensure the safety of its citizens. That is why one must fight global terrorism. But it has to be done with the appropriate means.

The US should have learned from its previous “retaliatory” operations — “Eagle Claw” in Iraq (1980), “Urgent Fury” in Grenada (1983), “Just Cause” in Panama (1990), “Restore Hope” in Somalia (1993), not to mention the destruction of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan in 1998 — almost all of them ending in a pitiful way. That has not been the case. Obviously, President Bush wanted to react in a spectacular way in order to satisfy a public opinion calling for quick and brutal revenge (according to a *New York Times* survey, 60% of American supported a war “even if thousands of innocent civilians should be killed”), and the clear identification of the culprits. For its part, the military-industrial complex needed a global enemy, identifiable with the “Evil Empire,” to assert its power and continue to manufacture weapons. When the enemy does not have a face, he needs to be given one, i.e., one has to be constructed. It turned out to be Bin Laden and, behind him, the Taliban. In the days following the attacks, it would have been wiser not to mention Bin Laden and to eliminate him discreetly. Putting him in the spotlight, even if only to expose him to global condemnation, made him into a hero, maybe even a martyr.

So Bush chose the forceful solution, because public opinion demanded it and because it appeared to be the only one which could reinforce in Americans the conviction that they are the strongest, and therefore the best; that they can always impose their viewpoint, and that they are always right.

While everyone expected a longer war, the American military victory was not a surprise. Crushing with guided missiles and massive bombings a country which does not have an army, an air force, an anti-aircraft defense, or important civilian and military infrastructures is not a big deal. The war has mainly provided an opportunity to test new, sophisticated weapons in real settings, and to demonstrate once again American absolute military supremacy — a supremacy that should come as no surprise, considering that with a military budget of 366 billion dollars in 2002, the US spends more than Russia, China, France and Germany combined.

But what is the result? Despite the propaganda pounded out by Washington commentators, the “fight against terrorism” is an almost complete failure. Osama bin Laden, whose capture or death seemed a little more certain every day, has vanished. Mullah Omar has disappeared. Al Qaida leaders remain untraceable. Not a single person who could be blamed with certainty of having participated in the Sept. 11 events has officially been captured or killed. The Western press described in great detail Bin Laden’s “underground refuge,” a fortress built in a mountain, equipped with the most sophisticated technology, and reminiscent of James Bond movies, Hitler’s bunker and Ali Baba’s cavern. After the storming of Tora Bora, TV has only been able to show obscure caverns and rat holes.

Nor has the war in Afghanistan reestablished “any democracy” — a word which, in this part of the world, has absolutely no meaning. It has just been a matter of one Islamic faction replacing another. The combatants for the Northern Alliance, who had massacred 50,000 people in Kabul between 1992 and 1996, immediately after regaining power looted the food warehouses and reestablished their monopoly of the drug trade. In the cities, insecurity and criminality have soared. In Kabul as well as Jalalabad the new leaders have announced that public executions will continue and that the *sharia* remains in place: once the Western TV left, women put on their *burqah* again. In the north of the country, the Hazara minority is again threatened by the Pashtun and Tadjik alliance, while the “war-lords” everywhere have already resumed fighting.

Even though the number of air strikes is lower than during the war in Kosovo (4,700 all together against 13,000 in the Balkans), the number of civilian casualties is higher. Dr. Marc Herold, economics professor at the University of New Hampshire, estimates their number at 4,000. In addition, there are the injured, displaced people as well as the victims of summary executions and rapes. The air raids drove away from their homes over 1,500,000 Afghans.

During the hostilities, Donald Rumsfeld unambiguously called for the killing of Al Qaida members, even if they decided to surrender or if they were prisoners. Thus, over 400 prisoners were massacred during the uprising at Fort Qala-e-Jhangi,

and probably even more in Kunduz or during the capture of Tora Bora. Other alleged terrorists have been transferred to the American base of Guantanamo in Cuba. Locked in cages like animals — a sight, which will undoubtedly lead to new recruits for terrorism — they have been denied the status of prisoners of war, an obviously blatant violation of the Geneva Convention. Their fate remains uncertain. Special tribunals, unencumbered by normal legal practices, should try them. In the American press, some commentators have even suggested that, in order to make them talk, the use of torture would be perfectly justified.

