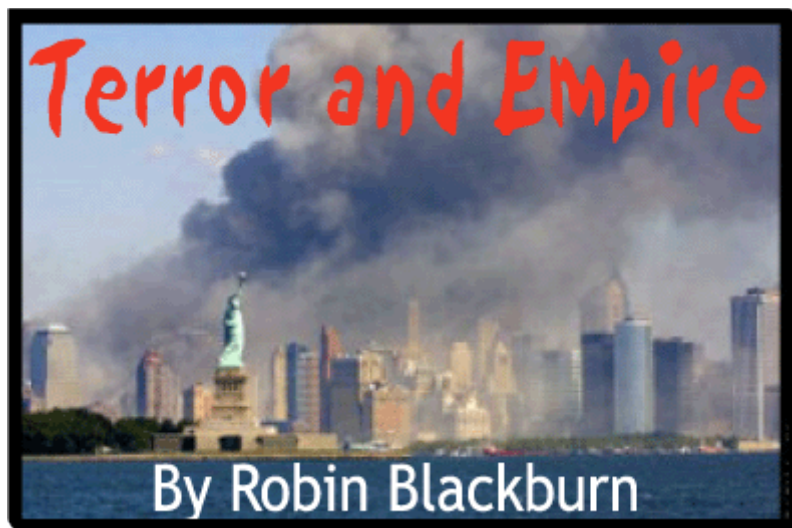


Terror and Empire by Robin Blackburn

A CounterPunch Special Report

Robin Blackburn is former editor of [New Left Review](#), author of the renowned two-volume history of [colonial slavery](#) and currently visiting professor at The New School, New York. CounterPunch is proud to publish Robin's booklength report, **Terror and Empire**, the first extended radical analysis of the post September 11 world, what the terror war is all about, and how a just war on terror could be fought and won.



Chapter One The Field of Battle

It is inherent in the concept of a terrorist act that it aims at an effect very much larger than the direct physical destruction it causes. Proponents of what used to be called the 'propaganda of the deed' also believed that in the illuminating glare of terror the vulnerability of a corrupt order would be starkly revealed. Once corruption and oppression were stripped away, a sacred or natural order--the nation, the religious community, the people--would come into its own.

The instigators of September 11 brought off a far more spectacular coup than any exponent of the propaganda of the deed, threaten more than a dozen of the world's most autocratic and corrupt rulers and aim to summon to arms a religious community of well over a billion people. The resources disposed of by these men transcend those traditionally associated with terrorism and are closer to those of a small state, but a state without boundaries whose headquarters hops from country to country.

Given the extent of the destruction wrought by the September 11 attack it is sobering to realise that the effect aimed at is qualitatively larger, namely that of re-ordering world politics around a 'clash of civilisations', allowing the Islamic world to free itself of all infidel trammels. Whether the strategic director of the Al Qaeda network is Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri or someone else, their aim from the outset was to provoke the United States into a counter-reaction that would alienate Muslim opinion; to expose the hypocrisy of the hereditary and autocratic rulers of the Muslim world; to create conditions in which the forces of Islamic jihad could seize or manipulate power in one or another of the larger or more significant Muslim states.

The new Caliphates at which they aim might appear a medieval fantasy but are to be equipped with the military and financial resources of modernity. They urge believers to consider the awesome power of Muslim leaders equipped with Islamic virtue, oil and nuclear weapons. Given the frustrated or desperate condition of much of the Muslim world, this is a message that has great resonance even amongst Muslims who are uneasy at, or repelled by, terror actions. The message targets the military actions and dispositions of the United States and Israel,

especially as they are deemed to encroach on Muslim holy places, but it is also aimed at the existing governments of the Islamic world, seen as pawns of the West.

The September 11 attack invited a response and Al Qaeda did little to cover its tracks. The leaders of Al Qaeda, and those close to them in the Taliban leadership, may have felt that they needed to widen the conflict and escape the problems of famine and drought. The latter were forcing them into dependency on the international aid agencies and the US anti-drug program. In such desperate circumstances the goal of Al Qaeda was probably to draw the United States into the Afghan minefield while boosting its position elsewhere in the Muslim world.

The US president responded to September 11 by proclaiming a global, US-led 'war on terrorism'. Washington sought every conceivable ally or partner but insisted on retaining complete control of its 'war'. The UN and the Security Council were asked to support the US effort, and each of their members to help in whatever way they could, but there was to be no formal anti-terrorism coalition and no supranational organisation to embody it. If this is the new 'cold war', as some have suggested, it is very differently structured. On one side there is the world's most powerful state, with its 20th century weapons systems and a global system of alliances. On the other there is a terror network of perhaps no more than a few thousand men, acting as a self-proclaimed 'Muslim vanguard', but occasionally able to ignite the resentments and frustrations of tens or even hundreds of millions in the Islamic world. At the height of the Cold War the Communist states ruled one third of the world's population, had military means that seemed a match for those of its global competitor and believed that they could beat the capitalist west at its own game of economic growth. Al Qaeda may have the economic and military resources of a statelet but it aims to shape the thinking of a civilisation. Its members are drawn from many nationalities and have been active in Central Asia, the Balkans, Europe, North America, Kashmir, China, Indonesia and the Phillippines as well as the Middle East and Africa. Its ideology is fuelled by a sense of injury and wounded pride rather than material aspiration. It is virulently anti-infidel and misogynist, anti-secular without being at all anti-capitalist, and egalitarian without being democratic. Islamic civilisation has always left great scope for mercantile capitalism. The neo-fundamentalism of the eighties and nineties, forged in a battle with godless Communism and in reaction to royalist bureaucracy and corruption, accentuated this legacy by basing itself on strong and responsible Islamic business and faith-based charity. While prepared to work with a variety of Islamic political authorities the project of Al Qaeda transcends such boundaries aiming to unite the faithful against the infidels who have insulted and oppressed Islam.

In World War II liberal capitalism and autocratic Communism fought as allies against fascism. But in the postwar period the West feared a loss of control in the Middle East and so it allied with the most conservative forces in the Islamic world. The Saudi and Iranian monarchies were chosen as the strategic allies needed to protect Middle Eastern oil resources while secular nationalists like Mossadegh in Iran or Kassem in Iraq were destabilised and replaced. In fact the Western system of alliances is not simply a relic of the Cold War but rather a palimpsest that reflects, layer on layer, a longer history and a colonialism that mummified an extraordinary collection of archaic or pseudo-archaic regimes. This embraces Saudi Arabia with its 30,000-strong Royal Family, the Shaikhs of Bahrein, Qattar and Kuwait, the Sultan of Oman, and the Emirates--boasting the world's longest-serving head of state, Shaikh Sakir al-Qasimi of Ras al-Khaimah, who ascended his throne in 1948. When we add to those the Sultan of Brunei in the South China sea it is as if oil is a pickling fluid akin to formaldehyde projecting into the 21st century simulacra of the Anciens Regimes of former times. Pakistan, with its notorious 'feudals', does not have oil but enjoys an intimate pact with the oil sheikhdoms. The paradox here for liberal, bourgeois and nationalist forces in the Middle East was that the power that should have been their great ally, the United States, actually blocked them at every turn and preferred to do business with royal absolutists.

The US-sponsored Arabian and Gulf regime associates the West with corruption, autocracy and stagnation at a time when there is a yearning for a new start in the Arab world. The dilemma of US policy is that it understandably wishes to avoid a 'clash of civilisations' while remaining fearful of renewal within the Muslim world. It was a tribute to Washington's diplomacy that its assault on Afghanistan aroused so little official censure in the Muslim world, but an indication of the fragility of this success that no Muslim state was willing to play an active and public role in the attack. Notwithstanding continuing corrections and adjustments--dumping the terms 'crusade' and 'infinite justice' for the campaign against Al Qaeda, strenuously cultivating old

and new Muslim allies--the US failed to extricate itself from the strategic trap it faces. It preferred to talk of war than of a police operation. And it was planning a new government in Afghanistan based on 'moderate' Taliban and Northern warlords and mercenary tribal elders under the aegis of the former monarch, Zahir Shah. So far as the wider Islamic world is concerned this strategy simultaneously offends the Islamicists and those who yearn for more democracy, autonomy and self-respect. Religious fanatics and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois democrats are not natural allies--in Iran they are at loggerheads--but in the territories where the United States has allied itself with feudal and autocratic reaction these two currents find a common antagonist. The White House may genuinely believe that the interests of global capitalism are best promoted by its pact with the oil dynasties and their Pakistani and Egyptian hangers-on, but this is not true. The pact may deliver slightly cheaper oil, and privileges to Western oil corporations, but it stifles the growth of an autonomous business culture and circuits of accumulation in the region itself. The resulting frustrations create conditions which politicise religious fanaticism, especially in those countries where such fanaticism is one of the few officially-tolerated species of public activity.

The US attack on Afghanistan was certainly anticipated. Just a few days before September 11 Massoud, the commander of the anti-Taliban forces, was assassinated by agents of Al Qaeda, posing as journalists. This action was calculated to both please and strengthen the Taliban, by ridding them of their most dangerous enemy, and to leave the United States with less credible local allies. The warlords of the Northern Alliance are dependent on autocratic governments in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan that are seen as stooges of neighbouring powers. With all its failings the Northern Alliance is preferable to the Taliban, but it does not represent a force for democracy and does not shield the invaders from the charge of being alien to Islam. Matters will not be improved by giving key positions to 'moderate Taliban' and royalists. This approach risks the worst of both worlds--discouraging those who yearn for a more tolerant social order, for secular progress and for an Afghan regime not beholden to foreigners while failing to win over or appease the religious fanatics, or seriously to erode their appeal.

Washington strives not to inflame Muslim opinion, or to allow the conflict to be defined as a war of religions. It hopes that the danger can be avoided by allowing its Muslim allies to adopt a low profile, or even to stand aside. The UN may be handed responsibility for occupied areas of Afghanistan but Iranian and Egyptian proposals that the UN should take charge of the anti-terrorism campaign were rejected. Given the UN's long history giving cover to US military campaigns, from Korea to Kosovo, entrusting it with nominal responsibility post facto will be of limited value in averting the danger of a 'clash of civilisations'. The UN could sponsor an accord against terrorism and the creation of a supranational force to police it. But such an approach would have little legitimacy if credible governments from the Muslim world are excluded. An international and supranational approach would be far more effective longterm at tackling terrorism than a US-led and defined 'war'.but will not easily be accepted in Washington since it would challenge imperial ideology and control. The Bush team see themselves as champions of the American people and US capitalism but in fact neither require direct US control of Middle Eastern oil, as we will see below.

The most difficult thing for the strategists of Empire to perceive, or explain to the American people, is that the best and perhaps only effective coalition against Al Qaeda and the Taliban will be one that they do not lead and do not control. The leaflets dropped on with the food packages carried a message that this was a contribution from 'The Partnership of Nations' in English and Pushtu. The use of this hollow rubric--perhaps sounding like United Nations in translation--testified to a deficit of legitimacy. The United States has standing against Al Qaeda because of what its citizens have suffered at its hands. But nobody really believes that the Taliban ordered the September 11.

While I will focus on Washington's sins of omission and commission I believe it would be wrong to slight the ability of the Bush administration to impose its own definitions on domestic opponents, and on allies and even enemies, abroad. The US president has sometimes been presented as a figure of fun but this has not stopped him having the last laugh on those who ridiculed him. Unlike more brilliant leaders he surrounds himself with a capable and experienced team, and sometimes heeds words of caution. The secret of his strength--and his fatal flaw--may be the instinctive rapport he enjoys with those gripped by US national messianism, the idea that only the United States can tackle the really big global threats and that whatever the US does is ipso facto favourable to freedom. These sentiments are often

accompanied by deprecation of international organisations, an unwillingness to consider global complexities, or to contemplate any sacrifice of US sovereignty. The casualties on September 11 were on a terrible scale but our world bristles with these and greater dangers, notably that of encouraging a 'clash of civilisations' linked to weapons of mass destruction.

Jonathan Schell has drawn out attention to what he calls, in a book of that name, *The Unfinished Twentieth Century*. Schell argues that with the end of the Cold War in 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the huge apparatus of nuclear deterrence became redundant, yet it was neither scrapped or negotiated away. Russia, China and the other nuclear powers were not invited to dismantle--or even to drastically reduce--their nuclear weapons systems. The 1972 treaty against biological weapons was useless because there was no enforcement agency nor mandatory inspection. Sixty major overseas US military bases were maintained in forty countries, backed up by over seven hundred other military installations. What was true of weapons systems and overseas bases also applied to alliances. NATO was not disbanded, nor widened to include Russia. Instead it expanded eastwards and a type of ghostly and surreptitious Cold War against unnamed 'global competitors' (actually Russia and China) was perpetuated.

