

## CHAPTER 1

## Worlds in Collision

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It is curious how a specific date – not a year, but a specific month and a specific day – have almost universally come to define a world historical crisis. The signposts of world affairs in the twentieth century were fixed in particular places: Sarajevo, Munich, Suez, Cuba, Vietnam and the rest. In the case of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon it is as if we instantly understood that the meanings of these ‘events’ were global, beyond locality, an out-of-geography experience. September 11 was a place we all shared.

It was a place we all shared because there was a sense that what we were witnessing, literally, was a collision of worlds. The suffocating smoke and debris from the collapse of the Twin Towers (the image on the cover of this book) not only show the material destruction that follows when worlds collide, but also symbolize the difficulty of understanding colliding thought-worlds. The collisions we pick out in this chapter run through the book: those between different political entities, struggling for power and employing violence and other traditional instruments of policy; and between those thought-worlds characterized by different beliefs about what is reality, what constitutes reliable knowledge and how we should behave. Although what follows are presented as collisions in the context of September 11, we have chosen not to link them by a ‘versus’, because in our view most of them do not necessarily stand in opposition. We have linked them by ‘and’. The one exception – the one unambiguous *versus* – is terrorism itself.

**Islam and the United States**

In the collision between the United States and Islam two parallel questions have pressed for answers. Why is the United States hated in so

many parts of the world? And why is Islam so feared? The answer at one level is easy: the United States is hated because it is feared, while Islam is feared because it is hated. This is a start. In the search for a fuller answer, unfortunately, the chief protagonists shy away. It should be a time for introspection, for the deepening of self-knowledge; instead, self-justification has been the norm.

Introspection in the United States is discouraged by the very circumstances of the attacks. Such was the sense of homeland violation that it was no surprise when President Bush demanded a loyalty test: 'Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists', he told Congress on September 20, 2001.<sup>1</sup> As a result, to criticize the White House's handling of the crisis, or to seek an explanation for the attacks that is more penetrating than simply asserting the nihilistic mindsets of the perpetrators, is considered to be tantamount to being sympathetic to the terrorists. To try to find reasons is seen as a slippery slope towards concluding that the United States 'deserved it', and hence is treason. Some external friends might have kept quiet out of opportunism. Like the UK, they have stood (more or less) 'shoulder to shoulder' with the United States in its time of crisis, in the hope, one day, that the United States would do the same for them.

So why is the United States hated? 'It' is not: and the very question betrays a powerful stereotyping that feeds global disorder. We do not believe that the 'United States' is hated. There is a large Muslim population in the country not seeking to emigrate; there is a well of respect for American life and people throughout the world. Without doubt, many people have ambivalent feelings towards US society: but so do many of us about our own societies. The 'United States' must be disaggregated. Then it becomes apparent that it is the policies of successive US governments that are so hated: the manner in which the world's sole superpower tends always to get its way; its sometimes brutal foreign policy and profitable project of globalization; its support for tyrants while mouthing the language of democracy and human rights; and the way it uses local proxies to dominate the global order. However benign the US hegemon, it will be feared because it is drawn as no other power into the daily business of running the world, and it will get its way. In any human situation, such structural power tends to provoke the hostility of those who are not listened to, or who do not get their way, ever.

US governments have, without doubt, much to answer for. Set against this, as a society, the US is an idea to which countless victims flock, seeking refuge from tyranny and hunger. Its capacity for

economic regenerations is such that it is one of the few countries to treat immigration as an economic resource rather than a burden. One wonders how many of those demonstrating against 'The Great Satan' in places like Iran, Pakistan and Iraq, would pass up the opportunity to join generations of Poles, Italians, Cubans and others who have helped create the land of the free? Many Muslim asylum seekers, migrants and intellectuals have chosen the United States as the site of their hopes for themselves and their families, and not countries at the heart of the Islamic world. The distinction between the US state and US society is vital, and too little heeded by those casually labelling the United States as universally hated, and those critics of this or that policy casually labelling them as 'anti-American'.