The country's new strong man, Hamid Karzai, is one of the tribal chiefs of the Southern branch of the Pashtun ethnic groups. For the Americans, he has the advantage of having been in contact with the CIA, in particular with William Casey and George Bush, after the war against the Red Army. Thus, he was a lot "safer" than his rival Abdul Haq, this Northern Alliance chief, who Washington thought was too close to the Russians and the Iranians, and was assassinated by the Taliban under mysterious circumstances at the beginning of the war. Hamid Karzai has been educated in the US, where he was — lucky coincidence — a consultant for El Segundo, the Californian subsidiary of the oil company Unocal, when it was negotiating with the Taliban the installation of a pipeline in Afghanistan.

In December 1979, the Russians had invaded Afghanistan to defeat resistance by any means. Six years later, they packed up and left. Every time someone tried to invade it, Afghanistan turned out to be a quagmire. This time, once again, nothing has been solved. More than ever Afghanistan is at brink of civil war and endemic fighting between rival fractions. The question is: What are the risks of contagion? The worst scenario is one of political trouble in Pakistan and the rise to power of Islamic extremists in a country with nuclear power. This would be a major destabilization in the Indian subcontinent, where the Indian-Pakistani conflict has already resulted in four wars in 50 years (including the one in 1971, which ended with the creation of Bangladesh). It is probably not an accident that the war in Afghanistan coincides with a rise of tension in Kashmir and a recent deterioration of relations between India and Pakistan. A modern Islamic state, Pakistan now has 140 million inhabitants, and should have 195 million within 15 years. 61% of its population is less than 25 years old.

## 9

But, Afghanistan is also a country whose geopolitical importance cannot be underestimated. Indeed, oil and gas pipelines intended to transport the huge oil reserves in Central Asia and the Caspian region to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean have to pass through its territory. The oil reserves of the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are estimated at 15 billion barrels. Chinese industrial growth increases Beijing's need for gas and oil: China has been importing oil since 1993, and its consumption should soon catch up with that of US. Under these conditions, it is vital for them to control the

reserves located between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and to dispatch them toward the Pakistani coast, avoiding the cartel of oil-producers in the Gulf zone. A Russian oil pipeline has already been opened between Baku and the Novorossiysk harbor in October 2001. The pipelines being built since 1998 by Unocal have to go through Afghanistan, a distance of 1,200 km, to connect Dauletabad in Turkmenistan to Multan in Pakistan (estimated cost: \$1.9 billion).

As soon as the Taliban took over power, Washington's policy toward the new regime appeared to be concerned primarily with Unocal's interests. The Afghan-American Zalmi Khalilzad provided the connection between the company and the Taliban — the same Khalilzad who Bush has recently appointed a special agent in Afghanistan, after he was Condoleezza Rice's adviser for Afghan affairs. Also present at the negotiations was Laila Helms, a niece by marriage of former CIA director Richard Helms and the unofficial representative of the Taliban regime in the US. In December 1997, several Taliban leaders were invited on his behalf to visit Unocal installations in Houston. They were welcomed in royal fashion.

It is difficult to ignore all this, when former leaders of the oil industry dominate the current American government. Bush started at the oil company Arbusto Energy, renamed Bush Exploration Oil in 1982 and later merged with another company under the name Harken Energy Corporation. Before he held his current position, Vice President Dick Cheney was the CEO of Halliburton, which had been officially in charge of the construction of the Afghan pipeline. (This huge multi-national company, with more than 100,000 employees in 130 countries, had sales of over \$15 billion). The Under-Secretary Kathleen Cooper has worked for Exxon. Condoleezza Rice was a member of the board for Chevron (which went as far as to name one of its supertankers "SS Condoleezza Rice"). The Under-Secretary of Commerce, Donald Evans, made his career in the oil industry.

In addition, Afghanistan is the only country in the world bordering four different nuclear powers: India, Pakistan, China and Russia. It has common borders with Iran and former Soviet republics in Central Asia. The war allowed the US to achieve a strategic breakthrough. Moreover, the establishment of American bases or a Washington-controlled government in Afghanistan now allow NATO forces to definitively deny Russians, already threatened by the bases in the Baltic countries, access to the "hot seas" of the Southern hemisphere.