Also still in place was that palimpsest of alliances inherited from colonialism and the Cold War, so that the United States entered the new century encumbered and compromised by all that was most backward-looking and discredited in the Islamic world. During the Cold war the military confrontation was precariously regulated by the 'balance of terror'. Today not only is this lacking but the 'war against terrorism' will stoke Muslim resentment in a widening arc of states and could eventually give Al Qaeda the influence it aims at in a nuclear state. The dangers of an escalation of terror, and of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, are very much increased if hundreds of millions of people believe themselves to be nursing legitimate grievances.

The imperial role is justified on the grounds that the United States has a special destiny as world leader and champion of freedom. These roles, it is believed, require Washington to meet the threat of rogue states acquiring weapons of mass destruction, to pre-empt 'global competitors', to secure sources of scarce raw materials (especially oil), and to guarantee the personal security of ordinary Americans. Yet the truth is that the empire does not secure these goals, and actually makes 'blowback' more likely, as Chalmers Johnson so presciently argued. A healthier US polity could dispense with the cumbersome and expensive apparatus of empire, set the scene for a broader, more pluralistic global capitalism, and promote the competence and authority of supranational agencies in the fields of disarmament, anti-terrorism and peace-keeping. But the vested interests which stand in the way of these goals are those of a bloated military-industrial complex and re-charged presidency.

Chapter 2

The Imperial Presidency and National Messianism

The terrorist coup of September 11 set the scene for the resurgence of an imperial presidency. This was initially concealed by Bush's dithering on the day itself. Yet his first words insisted that the nation was at war and that reprisals would be visited not only on the perpetrators but on the states which had backed them. It soon became clear that the Bush White House was taking advantage of the shock at what had happened to demand global 'war powers' and the financial and constitutional means to employ them. In less than 48 hours NATO was persuaded to invoke, for the first time ever, Article 5 and consequently to give the US commander in chief huge scope to act in its name. The Senate took only a little longer unanimously to back the President's declaration of war against an unnamed enemy and for Congress to place a \$40 billion war chest at his disposal. When the Senate and House of representatives passed the anti-terrorism legislation requested by the administration in

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October many legislators complained that they had had no opportunity even to read the complex legislation they were voting on.

Even before the new order could be annointed by Congressional votes and orations it was clear that only the President of the United States could fill the hole that yawned. For an unforgettable moment the Empire trembled as an abyss opened, the sun stopped in the darkened sky and the most powerful state in history was paralysed by the suicidal and murderous audacity of nineteen youths. Nowhere in the world--save perhaps TV-less Afghanistan--did anyone doubt that something fundamental had happened and that it happened everywhere. The void had to be filled and, for better or worse, Bush stepped into a new role.

What has now happened raises the power of the president by a quantum leap. It restores an imperial potency to the presidency equal to--or even exceeding--that of the Reagan era. Bush's authority and freedom of action today is certainly far greater than that enjoyed by his father on the eve of the Gulf War. The imperial presidency has been struggling to be born for some time. Indeed in some respects Bush's imperial White House is simply continuing the policies of his predecessors. But it would be wrong to see the post-September 11 Bush regime as essentially a ratcheting up of the Clinton policy, commensurate with the newly-perceived dimensions of the threat. Everything suggests that a watershed has been passed. Bush is far stronger than Clinton, essentially because he faces virtually no opposition. While Clinton was unrelentingly pilloried and opposed by a fairly effective Republic Congressional majority, Bush now has the Democrats eating out of his hand. On September 14-15 only Congresswoman Barbara Lee (Oakland) voted against the emergency package. Congress may later wish to challenge Bush's chosen strategy or target but their resolution gives them only scant leverage--and only a few are likely to hold him even to those broadly-construed limits.

The Clinton administration claimed and exercised a right of unilateral action against a variety of enemies. Madeleine Allbright explained: 'If we have to use force it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see farther into the future.' Yet the record of the indispensable nation in the nineties was not a good one. The issue of nuclear disarmament was neglected. The Russians were not engaged in this or any other positive way, and instead NATO was enlarged to encircle it. In the absence of an agreement between Moscow and Washington the secondary nuclear powers did nothing and India and Pakistan tested nuclear devices. Repeated bombardment of Iraq did more to weaken the United States in the region that to weaken the regime of Saddam Hussein. Rwanda bled. The break up of Yugoslavia dragged on for many years and cost many lives. The failure to use Moscow and the OSCE structure to secure Serb withdrawal from Kosovo at Rambouillet lead to massive bombing of Serbia and Kosovo. But eventually the European allies insisted that Russian mediation to this end be obtained--and it was this rather than the bombing which secured a result. The essential mistake, a fruit of the Cold War mentality, was the attempt to exclude Russia and undermine the Primakov government. (Washington squelched Russian mediation at Rambouillet because, if successful, it would have given Russia an ongoing role in the former Yugoslavia. In the end, Russia had to be given a minor role anyway. Russia had great leverage in Belgrade because Yugoslav forces were highly dependent on Russian oil and military supplies. Washington regarded the Primakov government as a throwback to the Soviet era. In fact, his fall and eventual replacement by Putin led to the bloody Russian onslaught on Chechnya, with only token western protests. The unspoken agreement was that if you let us bomb Serbia we'll let you bomb Chechnya. Also note that mass opposition to Milosevic, including street demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of citizens, took place in 1996 and 1997 and in 2000, but not in the period of western bombardment.)

While Washington might ask the United Nations to rubber stamp its own initiatives, it did not even bother to pay its quota. With the possible exception of Haiti there were very few gains for the US go-it-alone method in the nineties, but an alternative edged into view when the UN successfully orchestrated, with the help of regional powers, the Indonesian military withdrawal from East Timor.

When Bush arrived in the White House its allies were unhappy to discover that the new president, despite his own criticisms of the Clinton-Albright interventions, had an even more vigorous notion of America's special destiny. He regarded international treaties as scraps of paper (ABM or Kyoto), spurned agreements on land-mines, biological warfare and terrorism or, as in Durban, simply left the room when dialogue was required. Secretary of State Colin Powell

seems to have cautioned against some of these decisions but without any success. Sustaining these positions was a determination not to yield an iota of US sovereignty while often expecting this sacrifice of other states.

Because the US was manifestly the injured party on September 11 the situation itself conspired to reinforce Washington's habitual conduct and assumptions. Washington always insists on running the show but this time virtually no one objected. Such was the shock at the events of September 11 that the European allies announced their prior willingness to back almost any action the US might launch, even before learning what it would be. Perhaps they thought that their swift support would earn them some influence at a later stage and that in its hour of need the Bush presidency would discover the need to jettison the unilateral approach. In a way it has but in the direction of a proliferation of bi-lateralism as the US Secretary of State and Defense Secretary engage in an unceasing round of consultations across several continents, not a new emphasis on NATO and the European allies.

The likelihood that Europe will restrain Washington is further reduced by political factors. The balance in Europe is shifting. The new rightist Italian government wants to ingratiate itself with Washington to enhance its respectability. Berlusconi, the prime minister, probably agrees with Bush anyway. Blair always supports the US and Chirac is also now inclined to, while the German government is in disarray. The Europeans have few troops to spare and are likely to be much less involved than they were (or are) in the Balkans. So this will give them less influence anyway.

In the weeks following September 11 both Powell and Rumsfeld undertook a wide-ranging diplomatic effort directed at key regional players, like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Russia and China. This could be called a multilateral approach, especially since US policy evidently took note of reservations and problems raised by the governments of these states. But the choice of whom to approach, and what advice to accept, still lay with Washington. No attempt was being made to mount a collective operation using the United Nations or some other body.

Thus it is not so much Bush's personality which should be scrutinised as the president's new programme and mandate, the situation and character of his machine and the facilities it now enjoys, both domestically and abroad. Behind Bush stand more considerable figures like Cheney and Rumsfeld and behind them a military-industrial complex which begins to see its prayers being answered. It is astonishing to recollect that as recently as September 2 the New York Times ran a headline: 'Dogfight for Dollars on Capitol Hill: The Winnowing Begins on Contracts for Planes, Ships and All Things Military'.

While it would be foolish to minimise the tidal wave of US public outrage and the upsurge of patriotism occasioned by September 11, it would also be wrong to think that all Americans were bent on evening the score by slaughtering innocents. Of course there were angry voices in the tabloids, radio shows and respectable organs of opinion which whip up blood lust or peddle stereotypes. These are dangerous because they encourage official recklessness and the brandishing of US sovereignty, not because tens of millions of Americans actually want to fight a war. On September 18 the New York Times reported that there had been no increase in enlistment over the previous week and that there were no queues at the recruiting offices as there had been after Pearl Harbour. The grief and candle-lit vigils had a more thoughtful side that could also be heard in the media, and which found expression in declarations by the Bishop of Boston and other senior Catholics, but not in Congress. The Democrats' conduct was dictated by their belief that, in an atmosphere of patriotic mobilisation, it would be fatal to allow any daylight to appear between themselves and the president.

So the Presidency came to enjoy almost complete freedom of action and was able to give shape and direction to the widespread sense of shock, anger and alarm. Moreover Bush repeatedly insisted that the campaign against international terrorism would be a long one, presumably requiring indefinite extension of his special powers. In a book published this September Daniel Lazare anticipated this state of affairs when he warned of the extraordinary power of a US president compared with counterparts in other democratic states. In European democracies the head of government has greater domestic power than a US president. But in external affairs, Lazare argues, matters stand the other way around: '(A) US president is a good deal more powerful. Surrounded by courtiers, intelligence agencies, and military units at his beck and call, he is free to launch invasions or order covert operations any time, day or

night, without fear of contradiction from his cabinet or any of his subordinates. Indeed he is *expected* to engage in such unilateral displays'. . Lazare was here drawing attention to a powerful war- and Cold War-related trend in US government which witnessed a twentieth century aggrandisement of the presidency that would have astonished the framers of the Constitution. But this trend was at least partly checked by resistance to the Vietnam war, by the impeachment of Nixon and by the considerable public controversy over Iran-Contra, or even the Gulf War or Kosovo bombardment. Moreover the post-Vietnam refusal to accept casualties also hobbled the US president and the war machine at his command. The opinion polls and talk shows now suggest that this restraint has weakened. Finally, US allies also constrained the White House during those episodes. Today matters are different and Lazare is simply stating the bare truth when he writes: 'Short of total war, the US president has *carte blanche* to attack whom he pleases virtually anywhere in the world.' .

The exact wording of the Congressional resolution of September 15 made clear the latitude extended to Bush: ' the president is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.' So Bush can decide who is the enemy. That enemy can be a 'nation', a term which, unlike 'state' or 'government', would seem to expose whole peoples to attack. The president could be tempted to read the last clause as authorizing him to hit at any potential terrorist outfit or 'nation', not just those implicated in September 11. The only hints at restraint are those words 'necessary and appropriate' and the residual implication that it is only those implicated in September 11 who should be targeted. For the moment these qualifications carry little weight though if things go wrong critics might invoke them. It was on the day after this resolution that Bush vowed to 'rid the world of evil-doers' and cautioned: 'This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while.'

The imperial presidency legitimated by the resolution might astound the framers of the Constitution but is not thereby unconstitutional. As Lazare argues, the Constitution was forged for another age and with the purpose of rendering public power as circumscribed and divided as possible. The presidency has escaped these bounds because no state could respect them in modern conditions. Invoking the archaic features of the Constitution will not restrain the presidency. Once war powers have been conferred on the president the executive's already large competence is both increased and formally sanctioned.

When Americans say they want action against 'those responsible' for the attacks the sentiment is easy to understand. To expect the mass of US citizens simply to accept that they should be the target of such attacks would be ridiculous. Bush's address to Congress on September 20 outlining his campaign against terrorism addressed these anxieties. Unfortunately it also harnessed them to a boundless and unilateral, US-defined and US-led war against terrorism (the word 'crusade' was avoided this time). This approach is most unlikely to capture the culprits or to prevent further attacks acts from the same quarter. Indeed, as I will argue, it gets in the way of more effective approaches that would inflict political defeats on Al Qaeda.