Self-knowledge never comes easily. Many Americans are held back from achieving a better understanding of how their government is perceived by knowing so little of their own history, and even less of the history of other peoples. It is not that long since George W. Bush, then on the campaign trail, was unable to name several heads of state, including President Musharraf of Pakistan. After 9/11, Musharraf's agreement to 'full cooperation' in the global war on terror was a decisive part of US coalition building. Lack of knowledge is made worse by the mythological history promoted for profit and entertainment by Hollywood. Intensely law-abiding people who are brought up to believe they belong to the land of the free, the home of the brave, and the shining city on the hill, and who are convinced that their country is a force for good in the world, find it truly shocking when told by one of their own leading intellectuals, Susan Sontag, that 'America is founded on genocide'.<sup>2</sup> The thought is so shocking that it is erased from memory, or she is. Ignorance and myth can breed self-righteousness – a dangerous foundation on which to engage with the world.

The moral high ground is where ethnocentric memories reside. And here, also, is where there are so many similarities between the Bush presidency and the Reagan era. In both cases there is a gap between the self-image of standing firm for liberty, democracy, international law and peace, while conducting policies characterized by inconsistency on free trade, the support of tyrants, economic imperialism, playing fast and loose with international law and, when necessary, being ready, willing and able to use violence. The echoes of the Reagan era are the stronger today because of the return of so many officials of that time to key positions in Washington.

If power is part of the problem with the United States, it is lack of power that besets Islam. In various contexts in recent years, Muslims

have been on the receiving end of world politics. They have frequently been victims, although they are invariably represented as perpetrators. As with the US, it is therefore necessary to disaggregate 'Islam'. The stereotype is of suicide bombers, terrorists and fundamentalist clerics. But when one contemplates the 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, the emptiness of the stereotype is evident; most live lives of tolerance, order and decency. It is true that many Muslims regard with distaste some of the excesses of 'Western' life (the breakdown of family life, crime, pornography, and so on) but this is not much different to the feelings of many in the West. If we strip away national structures, militarized security managers and religious fanatics, it is possible to see here a core of shared values. Sections of the Islamic world celebrated the attacks on September 11, but these were drowned out by the expressions of sympathy shown for innocent victims.

However, it cannot be avoided that there were celebrations, and the terrorists did identify with Islam. Introspection is needed, but as with the United States the search for self-knowledge is not a priority. Nor is it encouraged in Islamic states and societies, where tyranny and constraints on freedom of enquiry are widespread. These are circumstances in which it is easier to blame others. So, is 'it' about Islam? For understandable reasons Western political leaders have gone out of their way to say 'No'. Soon after the attacks, Prime Minister Blair, for example, said that 'we do not act against Islam'.<sup>3</sup> He and other leaders attempted to limit intercultural hostility by showing sensitivity to cultural particularities while at the same time underlining common values. Others, without the pressures of office, maintained different views. Salman Rushdie insisted: 'Yes, this is about Islam.'<sup>4</sup> Osama bin Laden, for example, has been part of a radical political movement of Islamists who have had a presence in Egypt, Algeria, Iran and Pakistan. The origins of the Taliban government in 1994 exemplify the rise of Islamism, with its adherence to a particular interpretation of the faith and its desire to fight a holy war against the 'infidel' using a transnational coalition of Islamist warriors.<sup>5</sup> It is partly about Islam, therefore, but there is much more to fathom, from the fantasies of the terrorists of September to the unravelling of the relationships between culture, politics and religion in the Islamic world. The latter is not helped by the fact that many intellectuals in the West treat the subject as 'taboo', the result of physical fear, or guilt for the imperial past, or because of the fashion for not wanting to engage in intercultural critique.<sup>6</sup> The attempt to explain what happened with reference to religion is crude reductionism. Trying to unravel the intricacies of the Muslim world

cannot be achieved by 'naive references to the Koran'; this, according to Stephen Chan, would be 'as stupid as trying to understand "the West" by Saddam distributing the Bible and talking about the children of Abraham'.<sup>7</sup> What is more, ideas about defending the faith, by force if necessary, are present in many of the world's religions. It is possible to find passages in Judaism, Christianity and in the Koran 'that legitimate violence, terror and senseless sacrifice'.<sup>8</sup>

We are not suggesting here anything as naive as the simple idea that deeper self-knowledge on the part of Muslims and Americans will stop future collisions of one sort or another, but it would help to change the climate. What we have suggested here, all too briefly, is the critical point that we are not confronted today by a simple 'clash of civilizations'.<sup>9</sup> What we have instead is a confusion of misunderstandings, crude stereotypes, and parallel absences of self-knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The United States and Islam represent major forces in contemporary world politics: one is politically and economically centralized and dominant in terms of both material and soft power, while the other is politically decentralized and weak but ideationally massively influential. An attitudinal shift is needed, and the starting point may have been precisely identified by a Palestinian journalist who, when asked if he could say one thing to Americans in the aftermath of September 11, replied: 'America, we feel your pain. Isn't it time you felt ours?'