Considering all this, one wonders whether the objective of the war in Afghanistan was really to "fight against terrorism" and to destroy the Al Quaida network. Since Bin Laden's presence in their territory was harming their international image, in 1999 the Taliban proposed to the Americans to neutralize or eliminate him. Americans did not follow up on this proposal. After the Sept. 11 events, they still proposed to hand him over on the condition that he be tried in a neutral country — a procedure not altogether unacceptable, since it had already been followed with the alleged perpetrators of the air attack

in Lockerby. Washington again refused. Furthermore, the former Pakistani minister for foreign affairs, Niaz Naik, has revealed that, as early as July 2001, American officials had proposed to him a military plan for overthrowing the Taliban regime and replacing it by a “moderate” regime.

The Gulf War allowed Americans to install permanent military bases in Saudi Arabia. The war against Serbia allowed them to settle permanently in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. It is a safe bet that, after defeating the Taliban, they will install themselves not only in Central Asia and Afghanistan, but also in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, in order to control the region’s oil and gas, and include the former Soviet republics into their sphere of influence. This will provide them with a place of utmost geo-strategic importance between China and Russia. “Humanitarian assistance” is a good pretext to reach this objective. To preach about “the good” almost always hides a will for absolute power.

For the time being, though, it is time for Russian-American cooperation. It is one of the great ironies of history to have seen the US fight a war against Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan together with the Russians, after the US armed and even financed the same terrorism 20 years ago to weaken Russian power. Just as they had not hesitated to join Islamic fundamentalists in the struggle against the Soviet Union, the US did not hesitate to support Pakistani putschist General President Pervez Musharraf or Uzbek dictator Islam Karimow in order to defeat the Taliban. After being the main Taliban supporter against the Northern Alliance (and having sponsored Kashmir terrorism for over ten years), Musharraf has been showered with gifts (\$6 billion of foreign aid in three months) and has had the economic sanctions imposed on Pakistan for testing nuclear devices lifted. Yet, the Pakistani head of the secret service, General Mahmoud Ahmed, who on Sept. 11 was in Washington meeting with members of the State Department and the CIA, also had a deposit of \$100,000 made on the bank account of Mohammed Atta, one of the perpetrators of the New York attacks, through a middleman, another terrorist, the Anglo-Pakistani Ahmed Omar Sheik. President Musharraf asked him to resign on Oct. 8, the same day the US started bombing Afghanistan.

At the same time, under the pretense of fighting against terrorism or “Islamic fundamentalism,” the Sept. 11 events will allow Russia to continue its colonial war in Chechnya, the bloody Algerian military junta to “eradicate” its opponents, China to accelerate its repression of the Okighurs minorities (7 million people) in the Muslim province of Xinjiang (former Eastern Turkestan, a region rich in oil deposits), and, last but not least, the Israeli government to intensify its policy of “targeted assassination” of Palestinian leaders. After Sept. 11, Ariel Sharon has compared Yasser Arafat to Bin Laden, and has undertaken, with Bush’s support, to delegitimize the leader of the Palestinian authority, branded as the only real obstacle to the crushing of the Palestinian movement.

## 10

No one will regret the abominable Taliban regime: these fanatics had pushed to the limit misogyny and iconoclasm typical for monotheistic religions. Yet, the shortcomings of this regime do not alter the fact that the American war in Afghanistan is clearly illegal from the point of view of international law. Art. 51 of the UN Charter allows for self-defense, but not retaliation. It allows a nation to respond to an attack with force, but not to retaliate once the attack has ended or is stopped.

American indifference to international law and the UN policies was already clear during the Gulf War and, later, during the attack on Kosovo. But it became even more obvious when the Reagan administration attacked Nicaragua, mined its harbors, and provided financial support to the Contra terrorists, who at the time were fighting the (Left-nationalist) Sandinist government. About 30,000 civilians were killed during the offensive. Nicaragua filed a complaint before the International Court. After examining the evidence, the Court condemned the US for “illegal use of force” and ordered it to leave the country and pay substantial penalties to the government. The only US response was to reject the verdict, to announce that it would no longer recognize this jurisdiction, and to increase its support to the Contras. Later, the American government vetoed a UN resolution requiring all members of the UN to abide by international law. John Negroponte, the newly appointed US ambassador to the UN, in charge of the “war against terrorism,” is the same person who, as the US ambassador to Honduras, supervised the attacks against Nicaragua in the 1980s.