In a controlled and polished performance, and speaking from a prepared text, Bush underlined the limitless scope and long duration of the new mission which he would undertake on behalf of his wounded but unbowed country. 'Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.' This new war against terror forced a choice upon every nation: 'Every nation in every region of the world now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.' So the president not only commandeered US foreign policy but sought to impose his definitions on every state in the world. In the truncated discussion that followed the speech no member of Congress queried the extraordinary new mandate.

The laying down of the law to other states combined with the refusal to yield up a particle of US sovereignty establishes the principle of the new empire. The obsessively reiterated discourse of war directed attention away from what could have been an international police action. And its definition as a 'new kind of war' allowed unilateralism to be raised to a new pitch. This was the unilateralism of imperial leadership, not that of isolationism or withdrawal. The attack had demonstrated 'global reach' yet had been aimed this time exclusively at targets on US soil. The fact that both attackers and victims were of many nations, and the world-wide

revulsion at its devastating consequences, could have been used to mount a multilateral response. But that would have been contrary to the administration's every instinct and inclination. That such an approach might be more effective in tracking down and punishing the network responsible for the attack would appear a crazy notion not only to the Bush White House but to the jingoists such as liberal commentator Thomas Friedman and the conservative commentator William Safire.

After the events of September 11 any US president, it might be urged, would have reacted in much the same way. But some might have avoided the continued and strident unilateralism. They might have seen that the international revulsion already evident, and willingly given, made it clear the United Nations, and its Security Council, could play a crucial role in combating terrorism. In the aftermath of the two world wars US presidents did advocate supranational organisation, in the shape of the League of Nations and UN. The aftermath of September 11 offered an opportunity to work out with other governments what was justified and effective in a campaign against terrorism, and what would merely feed it.

Whether or not a different president might have acted differently, Congress could have acted differently. One suspects that a Republican Senate faced with such demands from a Democratic president would have retained more of a say over future developments, or at least secured an informal agreement that the text of the President's speech would have to be agreed beforehand. While the Democrats were under pressure to vote a resolution, the president, after a poor start, was also under pressure. In her [interview with The Nation for 8 October Barbara Lee](#) tells us many legislators shared her fears. They just lacked the courage of their convictions.

When Bush declared that states implicated in terrorism would be treated as enemies he was announcing a new, and in some ways welcome, policy since too many such states have in the past been close friends of the US. The US president showed no awareness, for example, that the US had aligned itself with states that unleashed death-squads in Central and South America. The generous might say that we should not visit the sins of the father on the son and that it is the future that matters. Yet in the days following the September 11 the Senate ratified Bush's nominee as Ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, a man notorious for his failure to report large scale violations of human rights by US-linked contra forces when he was ambassador in Honduras in the eighties. Thus the man who will represent the US case against terrorism to the major world forum will himself be someone who at best turned a blind eye to the slaughter of many thousands, and whose complicity may well have been worse than that.

The unilateralist conclusions drawn by Bush were superficially at odds with one theme of his speech on September 20: 'This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilisation's fight.' Given this claim it might seem strange that a world body, such as the United Nations, was not entrusted with conducting the fight. The explanation, of course, was the doctrine of national messianism. The United States is the leader and representative of humanity and civilisation, acting in their name.

Chapter 3

The US Alliance with Militant Islam

In the month or so following September 11 an astonishing picture emerged of the extent to which Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda and the Taliban had been enjoying crucial support from supposed US friends and client states. It became clear that a steady stream of financial contributions from Saudi Arabia and the Emirates had furnished Al Qaeda and the Taliban with their life blood in the days, months and years leading up to September 11. The US government itself paid the Taliban authorities \$42 million in 2000 for cooperation in 'war against drugs'. Yet US courts had already established both Al Qaeda's role in the East African embassy bombings in 1998 and the presence of the Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan.

The US military and intelligence community has the most intimate relationship with the security services of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. These states, as we know them today, would not exist without US support. Saudi oil and Pakistani proximity to Afghanistan led Washington to confer great importance on these states. And it was only Saudi and Pakistani support for the Taliban--including military units as well as lavish amounts of money, arms and training - which allowed them to seize power in Afghanistan in 1996, displacing the fractious alliance of mujahedeen and military men which ruled the country from 1992. The Taliban movement received help from bin Laden and subsequently allowed his Al Qaeda network to set up training camps there. It was Prince Turki al Feisal, the then head of Saudi intelligence, who first recruited bin Laden to organise resistance in Afghanistan, with US approval. (This man was removed from his post without explanation two months before the attack.) For its part the Pakistani military intelligence, the ISI, sponsors of the Taliban, welcomed the Saudi money which bin Laden continued to attract. The US charge against the bin Laden network was plausible partly because the ramifications of this claim were bound to be so awkward and embarrassing for the US authorities themselves. Another reason is that in an affair like this, the focus of so much attention, pinning the blame simply on a convenient but false target--say Castro, Chavez, Saddam or Ghaddafi--would be risky and short-sighted. (Unfortunately that does not mean that it will not be attempted at a later stage.) While the execution of the September 11 action required comparatively modest sums the extensive operational network and training camps of Al Qaeda certainly demand deep pockets. This is where bin Laden's supporters in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates come in. An editorial in the New Republic on 24 Sept hinted at this when it referred to Saudi Arabia's 'filthy secrets'. In an article in the same issue Martin Peretz explained that Saudi money has been flowing into the coffers of the bin Laden network: 'Many Saudis--maybe even the monarchy itself--finance it, if only to keep it engaged and out of Riyadh.' Peretz is strongly favourable to Israel and is likely to be furnished with the best information available to its government. Thomas Friedman in the New York Times for September 21 also writes of a Saudi 'devil's pact' such that the Saudi authorities 'allowed the Islamists' domestic supporters to continue raising money, ostensibly for Muslim welfare groups, and to funnel it to Osama bin Laden--on condition that the Islamic extremists not attack this regime.' Further details were vouchsafed by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker in an article based in part on US intelligence transcripts of conversations amongst members of the Saudi Royal Family: 'When the Saudis were confronted by press reports that some of the substantial funds that the monarchy routinely gives to Islamic charities may actually have gone to Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks, they denied any knowledge of such transfers. The intercepts, however, have led many in the intelligence community to think otherwise. The Bush administration has chosen not to confront the Saudi leadership over its financial support of terror organisations and its refusal to help in the investigation' (of September 11).

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Terror and Empire



By Robin Blackburn

Saudi Arabia maintains sixty Islamic Centers spread through the world which proselytise the bleak doctrines of the militant Wahabi sect. The supposedly charitable and educational trusts supported by huge amounts of Saudi cash have been used to fund madrassas, or religious schools, where the basic needs of poor students are met but nothing is taught except the Wahabi interpretation of the Koran and the need for jihad. Inside Saudi Arabia itself hatred of the infidel is also inculcated by the Wahabi-dominated educational system despite the fact that only five per cent of the population belong to the Wahabi sect. A New York Times report from Riyadh observes the paradox: '(E)xtremism, born of the local, puritanical Wahabi brand of Islam, constrains life here, shaping the way people live and the way Saudi Arabia greets the world. The United States seeks to build a coalition against terror with the kingdom, long a Western business and military ally, and yet the country has revealed itself as the source of the very ideology confronting America in the battle against terrorism.' Hersh also explained that one of the few members of the Royal Family who wants to combat corruption, Crown Prince Abdullah, was also regarded as too hostile to the US, and that the almost wholly incapacitated King Fahd was being kept alive to prevent Abdullah's succession. The king's inability to recognise even close friends, Hersh explains, did not prevent the US information services releasing a picture of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld meeting with him, ostensibly to plan the response to September 11 .

Despite its prodigious oil wealth the Saudi kingdom has failed to achieve rounded economic or social development, indeed has recently been less buoyant than that of Iraq. As a result there are many frustrated and unemployed youths who aspire to a middle class existence but are unlikely to obtain it. And there are upper class youths who despise their parent's complicity in a corrupt and arbitrary order. As an educational force the Saudi autocracy not only diffuses Wahabism but also seeks to instil terror by judicial maiming and execution. Against this background the fact that fifteen of the September 11 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia is not surprising. Other hijackers came from the Emirates and from the fundamentalist milieu in Egypt where a stagnant and corrupt autocracy has also helped to make middle class frustration and resentment a powerful force.

While Saudi and Pakistani authorities were scared of Al Qaeda and, only dealt with it at arm's length via 'charitable' intermediaries, they were closely involved in the rise of the Taliban. Their support for this organisation, itself linked to Al Qaeda, was given quite voluntarily and cannot be explained away as an attempt to buy off the militants. The Saudi security services supplied money and arms; the Pakistani ISI, training, officers and military experts. The Saudis appreciated the Taliban's narrow Deobandi theology, while their seizure of power was one of the very few successes that could be claimed by Pakistani state policy. . Without Pakistani and Saudi help, the Taliban would never have seized power and the bin Laden network would have had no haven for its training camps. Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban leader, formed an alliance with Al Qaeda because it also could supply money and men, and because this somewhat reduced reliance on Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. No doubt the latter were not unhappy to see Al Qaeda drawn off to Afghanistan but they also identified with the Taliban project. The US was aware of these developments as was explained by John Burns, reporting from Islamabad in the New York Times just after the attacks: 'Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, or I.S.I. (was) responsible for channelling large amounts of military and financial aid to the Taliban. Until the attacks in New York and Washington, that support had been quietly tolerated by the United States, despite the bitter opposition to the repressive forms of Islamic rule imposed by the Taliban '.

A later report revealed that the ISI was also in league with Al Qaeda: 'The intelligence service of Pakistan has had an indirect but longstanding relationship with Al Qaeda, turning a blind eye for years to the growing ties between Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, according to American officials. The intelligence service even used Al Qaeda camps to train covert operatives for use in a war of terror against India.' The United States was aware of such connections. Following the embassy bombings in 1998 a State Department official, Michael Sheenan, urged that the US should make isolating Al Qaeda a priority: 'Mr Sheenan's memo outlined a series of actions the United States could take toward Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen to persuade them to help isolate Al Qaeda. The document called Pakistan the key, and it suggested that the administration make terrorism the central issue in the relations between Washington and Islamabad. The document also urged the administration to find ways to curb terrorist money-laundering Mr Sheenan's plan "landed with a resounding thud," one former official recalled, "He couldn't get anyone interested."'

Washington cannot have been unaware of Taliban theology but had long grown used to the idea that Muslim fanatics were convenient and easily manipulated allies and that the real enemy was secular authorities who don't truckle to the United States. Historically the US security establishment did not see the Islamic jihad and bin Laden terror networks as a negative phenomenon. In the eighties such networks were financed, trained and armed so long as they were fighting against the Russian-supported regime in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda was established in 1989 at the high point of this effort. Subsequent to this, Muslim jihad networks were often still seen as an ally or tool in former Soviet lands and in parts of the Middle East. Elements of the Al Qaeda network were active in Chechnya and former Soviet central Asia. They were also active in Bosnia and Kosovo. The Western press did not like to make much of it but some of the Bosnian and KLA units resorted to terror tactics. Indeed, as a legacy of this, gangs of ethno-religious thugs still terrorise the populations some of the Balkan statelets set up by NATO and act as a prime conduit for the thriving drug trade from Afghanistan to Western Europe. [When police in Oslo made Norway's largest ever heroin seizure, they discovered that former fighters from the Kosovo Liberation Army controlled the distribution chain, as related in The Economist for October 20, 2001. Of course, neither the terrorism nor the drug-running of some KLA justifies Milosevic's repression of the Kosovan people. In the late 1980s, the US State Department had a soft spot for Milosevic and did nothing to avert the distination of a

country that was seen as a "neutral" and "socialist" power by many in the West. Because of the demand of western creditors, the Yugoslav government swept aside by Milosevic was unable to pay the salaries of its soldiers, a circumstance which greatly increased its vulnerability.]

And as we witness special powers being conferred on Bush in the aftermath of a terror action we should remember the decisive role played by the bombing of Moscow apartments in the rise and rise of Vladimir Putin. The slaughter of 118 Muscovites in 1999 set the scene for a revenge panic which Putin adroitly used first to justify a bloody offensive against the Chechens and then to elevate himself to the Presidency. Responsibility for these bombs has never been clarified but supporters of Islamic jihad do seem plausible candidates as the actual perpetrators, with or without some degree of collusion from sections of the Chechen leadership and/or the Russian security services. The murkiness of terror tactics have long made them the provocateur's weapon of choice, Conrad's theme in *The Secret Agent*.

Free market ideology combined with anti-Communism and suspicion of Russia to produce an extraordinary laxness when it came to US surveillance of the bin Laden network, even long after the 1993 World Trade Center bomb and the African embassy bombings. Clinton sought Congressional approval for checks on capital movements to make sure that they were not helping to finance terrorist activity. They were blocked by the Texas Republican Phil Gramm, who was then the chairman of the Senate's Banking Committee, as well as by the banking industry. Gramm was reported after September 11 2001 as standing by his previous opposition to any type of capital movement monitoring: "I was right then and I am right now" in opposing the bill, Mr Gramm said yesterday. He called the bill "totalitarian" and added: "The way to deal with terrorists is to hunt them down and kill them" The religious authorities in Saudi Arabia also uphold the absolute rights of property-owners and the secular authorities allow unlimited cross-border cash transfers. This is a country without capital gains tax, inheritance tax or income tax. As *Business Week* explains: 'While Saudi Arabia may seem like a tightly controlled society, its Hanbali system of Islamic jurisprudence puts great emphasis on the sanctity of private property. "What you do with your money is utterly up to you," says Michael Field, a London-based author of several books on business in the gulf.' In Washington "it has fallen to Grover Norquist, the neo-conservative and free market advocate, to give radical Islam access to the Republicans and the Bush administration; for some time the Muslim Institute has operated out of the offices of his Institute for Tax Reform."

In his important study, *Islam and Capitalism*, the French scholar Maxine Rodinson explained Islam's compatibility with mercantile and financial accumulation. The first years of the Iranian revolution saw the state given some importance in Islamic economics but, as Olivier Roy explains, this was 'supplanted by a less state oriented and more liberal image, at least with respect to the economy, in Iran as in the rest of the Muslim world.' This author adds: 'This evolution goes hand in hand with Islamism's shift towards neo-fundamentalism and with the diffusion of the Islamist message to a wider audience (businessmen, students of economics, and others).' In the summer of 2001 the Bank-e-Eqtesadi Novine became the first private bank to be set up in Iran since the revolution, with many likely to follow. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are well supplied not just with financial institutions but with proudly Islamic banks. While Islamic investors have to be careful not to enjoy the fruits of 'usury' they are able to claim quarterly or annual 'bonuses' and they can invest in stocks and shares because such instruments allow them to share profits and losses. As this author explains, the type of mercantile and financial capitalism endorsed by Islamic ideology in Saudi Arabia, taking mainly parasitic and rentier forms, has failed to stimulate or diversify its economy. Straddling the latter are giant 'state-owned' corporations, notably Sabic, Saudi Airlines and Saudi Aramco, the latter with revenues of some \$80 billion annually. The Islamist view that these instruments of princely patronage should be broken up and turned over to honest Islamic businesses and foundations is gaining ground.

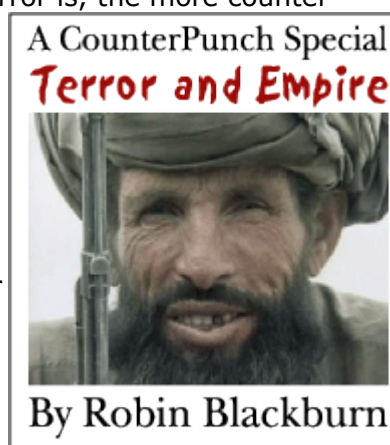
The Al Qaeda group has had access to the most sophisticated banking services but it combines this with the ability to use an informal network of paperless cash transfers, constituted by the facilities of hawala or trust brokers. These brokers regularly transfer large sums from the Middle East or the Indian sub-continent to North America or Europe leaving only the most cryptic records (a telephone remark or an e-mail saying 'Abdullah to receive twelve crates of mangoes'). The transactions are memorised by the brokers who net off the flows in opposite directions and make balancing payments every so often. Both here and in the organisation of the terror actions themselves we see different forms of the 'network society' about which

Manuel Castells writes in his book of that name. However Castells does not make it sufficiently clear that the network society has been linked to the rise of flexible markets and structures of capitalist accumulation as well as to the proliferation of informational technology. Not all 'information' has the same valency. There is all the difference in the world between the aimless web-surfer or chat-room participant and networks, and intranets, that dispose of financial, human and military resources. Accounts of Al Qaeda stress that it maintains an advanced network of the latter description. Bin Laden himself has specialised in finance and banking, and in commissioning and monitoring large-scale construction projects. Even in his Afghan cave bin Laden was accompanied by mobile generators, computers and communications equipment. A visiting Arab journalist explained: 'The mujahideen around the man belong to most Arab states, and are of different ages, but most of them are young. They hold high scientific degrees: doctors, engineers, teachers.' While it is likely that major Gulf state businesses do not speak with one voice, and spread their bets, some of them do identify with Al Qaeda and its campaign against a petrified social order.

The US response to the network challenge is, as explained by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*, to evoke the false universality of the United States as the ultimate custodian and guarantor of all that is valuable in human civilisation. But these authors are wrong to equate 'imperial sovereignty' with an imperial network, as they define it, since the latter would tolerate and encourage a multiplicity of centres within a capitalist world. Instead the United States sees itself as the sole center and uses its privileged role to protect anachronisms like the Saudi monarchy. It is true that Washington has managed to forge an understanding with Moscow and, perhaps, Beijing. But what it needs is a credible partner in the Islamic world if it is to head off the danger of a 'clash of civilisations'. And that is what it lacks.

Chapter 4: Is Terror Ever Effective?

It often seems that the more spectacularly successful an act of terror is, the more counter-productive its consequences. This is especially the case when the terror is expressive rather than instrumental, inspired by religion and not politics. The actions undertaken by the activists that bin Laden has trained have been notable for a wanton disregard of human life and apparent obliviousness to context. When he has allied his networks with communities that are oppressed--whether Palestinians, Chechens, Bosnian Muslims or Kosovan Albanians--his terror tactics have often weakened and compromised them. But it would be wrong to conclude that terror is always ineffective. The cases cited had a front line character, where Islamic populations live commingled with those of other faiths or none. In states with an overwhelmingly Muslim population matters could well be different.



Nationalist movements have sometimes used terror to undeniable effect--the FLN in Algeria, Irgun in Israel. This was because they were linked to an overarching political strategy, using terror to raise the cost of continuing occupation by the colonial power, and because there was a complex of social forces--summoned up by the national movement - which could take advantage of the confusion. The terror operations of Islamic jihad in mixed, secularised or 'frontline' zones lack this characteristic since they energise rather than disrupt their opponents, and since the community of believers is not a plausible social basis upon which to construct a new power. The terror actions of Hamas have divided rather than united Palestinians, leading to some Israeli 'quiet toleration' of the group in earlier days. Religious terror sets off reactions which, at least in many parts of the modern world, it cannot itself profit from. However in the more unstable and autocratic Islamic states themselves the terror tactics could work - even if most believers are thoroughly alienated by them. In these cases the implicit political project is that of creating a more virtuous and representative state, something that could well seem appealing in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, and possibly in countries like Egypt and Algeria as well.

These dangers could be much reduced by democratic progress in the Islamic world and the disabling of Al Qaeda, two objectives that could re-inforce one another. But if the US puts itself

at the head of a coalition to smash bin Laden comprising Russia, its client states and its most pliant European allies, then this will cast him in the role of a new Saladin and perilously exacerbate dangers that are anyway quite acute. This doesn't mean that the US should do nothing. Its huge influence over Saudi Arabia and Pakistan give it the opportunity to undo at last some of the damage of the past. If the Taliban's sponsors now undertook to weaken bin Laden and Al Qaeda by withdrawing all financial, material and human support this would be not only positive but long overdue. But the authorities in Riyadh and Islamabad may well not feel strong enough to do so, or will comply with the policy in a half-hearted and ineffective way, allowing Al Qaeda to escape with most of its resources.

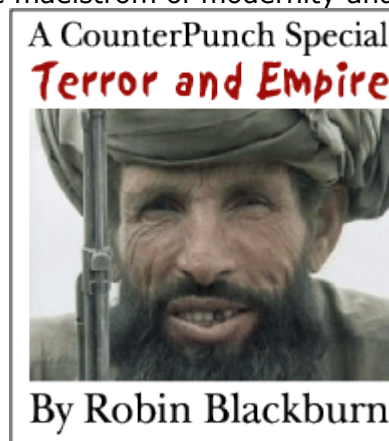
So at a moment when the US president has unprecedented opportunities for waging war his best policy would have been to act only indirectly, by turning off the money flows that have sustained the terror machine, and allow Afghanistan's Muslim neighbours to take the lead. Bush instead opted to bomb, and to send US and British forces. This has been the easy bit. But some leaders and militants of Al Qaeda are likely to escape and regroup elsewhere, whether in Afghanistan's mountain fastnesses or, via Pakistan, the wider Islamic world. Washington knows that even if the first phase of the operation is successful in military terms, and the Taliban driven out of the main Afghan towns, the war is not over and the terrorist threat barely diminished--and US success in Afghanistan could prepare the way for future setbacks elsewhere.

Chapter 5

Coming to Terms with the Revolution in the Islamic World

Today, the Middle East and the Muslim world are caught up in the maelstrom of modernity and democracy that perturb the entire globe. Its peoples crave a better life, a degree of respect, and a say in how their countries are run, and have done for a long time past. Autocratic, monarchical and traditionalist regimes were often set up to bar the road to the sort of secular progress promised by Arab nationalism or by such figures as prime minister Mossadegh in Iran, until his overthrow in 1953, and President Kassem in Iraq, until his overthrow in 1963, or prime minister Bhutto in Pakistan until his overthrow in 1977. The progress promised, still less achieved, by these leaders was, of course, incomplete and uneven. But compared to their rivals and successors they offered hope and a way forward. Generally the West accommodated to, or actually sponsored, the forces of reaction, counter-revolution and military overthrow, with their dismal train of corrupt, wasteful and vicious dictators, sheikhs, kings and princelings. It should not therefore surprise us that, as Said Aburish flatly asserts: 'There are no legitimate regimes in the Arab Middle East.' Often the nearer a regime is to the West the more discredited it is, and the more hostile to the United States its population. Saudi dependence on the US military and Mubarak's dependence on US aid are powerful agents of de-legitimisation. Washington's countenance of Israeli settlements and repression in the occupied areas, its support for the blatantly unfair Oslo accords, and the televised images of Palestinians being beaten and killed further discredited all pro-Western governments.

In a context where secular politics failed to generate progress, political Islam became an increasing force. Compared to secular nationalists and the left, the Islamists had the considerable advantage that their activity could for a time proceed in the shadow of the mosques and seminaries. And even once they faced repression, Islam gave them communication with a large following. In some countries, notably Iran at the time of the overthrow of the Shah, the Islamist movement became, for better or worse, intimately associated with a popular upheaval against autocracy. The Iran of Ayatolla Khomeini might appear, and in some respects be, a throwback to the past. But the constitution of the 'Islamic republic' was in fact a novel confection, quite unlike the autocracy of a Caliph.



While the analogy is no doubt a limited one, we should consider the outlook of Puritan revolutionaries in the early modern period when assessing developments in Iran. Michael Walzer, in his book *The Revolution of the Saints*, explains how Puritanism, with its fixation on the need to fight Satan, gave rise to new ways of waging war. Walzer explains of Calvin: 'Pervasive in his work was a view of the life of the saint as a perpetual, almost military, struggle with the devil. It was because of the devil, and his vast cohorts of earthly followers, that the conscientious, reforming activity of religious men so often resulted in or required violence and warfare.' [In his "The Revolution of the Saints", Michael Walzer develops an aspect of Max Weber's famous argument concerning the protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism. The broadly Marxist account of the role of the Puritans in the English Civil War, as advanced by Christopher Hill and Robert Brenner in *Merchants and Revolution*, is compelling. But the logic and passion of Puritanism as a religious current contributed to the momentous secular outcome. It is here that some parallel with Islamic radicalism today may be worth exploring. As in the 17th century, these Islamic radicals are often dealing with the problems of traditional tribal or feudal social relations in societies where capitalist modernization has taken hold but is very incomplete.]

Puritan militancy and organisation had an egalitarian appeal in a decaying feudal order and laid the basis for secular citizenship. Such an outlook led some English Puritan soldiers to rid themselves of monarchy and some to massacre the Irish or persecute witches. The overthrow of the Shah and the rise of the Islamic republic, both sponsored by an alliance of clerics and bazaar merchants, witnessed similar contradictory tendencies. [The Shah's regime did not repudiate all Mosadegh's reforms and appeared to some as a modernizing dictatorship. But its bureaucratic and merchantist character failed to stimulate capitalist transformation. While some westernizing compradores, technocrats and professionals supported the Shah, the bazaar merchants, linked to the internal market, played an important part in sustaining the opposition.]