The war against hyper-terrorism may require profound changes of international law (or international law may clash too much with what needs to be done). Yet, the US is the only country in the world to have ignored this law in an almost official way. The US government finances the International Tribunal of The Hague, but has stated it would never allow any of its citizens to be tried by that institution. On December 7, 2001, the US Senate approved a law (American Service Members Protection Act) allowing the Administration to take measures as severe as a military invasion to prevent American citizens from being brought before the future International Penal Court (IPC). The same government bill prohibits the participation of American troupes in UN peace operations unless the US is assured that none of their soldiers will ever be brought before this tribunal. Thus, the US does not recognize the higher authority of international jurisdiction, but demands that their allies submit to it. If the most powerful country in the world does not recognize international law, no wonder other countries or forces act the same way.

## 11

In fact, the objective should be to limit global terrorism and not to promote its growth. Therefore, it is not enough to attack terrorists in their supposed “refuge” or to plan retaliation after the attack. Intervention has to occur down the line. Infiltration, intelligence, and control of information are the first weapons

against terrorism, but conventional means are not suited for the task. Faced with “viral” contagion, one must oppose a strategy of communication and connection, which is also “viral.” Only networks can efficiently fight networks.

It is not easy to succeed. The impenetrable structure of the networks makes them difficult to infiltrate. To control their financial resources goes against the logic of globalization, resulting in hundreds of banks willing, in fiscal paradises, to launder any amount of dirty money. Concerning intelligence gathering, it requires surveillance, which can only restrict civil liberties. When no one can tell a friend from an enemy, when terrorist groups could be anywhere, the most “rational” approach is to suspect everyone. New restrictions in freedom of expression and communication are therefore to be expected. They will be all the more easily accepted if they are presented as necessary measures to insure greater “security.” While the fight against terrorism will accelerate the decline of the nation-state, because it implies considering national borders as insignificant, it will also end up reinforcing the control powers of the state apparatus and will contribute to the rise of a society of global surveillance: the global Panopticon.

After the attacks, the US passed an “Anti-Terror Act,” which allows it to arrest or to detain suspected non-citizens indefinitely, deport them, imprison them in solitary confinement and search their homes without authorization. This “patriotic” law gives the FBI and the NSA unlimited power. It sidesteps all legal restrictions as far as surveillance of communication is concerned, both at home and abroad. Over 1,200 foreigners (including about 60 Israeli) have been secretly arrested this way, because of mere suspicion. Four months later, 900 of them were still incarcerated, without having ever been presented before a judge or having had the opportunity to be assisted by a lawyer.

While terrorist activities are already sanctioned by existing legislation everywhere in Europe, on Sept. 30, 2001, the European Commission adopted an anti-terrorist bill based on an extensive definition of the term “terrorism” (“takeover or destruction of state property, means of public transportation, public places or blocking access to basic needs such as electricity, endangering of people, goods, animals or the environment”) which aggregates “international terrorist” acts with any violent political action, including traditional forms of street demonstrations. Such a law would allow the criminalization of all forms of social conflict not fitting the current legal framework and the criminalization of the expression of any opinion contrary to that of the ruling party.

On November 13, President Bush also signed a bill allowing for the trial of alleged terrorists by special military courts. The bill permits the sources for the accusation to remain secret, no possibility of appeal, and places “strict limits” on the right of the defense. The trials are to take place on military bases or on warships. The verdicts have to be delivered by a commission made up exclusively of officers, unanimity will no longer be required for the death penalty, and the verdict cannot be appealed. The legal proceedings will be kept secret, and the

conversations between the defendants and their lawyers can be recorded secretly.

The best way to fight terrorism implies, in reality, to intervene in the causes, and not on the consequences. Fighting terrorism without wondering about what provokes it renders powerless. The goal should be to isolate the terrorists from the masses amidst which they recruit, and thus to dry the well of anger, resentment, revolt, humiliation and despair from which they draw. The causes of terrorism have to be eradicated by taking into account everyone's grievances, not just the interests or views of the strongest. The real remedy for terrorism is not war, but justice.