Women kept the vote but were still policed and subordinated. The war with Iraq led to terrible loss of life and elements of a war economy. But gradually a more vigorous civil society emerged. The hardline clerics lost ground from 1990, opposed by bazaar merchants who had tired of their populist experiments. A more pragmatic leadership resorted to a programme of privatisation. In the 1997 presidential election the more moderate and tolerant, but cautious, cleric Khatami won, to be re-elected with even more support in 2001. This whole process resumes the trajectory of the interrupted bourgeois revolution in Iran.

Today political Islam still has an egalitarian resonance in feudal societies like those of Pakistan and the Arabian peninsula. The first bourgeois revolutions came into the world animated by Puritan righteousness, by hatred of Satan and by a belief that the Elect must prove themselves in purifying and terrifying deeds. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the defeat of fascism and decolonisation, the Russia and Chinese revolutions, opened up different paths to modernity in succeeding centuries. But apparently, because of the defeat of secular revolutionary forces in the Islamic world, we now witness a throwback to the dawn of the bourgeois epoch. [The path of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' has always been uneven, yoking together new freedoms with new and old slaveries. The actuality of the bourgeois or bourgeois-democratic revolution used to be a Marxist theme but is now also encountered in non-Marxist authors.]

If the Puritans represented a kind of progress in the seventeenth century could the same be said of today's hardline Islamic clerics? The answer is no. The secular spaces of the modern world create other possibilities (and weapons of mass destruction create other dangers). Indeed even in the seventeenth century there were proto-secular currents, like the Levellers, to which Walzer gives too little attention. Anyway it would be wrong to exalt the Puritans above such counter-currents as humanism and the baroque, as reflected in, say, Montaigne and Shakespeare, which also made a contribution to modernity and civility. However, where radical Islam has become a mass force, as it did in Iran, its evolution may bear comparison with that of the Puritans. Those Iranian clerics who wish to keep a theological straitjacket on Iranian society, and who mystify political realities with pseudo-religious categories like the Great Satan, are losing ground. Over two decades after the overthrow of the Shah some of the processes noted by Walzer seem to be at work in Iranian society, with student revolts, the assertion of women's civic rights, a flourishing Iranian cinema, and the tussle between elected

officials and hard line clerics. In these we see some rays of light in a darkening landscape. It is interesting that Iranian developments are closely followed by the Al Jazeera TV station which projects them to the Arabic world. The fact that the Iranians are Shi'ite, and the Taliban are Sunni, apparently does not lend the latter greater authority in the eyes of the Sunni majority in the Muslim world, because of the manifest excesses and failures of Taliban rule.

Thus Iran escapes the crisis of legitimacy in the region. That is why the best way to overthrow the Taliban and undercut the bin Laden network would be to let Iran, and other neighbouring states, take the lead in strengthening the Northern Alliance and other forces of the Afghani opposition.

The Taliban has not been a deep-rooted, popular force. They are young men brought up abroad and indoctrinated in madrassas, or religious colleges, sponsored by the ISI. Their movement would not have prevailed without foreign backing. Their rule was baneful for most of the population though some Afghans will support them because of tribal or family ties. This is why an indigenous opposition, supported by regional powers, is best placed for political reconstitution. The contribution that the US could make is to ensure that all Pakistani and Saudi support for the Taliban ceases immediately.

If Iran was left to play a leading role within a genuinely international coalition that would be quite different from the course the US has embarked on. Washington could regard its willingness to see this happen as embodying a Kissingeresque realism like the recognition of 'Red China' but without the cynicism and in a better cause. Such an approach would also be congruent with Samuel Huntington's advice, in *The Clash of Civilisations*, that the United States should work in concert with the leading powers in other major civilisations and not intervene militarily itself. Huntington's approach does not properly register the importance of the democratic revolution or make enough allowance for secular forces and the need to encourage them. His approach portrays a few great world civilisations without noting the cross-currents and mixtures that complicate the picture. Nevertheless Huntington's is a vision of the world which challenges the arrogant messianism of the Bush administration and the jingoists of the press.

All Iranian groupings were strongly opposed to the Taliban. There are some two million Afghan refugees within its borders, most of whom have been eager to return. The Iranian government has had links with resistance groups in the country and could easily help to strengthen them. While the Iranian government could help assemble a powerful reconstituting force it obviously will not aid or abet a US occupation. So the US authorities have to choose between a medium-to-long range policy which could work and their present policy, which will not meet the objectives set except very partially and at great risk.

Unfortunately the chances that the US will opt for the effective medium-to-long range policy any time soon are not good. The administration's response to the Iranian government supplies the litmus paper, since Iran has had such a potentially critical role to play in sponsoring an effective Afghan resistance and in de-legitimizing Al Qaeda. The mayor of Teheran sent a message of sympathy and support to mayor Giuliani of New York in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center. The Economist informs us that the US State Department cold-shouldered Iranian overtures: 'On September 16th a State department official said that Iran's help in the campaign against terrorism would be welcomed only if it withdrew support from Hizbullah hardly a realistic demand, not least because few countries, apart from America and Israel, consider Hizbullah to be a terrorist organisation..' On September 30 the Iranian assistant foreign minister gave an interview to the New York Times in which he explained the critical failings of US diplomacy and strategy: "No single nation can take up this fight", Zarif said "This is a global fight. And a cold warrior mentality against the global menace of terrorism is not going to produce the results necessary to eradicate terrorism." He said the coalition must both be inclusive and authorised by the United Nations. "Everybody has to be in", he said, "you can't pick and choose the members". Zarif extended his condolences to the American people. "The magnitude of this attack has been unprecedented", he said, "it is difficult for the world to comprehend that in a few seconds so many people have been lost. Certainly in Iran we understand the trauma that the American people are suffering and will continue to suffer for many years to come." While expressing sympathy for the victims of the attacks, Zarif criticised statements by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell about Iran's possible inclusion in an American led coalition. "The notion that you are either with the US or with the terrorists is problematic. People are not in line to join the coalition. There is no queue. In the

Iranian psyche the United States is not the center of the world.", he said, "So it would be advisable if the American people look at themselves from the perspective of others."

While the US is reluctant to allow Iran a leading role it will strive for, and probably achieve, a covert understanding. Unlike the governments of most other large Muslim states the government of Iran is not financially or militarily dependent on the United States. It has a long border with Afghanistan and many ties with its population. Washington knows that Iran will not wish to see another hostile government formed in the neighbouring state. But any tacit understanding will always be limited by Washington's insistence on its own determining role.

The existing Afghan opposition was backed by Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Iran alone has standing within the Muslim world and is manifestly better placed than they are to appeal for a broader internal post-Taliban coalition. The best that can be said about the regimes in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is that they do have a broadly secular character, and could allow secular Afghan refugees to return to their homeland. Uzbekistan has a functioning state based on the former Soviet order which has permitted a modicum of economic and social development. Tajikistan has suffered from civil war but now has a coalition government that includes former Communists and an Iranian-backed Islamic movement. Because of their autocratic character, past subservience to Moscow, and ethnic links, the support of the Uzbek and Tajik governments will not itself strengthen the appeal of any post-Taliban coalition. Such an opposition would be more convincing if it incorporated more diverse secular and civilian forces, such as the RAWA, or association of Afghan women. Those military leaders like General Dostum, who faithfully served the former Communist government, may prove more open to democratic and secular themes than the avid clique around President Rabbani. But the critical weakness of the Northern Alliance is its failure to rally a more representative coalition of forces. Iran can help but, because of religious and ethnic affiliations, not very much so far as the large Pushtun people are concerned. The adhesion of the king may help a little with the Pushtun but he is aged, out of touch and does not speak Pushto. However a democratic opening in Pakistan could help here.

The formation of a government in Pakistan committed to holding elections, and incorporating the main political parties on an interim basis, could help to weaken the Islamic jihad network. These civilian forces are not favourable to the Islamicists, whose parties have never been able to demonstrate electoral support in Pakistan. Notwithstanding the main parties' hostility to the Taliban, they will see good reasons to make sure that a post-Taliban government has friendly relations with Pakistan. The ISI has been strongly attached to the Taliban and the problem this poses is increased by the fact that, like other intelligence services, it has sources of revenue stemming from the drugs trade that are not controlled by its government. Pakistan's civilian governments have previously had little or no control over the intelligence network, but they have been scared to challenge it. But public opinion and the aspiration to be free of military misrule also count for something in the country. As Robert Fisk explains: 'Corrupt, drug-ridden, and inherently unstable Pakistan may be, but General Musharraf allows a kind of freedom of speech to continue.' The public opinion to which this allows expression is not favourable to the ISI or the Taliban but neither does it like the United States and Musharraf. Fisk notes: 'Aqil Shah put it very well when he wrote in Lahore's Friday Times last week that, by allying himself with America's "War on Terror", General Musharraf had secured de facto international acceptance for his 1999 coup.' (According to *The Economist*, "the one country that all drug traffickers try to avoid is Iran." Some 204 tonnes of opium and 29 tonnes of heroin and morphine were seized in Iran in 1999 by a combination of army and police units. In Turkey, by contrast, only one-third of a tonnes of opium was confiscated in the same year.) Musharraf has promised elections and should be held to his word. A civilian government formed now would have a far better chance of tackling the ISI than was ever previously the case.

Thus a regional solution should centrally involve Iran, Pakistan and Uzbekistan and outside powers can mainly help by offering a really large aid package to reward cooperation between them. The West expended huge sums in prosecuting a proxy war in Afghanistan and the United States and Britain are currently engaged in very costly military operations. If similar sums were available for reconstruction and development in the region this would powerfully assist the chances of a joint approach in Teheran, Tashkent and Islamabad. And only such an approach will offer the hope of an Afghan settlement.

The spectacle of a desperately poor and ravaged country being bombarded by two rich and powerful countries was counter-productive as well as repugnant. Robert MacFarlane, a former

National Security adviser to Ronald Reagan, argued that it would be better if the overthrow of the Taliban is encompassed by the Afghans themselves since 'the undoing of the Taliban by Afghans would remove any claim of martyrdom from Osama bin Laden, as well as reduce the risk of losing our Muslim coalition partners. The alternative is for much larger U.S. forces to do the job. They would surely succeed but at a much larger cost in lives.'

Russian and China should not, of course, directly intervene, and will not wish to, since their presence would also risk uniting Afghans against foreigners. They could supply useful logistical help, though they will not wish to see a permanent US or NATO military presence close to their sensitive central Asian border zones. However Russian and Chinese help will do nothing to alleviate the 'clash of civilisation' danger in the wider Muslim world.

Clearly the UN should have a crucial role to play, as the Iranian Foreign Minister observed, and as the Northern League has requested. The Taliban are not recognised as the Afghan government. The Security Council adopted a strong resolution against terrorism on 28 September but no UN police body was set up to enforce it. Instead each member state was asked to take its own measures and to report back within 90 days on its success in identifying and stamping out terrorist support networks. While seemingly multi-lateralist this approach allows Washington to retain control of all cross-border initiatives and to act as judge in 90 days of the adequacy of the measures reported. This is also clear from the explanations of the US Secretary of Defense. In an article entitled 'A New Kind of War', Rumsfeld explains, that this 'will not be waged by a grand alliance united for the single purpose of defeating an axis of hostile powers'. Instead of such an alliance, in which the US would have to compromise with allies, there will be 'floating coalitions' adopted or discarded at will by the directing center: 'Countries will have different roles and contribute in different ways. In this war the mission will determine the coalition, not the other way round.' And the mission will be set by Washington.

After the gains in Afghanistan there will be pressure to turn against Iraq. On September 19 the US press ran stories reporting that Mohammed Atta, an Egyptian who had taken part in the September 11 attack, had met with an Iraqi official in Europe in the previous month. Unnamed US government officials were quoted as saying that this might point to Iraqi involvement. The plausibility of such allegations is reduced by the fact that the Iraqi regime would have nothing to gain and everything to lose by participating in or supporting an Al Qaeda terrorist operation. Against the background of unrelenting Anglo-American bombing, Iraqi diplomacy has had great success in fostering opposition to UN sanctions and has significantly reduced their incidence. Should proof be forthcoming of Iraqi involvement, renewed sanctions would be the very least Bagdad would expect.

An earlier New York Times profile of Atta, made him seem a most unlikely follower for Saddam Hussein. His German friends described his increasing resentment against Western policies in the Middle East but also his deep religious views. His thesis-supervisor at a technical university in Hamburg mentioned a striking quotation from the Koran placed as a thesis dedication: 'I can't remember it precisely', Michule said, "But it is something like this: 'My life, my death, my sacrifice belongs to Allah, the lord of worlds.'). On the following day The Wall Street Journal's report concluded: 'current and former US counterterrorism officials remain skeptical that Iraq and Mr bin Laden's Al Qaeda have formed a lasting bond. They cite important differences of temperament and history. Saddam Hussein's government has deep secular roots, exposing it to threats from fundamentalists such as Mr bin Laden.' The advice left behind by the attackers promised them martyrdom in the service of Allah, and paradise, with no reference to secular objectives. They were urged to bless their weapons, to keep them sharp, and to kill quickly, so as to observe the Koranic instruction not to cause 'pain to the animal'. These religious instructions were quite at variance with the modus operandi of the Iraqi intelligence services.

Both the New York Times and the Wall St Journal explained that there was a rift in the administration with a faction that wanted the toppling of Saddam 'even if he cannot be linked to the terrorists who struck New York and Washington' as the New York Times put it. Colin Powell was reported to be worried that there was not the international support for an attack on Iraq because 'its civilian population draws great sympathy in the Middle East for the suffering it has endured since 1991.' In the wake of the anthrax sent to US media and political figures it was reported: '(T)he Pentagon was already pushing the theory that Iraq was involved in the attacks, arguing that Bagdad had both the means and the motive to wage bio-terrorism against the United States. But officials said federal investigators, as well as the Central

Intelligence Agency, believed there was little evidence linking Iraq to the Sept 11 attacks or to anthrax bioterrorism.' Subsequently it was reported that the anthrax strains employed in the attacks could have originated in many countries.

Since the US and British governments have been relentlessly bombing Iraq for years the question arises what more could they do? Bomb cities? Embark on a full-scale invasion? Both would multiply civilian casualties and suffering. And an invasion would require more troops and allies; short of convincing proof of Iraqi involvement these allies will be very difficult to find. In fact most of the evidence coming to light in the two months after September 11 pointed to surreptitious Saudi, not Iraqi, backing for Al Qaeda.

The US is compromised by the fact that its cause is still yoked to Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Egypt, as well as Israel. For Bush to imagine that the US stands for liberty and justice in the Middle East is a strange delusion. It could only ever be seen in this light if it broke with the Saudi monarchy and obliged Israel to withdraw completely from the occupied territories, something that would obviously require a revolution in its policy and priorities in the region. This is not about to happen but Washington does now see that American interests would be better served by curbing Israel. The US has already insisted, over-ruling Sharon, that Israel resume talking to the Palestinians. In an answer to an Iranian journalist the British Foreign Secretary went considerably further, observing: 'I understand that one of the factors that helps to breed terrorism is the anger which many people feel at the events over the years in Palestine.'

The need for Arab and Muslim allies drove the Bush administration to redefine its Israel policy and offer some concessions to Arab opinion. The oil and industrial interests so linked to the Bush regime could perceive the need for a fresh start in the region and the President is now so strong that he doesn't need to fear even the hostility of AIPAC, the influential pressure group which backs Israel. But alliance with the 'moderate' Arab states and the sort of token sops that might satisfy them - will not help since these are autocratic, repressive and discredited. So a replay of the Gulf War coalition will not work even on its own terms. An attempt simply to re-start the flawed and discredited 'peace process' would not be convincing even to most 'moderate' Arabs. The minimum should be compliance with UN Resolution 242 and willingness to discuss a territorial settlement that gives both Israelis and Palestinians contiguous land and reasonably defensible borders.

Compared with the killing power of states bent on war or exemplary punishment the actions of terrorists are often puny as well as counterproductive. But in this case the terror action was not just symbolic and spectacular, though it was that too. In terms of lives lost, or economic and political impact, it transcends the usual limits of terror actions, including those to which this network has previously been linked. The skill and calculation involved were of a high order. The intended audience of the September 11 action was the Islamic world in general, and disaffected young men in particular. Anger at the West's acquiescence in the killing of hundreds of Palestinian youths, or at Sharon's use of state terror against whole communities, or at the suffering of the Iraqi people directly at the hands of the US and UK, were only the most recent provocations. Osama bin Laden and his followers or co-thinkers have a political as well as identitarian project in so far as they are prepared to seize power wherever it may be possible in the Islamic world. They are revolutionaries as well as warriors.

Al Qaeda is animated by affronted religious sentiment and projects great changes undertaken in the name of Allah and the faithful, such as the forcing out of all 'crusaders and Jews' from Arabia, the overthrow of corrupt monarchs, and the virtuous use of oil wealth. The ideology of Al Qaeda is, in US parlance, 'neo-conservative'. It does not dwell on social inequality or injustice requiring state action, as Khomeini used to do in the early days of the Iranian revolution, but instead stresses the need for faith-based charity and ethical Islamic business. But the key appeal is to directly religious goals. In the tape he released on 8 October bin Laden saluted the September 11 attackers as 'a group of vanguard Muslims', who had 'stood in defense of...their brothers and sisters in Palestine' and who had avenged a Muslim nation that had been humiliated for eighty years. He also attacked Muslim 'hypocrites' who ignored Iraq: 'A million innocent children are dying at this time as we speak, killed in Iraq. We hear no denunciation, we hear no edict from the hereditary rulers.' Such apparently secular references are incorporated within a religious world view. 'These events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidels Every Muslim must rise to defend his religion.' He concluded with a surprisingly specific demand and threat: 'America will not live

in peace before peace reigns in Palestine, and before all the army of infidels depart from the land of Muhammad, peace be upon him. ' This last sentence could hint that bin Laden would like to see himself as the adviser to a reconstituted Saudi government, laying down terms to the United States. Though when bin Laden refers to 'peace in Palestine' what he probably means is driving all Jews, Christians and atheists in the sea.

Bin Laden's aims are expressed in terms calculated to appeal to mainstream Islam, apparently with some success. Many Muslims believe that unbelievers should not control their holy places. It is not only 'fundamentalists' who are likely to be offended by the presence of US troops in the Saudi kingdom, custodian of Mecca and Medina, and Israeli military control of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem. Since there is a large Muslim population in Arabia, in Jerusalem and on the West bank it is not unreasonable to take some account of these views, so long as they respect the non-aggressive sentiments of those of other religious faiths or none. Even the narrow-minded Saudi authorities have generally permitted Shi'ites access to Mecca and Medina. There is no good reason for US troops to be in Saudi Arabia and so they should be withdrawn, as Chalmers Johnson proposed prior to September 11. This would, at a stroke, remove Al Qaeda's biggest single recruiting issue. It would also begin to disentangle the United States from the Saudi regime, the fount of religious hatred and fortress of reaction in the Islamic world.

Matters are a little more complicated in Palestine since Jews, Muslims and Christians all have holy sites in Jerusalem. But if the Israelis were willing to treat with a viable Palestinian state on terms of equality it should not be so difficult to arrange for de-militarisation of the holy sites and a right of access to them. Since Palestine and Israel also contain cultural and archaeological sites of importance to non-believers one must hope that they can be catered to as well. Inter-faith agreements over access to holy sites have worked in the past in Jerusalem and there is no reason why they could not work even better in the future.

The militants of Al Qaeda and Islamic jihad have some very unattractive, indeed repellent, beliefs and there is no need to respect or compromise on any of these. They are willing to pitilessly destroy believers and non-believers alike since the believers will go to paradise and the infidels deserve to die anyway. This was already evident before September 11 : the East African embassy bombings wounded and maimed 4,000 people. But Al Qaeda and its allies also try to gain support by appearing to champion causes which are popular and justified. Al Qaeda is manifestly a threat to the cause of democracy and progress. But to oppose measures simply because they are supported by Al Qaeda plays into their hands.

Islamic jihad believes in a draconian subordination of women and the drastic curtailment of cultural and intellectual life. They urge that better prices should be obtained for oil and that Islamic banks and corporations would make better use of oil revenues than the hereditary states. While apparently secular objectives are proclaimed in its videos these are wrapped up in a religious world view. The ability of Al Qaeda to attract sympathy and support in the Islamic world can certainly be undercut by initiatives favourable to democracy, economic development, self-determination and respect for the peaceful exercise of religious rites (and rights). Although, in current circumstances, it is dangerous to under-estimate Al Qaeda's appeal, it is not a mass force anywhere in the Muslim world. It is a network of several thousands, not millions or even hundreds of thousands. There is evidence of bickering, factionalism and disorganisation within it. Without continuing subventions its finances would be strained. So for all these reasons the network could shrivel if the peoples of the Muslim world saw real opportunities to achieve recognition, justice and progress.

Islamic jihad has a political logic which feeds off the need for revolutionary transformations in the Islamic world and the failures of existing regimes, whether conservative or nationalist. The excessive and 'symbolic' dimensions of the September 11 action could further its political objectives if it drives Washington mad, if it makes the custodians of global capital forget how much they have to lose and if it plays to the Manichean phobias still evident in US political culture.

The Belgian Marxist Ernest Mandel used to say that the hugely prosperous American bourgeoisie had no rational interest in blowing up the world in a nuclear conflagration. Once again bourgeois America is in a like situation and does not have an interest in, say, promoting the fundamentalist network in the Pakistani armed forces. But this does not mean that American political leadership can find within itself the wisdom, imagination and patience to see

that the main role must now be played by others. The Islamic warriors who immolated themselves in the World Trade Center and Pentagon were armed only with knives and cardboard cutters. They turned their opponent's civilian airliners into devastating instruments of destruction. They are also ready to turn American belligerence into their ally.

Bush may wish to claim an extensive victory and to avoid the charge laid against his father that he did not finish the job. Sections of the US military and frustrated jingoists throughout the land may find a rolling state of emergency very congenial. Many Republicans see it as the best way to stave off setbacks in next year's elections. Even 'rational' capitalists may favour belligerent action say against Iraq or to shore up the Saudi monarchy if they come to believe that this could secure future control of Middle Eastern oil.

The US way of life owes much to cheap oil and gasoline but the real interests at stake are easy to over pitch. In recent years the Middle East has been supplying only about fifteen per cent of total US oil imports. Even if the US government and oil companies lost all privileged leverage in the Middle East they would still be able to buy some supplies from the region. The advocates of radical Islam speak of raising prices or using oil revenues differently not keeping the oil to themselves. The prices which eventually prevail will before long reflect supply and demand in what is an internationally competitive market. Mercantile activity, as we have pointed out, has always been compatible with Islam. It could be that average prices would be a little higher but this would scarcely be a disaster for the United States. On the other hand the risks entailed by allowing Islamic jihad to gain substantial state power are of a quite different description and Mandel's argument applies.

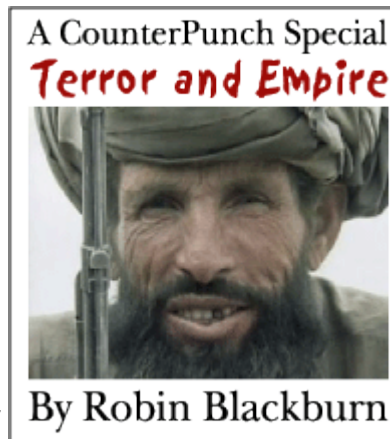
Chapter 6

Cosmopolitics Versus Terror

The flaw in the US proclamation of itself as the arbiter of global terror is not only its past record, but also its continuing imperial disposition and the readiness of US leaders to discount political and social considerations in favour of a stark opposition of good and evil. The British government has been far too subservient to Washington. But as an ex-colonial power it knows that terrorist movements can be undercut by political initiatives. It knows that the irreconcilables can be isolated by acts of decolonisation and negotiations with those formerly regarded as terrorists like Jomo Kenyatta, Archbishop Makarios and Gerry Adams. It is true that the White House has many times welcomed Yasser Arafat and was at one time willing to turn a blind eye to Saudi support for terrorists. But such pragmatism is no good unless informed by a willingness to accept structural change. The British did eventually accept decolonisation but it is less clear that the US understands that the time has come for a new type of empire, a network empire of many centers.