## 12

For the US, this means to take a more global look at the Arab-Muslim world, and, most of all, to develop more coherent policies. In the last decades, the US has distinguished between "good" and "bad" terrorists depending on whether or not they served US interests. During the Cold War, they systematically supported Islamic movements, which they saw as a shield against secular regimes suspected of being pro-Soviet (Egypt, Iraq, Syria). In Afghanistan, they supported the Mujaheddin as early as July 1979, i.e., six months before the Soviet invasion. As the Red Army invaded Afghanistan, in collaboration with Pakistan's secret services (al-Istakhbara al-'Ama), they recruited, armed and financed close to 100,000 Mujaheddin from 40 different countries. Ten years later, the opium crop at the Pakistani-Afghan border exceeded 800 tons a year. The Afghan resistance received a total of close to \$6 billion of weapons.

Injured four times while fighting the Red Army, Mullah Mohammed Omar was then considered a hero in the US. As for Osama bin Laden, he was asked by his tutor, Prince Turki Al-Faycal al-Sayd, at the time in charge of the Saudi Arabian secret services (a position he only left in August, 2001) to manage financially the CIA's secret operations in Afghanistan.

Relations were particularly close between the future President Bush and Bin Laden's entourage, thanks in particular to Bin Laden's brother-in-law, the billionaire Khaled Ben Mahfouz. In the 1990s, the latter, who has a house in Houston (he bought part of this city's airport with the support of the Bush family), was at the heart of the scandal surrounding the crash of the Bank of Credit And Commerce International (BCCI) — an Anglo-Pakistani establishment used by the Reagan-Bush administration to transfer Saudi money to the Contras and to Nicaragua and to send CIA funds to Afghan Mujaheddin. BCCI collapsed when it was established that it was also laundering money for the Medellin drug cartel. Former CIA agent James Buff was the contact between the BCCI and the Bush family. One year before its bankruptcy, the bank was used to organize illegal transactions for Bush, then the acting CEO of the Harken Energy Corporation. Today, the Bin Laden family is still one of the major financial partners of the Bush family.

In September 1996, the American assistant Secretary of State in South Asia described the Taliban's capture of Kabul as a "positive step." At the same time,

Unocal announced the signing of an agreement with the Taliban for the construction of a gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan to Pakistan. At that time, the Taliban had a diplomatic mission in Queens (New York), led by Abould Hakim Mojahed. Their representatives were frequently the guests of the State Department, the National Security Council and the CIA. Relations between US and the Taliban began to deteriorate in the fall of 1997. These relations were not interrupted until May 2001. In July 2001, Qazi Hussein Ahmed, leader of the pro-Taliban Pakistani movement Jamiaat-I-Islami, was still received in the offices of the CIA at Langley (Virginia).

In the meantime, there had been the Gulf War. Considered by Washington as an objective ally as long as he was fighting against Iran, Saddam Hussein suddenly became the Devil when he tried to take over Kuwait, which the British had previously cut out of his country. He was criticized for having brutally repressed his Kurd minorities in the 1980s. Yet, at the same time, between 1984 and 1989, Turkey had launched a series of military campaigns against its own Kurd population, destroying more than 3,500 villages, killing tens of thousands of people, and forcing two and a half million civilians into exile. Instead of trying to prevent them from doing so, Washington helped the massacres by arming the Turkish army, a NATO ally. The war against Iraq, the only secular country in the region also led to the death of tens of thousands of people. It was extended by an embargo and continuous bombings, which are still going on today. American troops took advantage of the situation and settled permanently in Saudi Arabia, close to Mecca, provoking the fury and indignation of the most radical Muslims. Brought back to power by the Americans, the Kuwait emir thanked them by participating in the creation, in Lugano, of the Nada Management Group, i.e., Bin Laden's financial holding.

After the Taliban's victory, the CIA-trained Mujaheddin rushed to fight in all conflicts involving Muslims. "Afghans" were seen in Algeria, Kashmir, Bosnia, Chechnya, Western China, the Philippines and Indonesia. In Egypt, the same extremists assassinated President Sadat. During the conflict in the Balkans, the US supported the Bosnian Muslims, and then the Albanian-speaking terrorists of Kosovo. In Macedonia, they finally tried to disarm the UCK that they had previously armed to fight against the Serbs.