Instead of decolonisation the Palestinians were offered besieged and fragmented enclaves. In Saudi Arabia and the Gulf decolonisation would mean the withdrawal of US and UK troops. A campaign against terror in the region would have to base itself on dismantling regimes that are based on terror not popular consent, whether in the occupied territories or in the motley retinue of monarchies and sheikdoms that have been the buttress of Empire. The species of bourgeois revolution now stalking the Islamic world threatens to sweep all these regimes into the dustbin of history. In the Gulf a large immigrant workforce could assert its presence. If the West insists on further supporting the old order it will ensure that this process is more bloody and dangerous than would otherwise be the case--and less likely to find a relatively more democratic, secular and pacific outcome.

In his speech to the Labour Party Conference in October 2001 Tony Blair acknowledged the need to tackle the conditions which 'breed support for the terrorists' but both analysis and



prescription were flawed and rhetorical. While poverty is indicted the arbitrary rule of monarchs and dictators is not. Tackling poverty is inescapably a long term goal but withdrawing support from the Sultans and Sheikhs could be speedily addressed. The privileges of the latter are, it seems, even more sacred than those of the oil companies. The other glaring deficiency of Blair's agenda is that it defers to, and thus encourages, what I have called US national messianism. Indeed the UK government is ever ready to back Washington's unilateral military interventions.

A campaign against terrorism will be far more likely to succeed if it is genuinely international in character, if implementation is entrusted to a supranational agency, if it is even-handed and consistent, if it is equally intolerant of state terror, if political and social injustices are resolutely addressed and if it pays attention to all the destructive potentials that have appeared as by-products of modernity.

The perils posed by terrorist acts can be reduced if inherently dangerous technologies--like nuclear power plants, very tall buildings, super-jumbos, centers for research into noxious germs and gasses - are secured, discouraged and minimised. It is worth bearing in mind that something like what happened in the World Trade Center could have occurred accidentally. Progress towards more equitable political and social institutions also can help to diminish the attractions of terrorism. Better public health facilities will also help to diminish the impact of terrorist acts where they nonetheless occur. National police forces probably need to work together more effectively. But there remains the supranational plane.

President Bush's inclinations today are as anachronistic as were those of President McKinley when he led the United States to victory over Spain in 1898 but then did not know what to do with it. His instinct was to use Spain's defeat to acquire pieces of imperial real estate (the Philippines, Guam, Cuba and Puerto Rico). He did not realise that territorial empires had peaked and that it was America's mission to embody the non-territorial variety that was to count in the twentieth century. Under pressure from an impressive Anti-Imperialist movement Cuba was given its independence in 1902, but with a Platt amendment that was long to rankle: it enshrined a US right of intervention in the island. Today Bush aspires to be a second McKinley exercising a sort of global Platt amendment in the war against terrorism. But the time for this type of imperial governance is over and a more plural capitalist world requires supranational agencies that do not only reflect the 'Washington consensus'.

Terror networks with 'global reach' will not be suppressed or minimised without a new and more authoritative network of institutions at a global and supranational, level. This means abating US national messianism together with the willingness of its allies to defer to Washington on a string of crucial issues for global governance. The United States is tempted to play the role of global gendarme because everyone knows that the United Nations, as it is, lacks the resources and capacity to fill this role. The weakness of the UN was cited by Richard Falk in *The Nation* as the reason for supporting Bush's go-it-alone strategy. But the same argument could be deployed to argue for the international body to be given specified supranational powers and for its decision-making powers to be enhanced. Obviously those would have to be accompanied by juridical restraints and democratic accountability such as have anyway been urged by writers like Daniele Archibugi. The situation created by September 11 created conditions where such issues could be urgently addressed and an anti-terrorist task force quickly assembled.

The crisis unleashed by September 11 shows that even in a case where the United States began with a moral right to act alone in defence of its citizens this has not been the best way of acting. Of course the UN could be far more effective if it was not continually by-passed and slighted by the United States. But it also needs, as it has since its inception, new authority and resources. Already in 1944 some argued for the UN to have its own armed force (World Guard), with its own budget and commanders (i.e. this was not to be formed by contributions from existing national armies). This is still a distant prospect today. But a supranational agency to deal with 'global terrorism' is another matter, requiring fewer resources and implying a smaller derogation of sovereignty. And if the principle can be won in this area this could be of great help in tackling nuclear and germ-war disarmament and inspection.

The fact that there is no Islamic country as a permanent member of the Security Council while there are two European states is unfortunate. The inclusion of, say, Indonesia might help to boost the standing of the UN in the Islamic world. When William Penn and Abbé Pierre first

proposed an international league to suppress war and piracy they urged that the Ottoman empire should be bound into it from the outset. Three centuries later we still haven't caught up with these bold thinkers.

An international accord against terrorism could be positive so long as there was the opportunity for each state's self-interested approach to be qualified by the need for a genuine international consensus. The latter would itself not be perfect, of course, but it would be better than encouraging each state to prosecute its own war against global terrorism. There are already international agreements which it could have invoked and which the Security Council of the UN could see were more vigorously enforced. The succession of treaties and agreements aimed at suppressing first piracy and then the Atlantic slave trade, with the latter often seen as legally equivalent to the former, furnish interesting precedents

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815 there was an international accord to equate slaving with piracy. But Washington would not agree. The US government had suppressed legal slave imports in 1808 but rejected effective international action against the Atlantic slave trade since this required a mutual right of inspection, which was deemed to be an infringement on US sovereignty. As a result the Atlantic slave trade to Cuba continued and the building of ships destined for the slave trade was a major New York industry in the 1850s. It was only in 1862 that Lincoln and Seward accepted the need for the United States to cooperate in suppressing the Atlantic traffic--and it was only then that the bans on Atlantic slaving became effective.

Other than the United States, the permanent members of the UN Security Council are ready for joint police action against terrorism, even the establishment of a supranational agency. The Chinese and Russian governments may use terror themselves but are opposed to the free-lance variety, especially when connected to Islamic fundamentalism. At one point in Bush's September 20 speech when he was listing the failed twentieth century doctrines comparable to Al Qaeda's fundamentalism, he mentioned fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism but left out, in deference to China and Russia, a specific mention of Communism. Evidently someone in the Bush entourage was already aiming at an entente with Beijing and Moscow.

Chapter 7

How to Get Serious About Terrorism

It is just possible that international action against terrorism, often a comparatively small-scale threat, could pave the way to international accords which remove the far greater--but now not entirely unrelated--terror of nuclear war. It could furnish a positive precedent. The pre-September 11 international order was based on the effective exclusion of Russia and China from any real role in global governance. That was the logic of Clinton's NATO expansion policy and of Bush's characterisation of China as a 'global competitor'. Russia and China not only have nuclear weapons but they also have the means to deliver them. Washington's policy of maintaining its own nuclear arsenal and blocking supranational inspection also made it very difficult to tackle the most dangerous type of proliferation, as seen in the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan. New Delhi and Islamabad were censured for developing their nuclear capability but nobody could suppose that these

powers would renounce such weapons so long as others possessed them The United States, Britain and France are theoretically committed to eventual nuclear disarmament but nobody takes this seriously since the governments concerned evidently do not do so themselves. Nuclear disarmament would only be acceptable to existing nuclear powers if carried out as part of a common agreement entered into by all and backed up by international inspection. Willingness to accept any such sacrifice of national; sovereignty was very remote on September 11 . During the Cold War nuclear dispositions were at least inserted into an overall strategy of control. But the anarchic dispositions which now reign constitute the perilous legacy of that 'unfinished twentieth century' about which Jonathan Schell has written.

A CounterPunch Special
Terror and Empire



By Robin Blackburn

Both Russia and the United States have 6,000 or more nuclear-armed missiles, about 20,000 nuclear bombs, and hundreds of tons of bomb-grade plutonium and uranium, apiece. Pakistan has between 30 and 50 partially disassembled nuclear bombs, of from one to 15 kilotons in yield. (The nuclear device dropped on Hiroshima was about 12 kilotons. Even if we believe that the US nuclear weapons are safely guarded, by well-paid and reliable soldiers, in secure locations, it would be heroic to make the same assumption about all the other nuclear arsenals. Yet Russia, India, and Pakistan are not going to relinquish their weapons so long as others retain them. As it happens all the world's significant nuclear powers have some direct stake in the events which have flowed from September 11. The most dangerous military stand-off at the present time is that between India and Pakistan. While the existing major nuclear powers have up to now only paid lip-service to further disarmament, and have only permitted limited rights of inspection, it could be that what Schell calls the 'crowbar of events'--in the form of the international response to September 11--could open the way, simply because political leaders perceive terrorism as a threat from which they must protect themselves and their people. It supplies a common enemy against whom nuclear weapons are worse than useless, since they might always be hi-jacked. It justifies dramatically reducing war preparations against one another. Nuclear weapons systems are perilous even in the hands of generals and politicians but since September 11 their hijacking by terrorists also becomes a plausible threat. The manifest possibility of further suicide attacks from aircraft, not necessarily hi-jacked, had exposed the vulnerability of civil as well as military nuclear installations. While military installations are supposedly well guarded they are not subject to international inspection. Civil installations are poorly guarded but are subject to inspection.

Osama bin Laden's 'Sword of God' message pointed to the loss of life at Hiroshima and Nagasaki as proof that the West was utterly careless of civilian, non-Christian lives. Intelligence reports cite a message circulating in the Al Qaeda network in Fall 2000 to the effect that a new Hiroshima was about to hit America. One of the scientists who helped Pakistan make its bombs, Dr Sultan Bashiruddin, also built facilities in Afghanistan for the Taliban. Bashiruddin, an outspoken admirer of the Taliban and exponent of 'Islamic science' worked for thirty years on Pakistan's bomb and was director of the Khabar ractor until 2000. Two other scientists were arrested with him in late October. These men may have had access to fissile material which could be used to make a 'dirty' nuclear device, with nuclear material wrapped around high explosives. And a Bin Laden aide who gave evidence at the 1998 trial for the embassy bombings testified that he had played a role in an attempt to buy fissile material.

Following the anthrax attacks in October 2001 the United States government made new proposals to tackle germ warfare facilities but scarcely abated their resistance to mandatory inspections. As tactful report in the New York Times explained: 'The proposals, intended to strengthen the 1972 treaty banning germ weapons, abandon a previous approach favoured by many other countries that sought to require treaty members to create a new international organisation to conduct mandatory inspections of plants in which germ weapons could be made. The administration opposed that approach, saying that it would have provided a false sense of security. Two veteran European diplomats interviewed today confirmed that their governments were ready to work with measures proposed by the administration. But both added that they still preferred the more sweeping approach that the administration rejected last summer and hoped that the White House would eventually endorse more of it. "We are ready and willing to work with the Americans to bridge the gaps," said one of the diplomats. "But we hope this is only a first step and that it opens the door to more sweeping measures." Arms control groups voiced similar reservations. This is a good start," said Daryl Kimball, director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association. "But it doesn't do what the draft agreement that the administration rejected would have done." Critics at home and abroad argued last summer that the White House's rejection of that proposed (UN) agreement, known as a protocol, showed that it was concentrating too much on new military programs and not enough on international treaties and the prevention of the spread of weapons. An interagency review within the administration had unanimously concluded that the protocol would have granted foreign inspectors too much access to American installations and companies. The 1972 treaty, which 143 nations have ratified, prohibits the development, production and possession of biological weapons. But the treaty has always lacked a means of verifying compliance. The administration's rejection of the draft agreement last summer effectively torpedoed its prospects.'

If the authors of the October attacks had mailed a thousand letters, all containing weapons-

grade anthrax, rather than three, only one of which seems to have been weapons-grade, then the casualties could have been comparable to those at the World Trade Towers or much worse. Likewise if crop-duster planes had been used, or aerosol canisters in tunnels or subways. Evidently the US administration itself did not avoid the 'false sense of security' against which it warned. Its new proposals addressed in the report, comprised a proposed 'code of conduct' for scientists and a 'provision that would require treaty members to "accept international expert inspectors" if the United Nations general secretary decided they should be sent'. Given US leverage over the UN, and its Security Council veto, it would never itself have to submit to inspection, but could require it of other states. The previous report noted: 'Several critics noted that these procedures fall short of the inspection of so-called dual use facilities long-favoured by arms control advocates. The lack of mandatory inspections is troubling one diplomat said. Seth Bruger, managing editor of the Arms Control Association monthly, also said his group felt that creating a professional group of inspectors would help give the treaty teeth. The administration has rejected both measures.'