Except for the Taliban regime, the Arab state most favorable to Islamic fundamentalism has always been Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has financed numerous terrorist networks. The Bin Laden group is closely linked to the puritan Wahhabite movement to which the Saudi dynasty officially belongs. The Wahhabite clergy, which advocates a literal reading of *The Koran*, has at its disposal in Saudi Arabia 35,000 mosques and a budget of \$10 billion a year, which allow the financing of a great number of schools and theological seminaries in Europe and North America. Osama bin Laden is a Saudi, as are the majority of the financial supporters of his organization. Out of the 19 identified presumed perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attacks, 11 had connections with Saudi Arabia, none with Afghanistan.

But until now, the US has always allowed Saudi Arabia to do what it pleased, in order to secure their oil supply. The only three countries which recognized the Taliban regime, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan, were three faithful American allies and clients.

No fight against Islamic terrorism is conceivable as long as the American government maintains such an incoherent policy toward the Arab-Muslim world. Similarly, no decline of terrorism is conceivable unless the US adopts a less unilateral view in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, there are reasons to be pessimistic. New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani refused a \$10 million check for the families of the rescue workers killed during the collapse of the WTC towers, because the donor, an Arab prince, had suggested a “readjustment” of the American policy in this conflict.

### 13

Islam (1.3 billion believers) is a dynamic religion, probably the only one growing nowadays. Unlike historical Christianity, but following the example of paganism (and Judaism), it does not separate the political from the sacred, the worldly from the spiritual. As a religion, it is based on a number of beliefs are no more nor less absurd or ridiculous than those of the other monotheistic religions. Its historical relationship with Europe is far more complex than the official historiography claims. (As Henri Pirenne pointed out, beginning in the 7th century, Arab-Islamic conquests led to the rise to power of Carolingian France and Germany). There is no point in falling into Irenism or demonizing fantasies on its behalf.

Islamism has a war component (which explains Nietzsche’s admiration), but this is far from defining its spirit or representing its sole characteristic. From Joshua’s massacres to the crusades, other monotheistic belief systems have deployed violence, while pretending to be “loving” and “peaceful” religions — justifying it with citations from the “holy books” (See Deut. 7, 23-24 and 20, 13-14; Mat. 10, 34). In Muslim theology, “jihad” designates a vocation for the good, and only by extension of the just war. Along with Christianity, during the 14th century Islam was sometimes peaceful, sometimes warlike. It was (and still is) home for many different tendencies, which always offered the most contradictory interpretations, or the most divergent readings of *The Koran*. Finally, like all monotheistic religions, in the course of history it has experienced emotional or mystical excesses, extremist or literal movements, which tried to purify the faith and bring about a “return to the sources.” From the time of the Crusades, through the Napoleonic period, to the Suez crisis, most of those extremist movements formed and developed in reaction to Western conquest and domination. Whether or not inspired by Wahhabism or recruits around the missionary movement Tabligh or Muslim Brothers, Islamic terrorism is only the most recent expression of this phenomenon.

At the risk of falling into essentialism, one cannot separate cultural and religious dynamics from their political and economic context. Seen in such a context,

radical Islam does not reject modernism (quite the opposite, it uses all its means), but wants to provide a different version than the one prevailing in the West. (René Girard is right, from this viewpoint, to talk about “mimetic rivalry on a global scale”). Above all, it also suggests that the reasons for the expansion of radical Islam are not religious, but fundamentally political and social. Muslims use a religious rhetoric, but they mainly demand political, cultural, and ethnic recognition. The Afghan conflict is less a religious than an ethnic conflict between a majority of Patshun tribes, bound by the same Wahhabite interpretation of Islam (Tariqa Muhammadiya), and minority ethnic groups gathered around the Northern Alliance: Tajiks, Uzbeks, Shiite Hazaras, etc. Far from indicating a very hypothetical “return of the religious,” Islam represents, first of all, a new formulation of the old Arab nationalist and anti-imperialist dynamic. The real question is: why has social protest and opposition to the powers that be, formerly expressed by secular nationalism (Nasser, Bath) now taken the form of religion-based opposition — why has religion replaced traditional nationalism as a way to respond or sublimate a feeling of humiliation or degradation?

The most profound *raison d'être* of Islam is the dead end in which relations between Western — starting with the US — and Muslim countries find themselves. The Arab-Muslim world has a difficult relation with its past. The fact that it is heir to a civilization equal and even superior to the Europe plays a major role in its collective psyche. It measures the gap between the time when Muslim civilization was one of the most brilliant in the world and its current situation. From the end of the 18th century, it has been schooled in Western modernity and now realizes that it did not get out of it what it wanted. This feeling drives it to seek an impossible return to “pure” Muslim tradition. The political failure of Muslim regimes, all corrupt, their inability to respond to Muslim pressure in any other way than brutal repression, and the presence in those countries of popular masses mainly composed of outcasts does the rest. Islam simultaneously offers the poorest a compensation, a feeling of belonging, and a value system. That is why the religious and the social elements tend to become one.

Finally, Muslim terrorism developed at a time when, in most of the Arab-Muslim world, political Islamism has in the last years accumulated (temporarily?) failures, be it in Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and even Iran.

In an article published in 1993, and in a book three years later, Samuel Huntington developed the now well-known thesis of the “clash of civilizations.” Rejecting a unilateral vision of the world, this thesis had at least the advantage of emphasizing, after Spengler and Toynbee, the durability of the great cultural entities and the distinct areas of civilization. Bringing up the possibility of a confrontation between these cultures, Huntington called for a new equilibrium adapted to a multilateral world. Less moderate commentators later used his thesis to predict, in the light of

recent events, a head-on collision between Islam and the West.

In a global world, where every day nation-states lose a little bit more of their importance, it is possible for cultures and civilizations to gain new political weight. Supposing that such poles of belonging could become players in international relations (which is not obvious), a “clash” between some of those cultures is also possible. Nevertheless, it is one thing to envision this possibility; it is another to welcome it and to do everything to hasten it. Generally, the responsible attitude consists in avoiding “clashes,” rather than looking for them.

As Edward W. Said pointed out: “When we talk about Islam, we eliminate more or less automatically space and time.” When one adopts Huntington’s reasoning, the biggest risk is indeed to fall into a-historicism, and especially into a false unitary representation of these cultures. Actually, Huntington tends to erase all differences between Europe and the US, and to represent Islam as monolithic — a modern equivalent of the Ottoman armies marching toward Vienna. This is by no means an adequate representation of reality. Politically as well as geopolitically, “Islam” does not exist anymore than the “West.” Neither is homogeneous, or an array of necessarily converging forces.

Beyond their ideological common dynamic, all Islamic movements have strong local and national characteristics. The Muslim world includes tens of societies and countries with completely different problems and experiences. Divided between Sunnites and Shiites, split into four different traditional schools (Hanefite, Malekite, Chafeite, Hanbaliste), it constitutes a universe more divided than ever, where movements and tendencies, sects and tribes, soldiers and mullahs confront each other. Created at the end of the 18th century by Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the official and mandatory religion of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, marginalized Sunni Orthodox Islam in Pakistan, and was rejected since its birth by the great majority of the Muslim authorities, starting with the Ottoman sultan-caliph. Conversely, Sufism has been frequently accused of pantheism. (In Kashmir, the practice of Sufist-inspired Islam is moreover one of the most tolerant in the Islamic world). Syria is lead by the Alaouits, who the Sunnites consider as polytheist renegades. One could go on.

One should also recall that radical Islam’s fiercest enemies — and most of its victims — are in Muslim countries. In Algeria, Egypt or Tunisia, Islamic terrorists first attack Muslim governments, Islamic institutions and authorities. The Tajik commander Ahmed Massoud, the Taliban’s number one enemy, was a pious Muslim, who imposed the Islamic *sharia* in Kabul in 1994 — and so were other leaders of the Northern Alliance (whose exact name is “National Unified Islamic Front”). The Islamic Republic of Iran has always condemned the Taliban, while supporting the Shiite militia of Hesbe-Warhdat and different factions of the Northern Alliance. All of this shows how ridiculous it is to confuse Islam with Islamic terrorism. The Islamic question concerns first of all the Muslim world, and it is not the expression of a conflict between civilizations.

To demonize all the Muslims in the world would be to fall into Bin Laden's trap and do exactly what the terrorists want. Pushing Western countries to indiscriminately declare themselves hostile to Islam would lead to the rise of thousands of new Bin Ladens. Just as Bush claims that he is speaking "in the name of civilization," Bin Laden pretends to speak "in the name of Islam." To take him at his word means to subscribe to the bipolar, simplistic idea he dreams of imposing. On the contrary, fighting against Bin Laden and his emulators requires demonstrating the wrongness of his claim. Those who support the thesis of the "clash of civilizations" are the best allies of Islamic extremism: whoever supports the idea "Islam vs. the West" uses Bin Laden's language. Those who talk about crusades do worse than stir up wild dreams: they are in the wrong time-period and they play the enemy's game.