The disagreements over how to deal with bio-terror weapons echoes problems encountered in dealing with nuclear weapons and also illustrates many of the issues that a wider protocol against terrorism would raise. Inspections aimed at verifying disarmament could be intrusive and would apply to civilian dual use facilities. Large corporations will claim that they will forfeit their commercial secrecy. Yet a safer world cannot be reached without opening up the world's military-industrial complexes to scrutiny. And one-sided measures which do not apply to the United States, Britain, and their allies and friends, will lack all legitimacy.

When it comes to an anti-terrorist accord there are further problems and legitimate fears concerning civil liberties, particularly given the emergency regulations promulgated both in the US and UK. President's Bush establishment by fiat of military tribunals to try Al Qaeda members or sympathisers drew a vitriolic rebuke from the right-winger William Safire, accusing Bush of Caesarism. Liberals and those on the left will be understandably disinclined to support further legislation on terrorism, or to see new bodies set up to combat it. Such legislative and organisational initiatives in the past have usually targeted legitimate dissent while being useless against serious terrorists. But this is why libertarians and progressives should take a keen interest, exposing the ulterior agenda of the security services but supporting measures which could help prevent or reduce acts of terror which expropriate and marginalise real movements of emancipation.

A UN secretariat against terrorism should have its own professional staff and should be able to prompt and require compliance from the police in any member state. Anything less than this would not be serious. A UN convention against terrorism could be based on its existing articles and protocols. And even prior to September 11 Saul Mendlovitz and John Fousek had already outlined the case for an international constabulary to combat crimes against humanity. Inevitably governments would try to invoke anti-terrorism to suppress legitimate opposition, but in such cases they might find it difficult to get a quorum to support them and would have to work through an agency, and submit to a court, they did not control. There should be habeas corpus and judicial safeguards against wrongful arrest, with the opportunity for representations to be made by social movements as well as states. The performance of judges in existing international tribunals also points to the need for trials by jury, a far more authentic expression of world concern than the type of judicial proceeding presided over by Carla del Ponte.

Israel would no doubt claim that Al Fatah and the PLO are terrorist organisations, yet these are now lodged in the PLA, an internationally-recognised state-like body. The Russian government will claim that the entire Chechen movement is terrorist. The Indian government likes to brand as terrorist any aspiration to Kashmiri independence. The Chinese government will brand Tibetan aspirations as terrorist. The US, France and Britain might seek to indict organisations at work in Puerto Rico, Northern Ireland or Corsica. Indeed the British 'anti-terrorist' legislation is framed broadly enough to target non-violent direct action by 'eco-warriors'. For these reasons progressives and liberals, and anybody who cherishes civil liberties and rights of national determination, will argue strongly against accepting accusations at face value or the setting up of an organisation responsible to individual governments.

What should count as terrorism? Obviously actions aimed at sowing terror by killing civilians, or seriously harming them, or threatening them with death or disfigurement, count as

terrorism. Such actions are supposedly illegal everywhere. Similar attacks or threats directed only against military personnel in time of peace are a more awkward case. If the government served by those personnel is autocratic and oppressive then this could justify armed resistance rather than terrorism. According to circumstances such armed resistance might be ill-advised or wrong but it would not be terrorism. We should bear in mind that the United States would not exist if its Founding Fathers had not taken up arms. There will, of course, be dispute about whether such and such a regime is repressive or autocratic, or whether an act really harmed civilians, but in practice it is often not so difficult to reach agreement. The aim of an anti-terrorist accord would be to identify and suppress clear cases of terrorism. It might even make sense to confine the competence of the agency to terrorist activity that crossed borders. Where the antiterrorist agency could not decide then governments would formulate their own response. The attempt to reach agreement, and the supranational character of an anti-terrorist agency, would be quite different from bi-lateral deals whereby the US forgets about the Chechens in return for Russia accepting NATO expansion.

The existence of such a supranational agency would hopefully tend to pre-empt and contain terrorist activity. But governments would still retain the ability to deal with terrorist threats as they saw best within their own borders. Likewise political or religious movements would no doubt still contrive to evade the reach of the agency. There would have to be sanctions for governments which flouted the accord or sabotaged the agency. Much would depend on the quality and authority of those in charge of investigations and operations; hopefully it would be possible to attract men like the Italian prosecutor Di Pietro and the Spanish judge Garzon.

The US has insisted that state-backed terrorism should be outlawed, meaning in practice state-backed terror of which it does not approve, in contradistinction to, say, the terror being wrought in Colombia by the authorities with the underpinning of US military aid. Distinguishing between state-backed terror and state-backed acts of war will not be easy. But the challenge is a good one, since state-backed terror often causes greater loss of life it is eminently worth identifying and opposing. But, for both practical and theoretical reasons, different agencies should target state terror and terrorist movements.

Independent investigators and jurists, with their own staff and budget, will be needed if such identifications are to be made with any credibility. The resources misspent on suppressing drug trafficking could be used to co-ordinate police action against terrorism. Indeed the link between drug-trafficking and terrorism means that a policy of de-criminalising drugs would fit well with a strategy for minimising terrorism. In the nature of any anti-terrorism agreement it should not be possible for one state to impose its criteria of terrorism on another and states which themselves practiced or condoned terror will destroy their own legitimacy. Realists may say that Washington and Moscow will covertly support terrorist groups in the future as they have in the past. Perhaps this is true. But in this case they will risk being arraigned before a supranational body and an aroused world public opinion. If the supranational body refuses to arraign powerful states, as may well happen, then this itself will prompt further protests and campaigns. Stopping powerful states from colluding with terror is not going to be easy but that is not a reason for not making the effort and for making sure that there are supranational guarantees.

An accord against terrorism would furnish opportunities to combat false accusations with the international secretariat developing its own criteria and tests. There remains the uncomfortable fact that not all such accusations will be false. Obviously good causes can be championed by bad methods. But when that happens it usually weakens those causes.

The term terror entered the political lexicon with the guillotine when the French revolution was hurling itself against the counter-revolutionary offensive of the European Ancien regime. Much of the legislation of this time--freeing the slaves, establishing secular education and proclaiming universal social rights--represented a huge step forward for humanity. But the terror weakened the Jacobin republic and hastened its overthrow. Stalin's much more extensive terror in the thirties weakened the Soviet Union at a critical time, contributing to early Nazi advances. Likewise, the Western allies' 'terror bombing' in 1944 had negligible impact on German output while actually boosting civilian morale.

If all movements of political or social liberation were induced to abandon terrorist methods there would be a gain and more space would be created for mass opposition to injustice. The tactics of guerrilla war, as elaborated by Guevara, Mao and Ho Chi Minh, aimed at cultivating

civilian support, winning over enemy soldiers and isolating the opposing governments, not terrorising the population. In the early labour movement Marxists, social democrats and most syndicalists opposed terroristic methods, and it was those movements that clung to this restraint which generally survived and flourished. The practice of terror by the early Soviet republic during the civil war was defended on the grounds that it helped to win more time but was probably a factor of demoralisation both then and subsequently. In any military conflict violence is deployed in ways that aim to destroy, immobilise or capture the opponent, but it is usually much better to surprise than to terrify. Recently in Lebanon some observers detected a shift in the policy of Hizbullah when it moved away from indiscriminate attacks against all Israelis and concentrated instead on attacking occupying military personnel in southern Lebanon--a move to political focus which led to Israeli withdrawal. If there was an international agreement against terrorism some Palestinians organisations might feel the need to abandon terror tactics that do them no good anyway--in the process they could isolate the Israeli state and throw into proper relief the ethnic cleansing which it continues to practice.

So long as there is oppression in the world there will be resistance, and where political systems are autocratic or alien this will often produce violent resistance. But progressives have learnt to distinguish between resistance which uses just and effective means to challenge and overthrow intolerable conditions, on the one hand, and acts of indiscriminate and exemplary violence, targeted against civilians and whole communities, on the other. Sometimes it may seem instrumentally effective to countenance torture or terror, but movements that employ such methods begin to stultify, deaden and demoralise themselves and to poison the cause for which they are fighting.

Fighters for liberation have nothing to lose by disavowing terror. It is interesting to reflect that the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutionaries inflicted major defeats on the United States and its proteges mainly without resort to such methods. Indeed they sought to engage US civilians in dialogue, not blow them to bits. The Vietnamese did use terror against civilian officials of the South Vietnamese government but it was the US forces which wantonly slaughtered villagers and employed cluster bombs. War brutalises. Even commanders claiming to fight for noble causes or in self-defense will sometimes resort to torture or terror. The 'rules of war' seek to regulate and channel the practice of violence but will always be difficult to define and enforce. Cynics who therefore believe that they can be ignored and flouted make a serious mistake and weaken their cause. Modern terrorism almost always flouts the rules of war by targeting civilians, though in the past anarchists acts of violence sometimes aimed exclusively at autocrats and their armed retainers while some nationalist violence aimed exclusively at the colonising power.

President Bush's notion of a 'war on terrorism' does have one advantage over the alternative notion that bringing terrorists to book is just a matter of law enforcement against criminals. As noted above, the British discovered in India, Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya, Palestine and Ireland that it was better to treat resistance, even terrorist resistance, as political since this was a way of controlling it. Sometimes British withdrawal was seen as completing the military effort (e.g. Malaya) while, in other cases, there were direct negotiations with political leaders linked to terrorist movements, leading to a hand over of power to them. If there was an international accord against terrorism it would be necessary and advisable that it should try to bring out into the open any genuine political and social injustices that might motivate, or lend credibility to, the terrorist group. A moralistic refusal to negotiate with terrorists in such a situation is rarely effective and merely serves to perpetuate hatred and injustice.

While the critique of terrorism should not be skipped simply because of the misdeeds, including complicity in terrorism, of the USA, the number and extent of the misdeeds should induce a more chastened American approach to the question. US presidents have sanctioned the assassination of foreign leaders like Lumumba, Allende and Castro. They have connived at death squads, carpet bombed Iraq and fostered the terror sown by RENAMO and UNITA in Southern Africa. So contrition on their part is in order. Even in the current campaign there are voices urging the brutal assertion of US power, willingness to inflict large-scale civilian casualties and to work with 'unsavoury allies' (as if that was unprecedented). Consider Senator John McCain's bluster: 'Only the complete destruction of international terrorism and the regimes that sponsor it will spare America from future attack American military power is the most important part. When it is brought to bear in great and terrible measure, it is a thing to strike terror in the heart of anyone who opposes it. No mountain is big enough, no cave deep

enough to hide from the full fury of American power.' But if Washington allows itself to be swayed by such overwrought counsel then firestorms in the Hindu Kush will only encourage further 'blowback'.

There are those in the Muslim world who find something positive in the democratic aspects of US culture. But if they see the US President propping up autocracy and monarchy in their lands the influence of US culture will actually undermine US state policy. The terror network has already shown the autonomy of far-flung exile chains and the new alliances they make possible. Democratic, radical and secular nationalist currents are also present in this milieu, including in the Saudi, Afghan, and Pakistani diaspora, and their mobilisation could help to head off the 'clash of civilisation' danger. But these people will not be rallying behind generals, sheiks and kings, even comparatively decent ones like the ex-monarch of Afghanistan.

If the US does not commit itself to a genuinely democratic solution, under UN auspices and supported by credible Muslim states, it risks strengthening Al Qaeda and, as has been starkly clear from the outset, could help them to seize power in a nuclear state--a country as unstable as former Yugoslavia and with a deep grudge against India, another nuclear state. The transnational structures so far proposed by the US are even more dangerous and deficit than those of the Cold War era. It would also involve spurning the opportunity to make a reality of the US Security Council and to bring in Russia and China from the diplomatic limbo to which they are currently condemned. Since these two powers are also armed with nuclear weapons the potential gain from an internationalist approach is genuinely epochal. But international nuclear disarmament--and parallel agreements covering other weapons of mass destruction--will require that the major powers are also covered and that they will permit international inspection and verification. Only this would make it impossible for medium and smaller states to stand apart from the process. A genuine campaign against terrorism could thus actually help the world to face up to the much worse threat of the tens of thousands of nuclear war-heads which still menace our species and planet. Terror weapons cannot be kept in sealed and self-contained compartments. If terrorism itself proliferates and escalates it will be more difficult to insulate weapons of mass destruction--biological as well as nuclear--from terrorist appropriation.

Since 1945 no nuclear bomb has exploded in an large urban area. The destruction of Lower Manhattan on and after September 11 was terrible enough but only a fraction of the devastation that a single nuclear weapon would cause if dropped on a city in the Indian sub-continent. But because it has happened September 11 could help us to grasp the importance of the still greater--if less palpable--calamities that current global arrangements still menace.