But the demonizing of Islam has already begun. In Europe, clever influential agents, passing themselves as Islamic "experts," work on using the legitimate resentment created by social pathologies born out of massive and uncontrolled immigration, to intensify hatred and delegitimize the demands of Arab masses in different parts of the world. At the same time, pathetic speeches one thought were long forgotten resurface, with Berlusconi or others, confusing the expression of a preference with the affirmation of superiority. These speeches about the "natural superiority of the Western world," together with calls to recolonize the world, create a deplorable climate promoting collective hysteria. The fear of contamination (e.g., by letters containing Anthrax) feeds the (media-) contamination. An environment of fear is as bad an adviser as fear. Unfortunately, those views are only beginning to be expressed. The specter of Islamic terrorism will soon be used by those who dream of taking revenge, or those who think it is in their best interest to start a "clash of civilizations." Anti-Islamicism may lead to the same mistakes prevalent when "the free world" had to be protected from communism. We are moving toward a new McCarthyism, based on the same delirious interpretations.

## 15

It would be a major mistake to think that Western countries are safe from all "fundamentalism." In the same way Bin Laden wants to convert or make all non-Muslims disappear from the planet, some Westerners dream of eradicating all social systems, all political and cultural entities, which do not conform to theirs. The concept that global free exchange is the only possible future for all the world cultures, and therefore desirable, is no less "fundamentalist" than the idea that the *sharia* should be instituted everywhere.

The truth is that the Western world always wants to dominate the world by imposing its ideas, techniques, products and behaviors. It invariably presents itself as "universal," therefore intrinsically good for everyone, with the inevitable consequence of making all other lifestyles and value systems appear "archaic" or inferior. In the past, similar attempts were made in the names of

“real faith,” “civilization,” “progress,” and “development.” Today, liberal globalization spreads a philosophy of life that privileges mundane pleasures, the logic of profit and the rules of money. Its outcome will be the transformation of the world into amusement parks and entertainment supermarkets; its slogan: living is consuming. Hannah Arendt was right when she said that a totalitarian regime needs to invent its own “metaphysical enemy.” The concept “Western world vs. what is not Western (or turns out to be impossible to Westernize)” is a simple reformulation of the Cold War rhetoric. To talk about enemies for cultures or peoples already means engaging in the logic of neo-colonial crusades. The abusive use of the concept of “clash of civilizations” conceals plans for Western hegemony.

The rise of convulsive indentitarianism and terrorist violence are not typical of a specific culture, but the result of the dissolution (or threat of dissolution) of all cultures. The best way to destroy hyper-terrorism would be to arrange things so that globalization no longer appears for what it is now, i.e., the unilateral imposition of a particular way of life, a not-indigenous and unique model of “civilization” or “development,” which contradicts cultural identities in the rest of the world. Jacques Chirac, usually not that well-inspired, was not wrong when on October 15, 2001, he stated in front of UNESCO that the Western world should stop imposing its “mainly materialistic” culture on the whole world, which consequently perceives it “as being aggressive.”

One power cannot pretend to manage the planet by itself. For a long time, the West has not been a notion of civilization, but rather a mere economic indicator. It is now up to the Europeans who, after the Sept. 11 events, have once more proven their total lack of independent political will, not only to avoid being dragged into wars in which they have no control, but also to make clear that the “Western” model of civilization is not necessarily theirs, and, in any case, does not exclude others. It is up to them to develop a new multi-polarization of international relations, and not to let themselves be confined in the alternative “Jihad or McWorld,” i.e., to reject the Jihad, but not to become a tool of the McWorld.

Today, there are deplorable views, according to which those who oppose the Western model can only be reactionary souls or dangerous fools for whom the fanatic Bin Laden, coming on the scene in time to demonstrate it, is in some way the archetype. They use Islamic terrorism as a convenient repellent, whose goal it is to relegitimize a system that generates inequality, frustration, and desperation. Today, the main enemy remains more than ever the global outburst of the logic of capital and the total commodification of social relations.