### **The West and the Rest**

If we take Osama bin Laden's public statements as our guide, the al-Qaeda network does not believe that it is in a fight with the 'West' so much as with the United States. Yet many commentators and some political leaders have seen the US-Islam collision as a particular manifestation of a much wider one. The collapse of the Twin Towers exposed a gap into which politicians and writers, journalists and academics have poured explanations based on their worries about globalization, fears about anarchy, guilt about Israel, shame about Africa, anxiety about the unknown, and a generalized sense of responsibility for what happened.

The world is not working for countless millions of its inhabitants. There is a growing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' through profit-led globalization, the buccaneering behaviour of global corporations, the voracious consumption of Western societies, the marginalization of the 'majority world', failed states, human rights abuses, cycles of economic boom and bust, regional crises in the Balkans and central Africa and elsewhere, escalating violence in the

Middle East, Western support for tyranny while ritualistically declaring its commitment to democracy, increasing numbers of desperate refugees, societies crippled by debt, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, environmental decay, the AIDS plague which continues to terrorize and kill in millions and enervate societies, and so on. These are seen as the breeding grounds for rage against 'the West' – but does it explain terror?<sup>11</sup> We know from history that the poor and humiliated might do anything if roused by voices able to promise them the earth, or heaven. Does al-Qaeda speak for the global poor? Whatever doubts may persist about the electoral legitimacy of George W. Bush, nobody elected Osama bin Laden, and the attacks were not followed by the discovery of a political testament by the perpetrators.

It does not dishonour those murdered in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania to point out, as did the leader writers of the *New Statesman* shortly afterwards, that the dead that day numbered less than half the total of children who die somewhere in the world each day from diarrhoea (caused by the lack of clean water). The point is not about forgetting September 11, but of remembering what the world is like every day. 'Never forget the other Terror' was the message, and the great American writer Mark Twain provided the text. Recalling the way Europe trembled in the 1790s as the terror swept through France, Twain pointed out that there had been two 'Reigns of Terror'. The first was the immediate and urgent one, which brought 'the horror of swift death'; the other resulted in 'lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty and heartbreak'. The former 'inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred million'. Writing as if for today, Twain said that the one brief terror 'we have all been ... diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over', whereas the other we had never learnt to see 'in its vastness or pity as it deserves'.<sup>12</sup> Terrorism is an abomination and must be countered, but poverty is the world's biggest killer.

Images of terrorism and poverty have fed fears of the 'coming anarchy' envisioned in the early 1990s by Robert D. Kaplan. He warned of a world splitting apart – a 'bifurcated world' – with the West inhabiting islands of comfort being threatened by a tidal wave of criminal anarchy on the part of the masses of alien races and cultures. It would be a violent state of nature in which he thought it doubtful whether the West could survive in its present form.<sup>13</sup> September 11 has confirmed this 'new pessimism'. One response has been the call to 'reorder' the world, by leaders such as Prime Minister Blair. Would any new world order – echoing the jibe of a decade earlier – simply be another version of the New World's order?

Some argue that the present crisis reveals how foolish have been the ideals of those who have imagined that the world could ever come together sharing a set of common values. But while the attacks and the reactions to them have revealed incompatibilities, there has been a range of agreement among those of different faiths, and no faiths, on what constitutes proper behaviour. There has been a massive rejection of terrorism as an instrument of politics, for example. Definitional difficulties remain, of course, but here is a case where collectivities have shared values about behaviour, even if they do not share the same prophet. We are not therefore witnessing a comprehensive clash of incompatible values across the world. It is simply not the case empirically. The south and north coexist in New York. The targeting of that city had a logic in terms of it being the highest symbol of modernity, but was inept at the human level, for it is a living example of people of all cultures being able to share the same busy space. The people of many nations and different faiths who were murdered in the World Trade Center are a tragic testimony to that fact. There are no clear-cut 'civilizational' lines. Western leaders in recent months have regularly pointed out their intervention on behalf of Muslim victims in Kosovo in 1999. As the bombs started dropping on Afghanistan in October 2001, the early stages of the trial of former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic gave some credence to their arguments.

It would be an error of historic proportions to exaggerate the incompatibility between the thought-worlds of the so-called West and the so-called Rest. We in the West may not be able to understand the thinking of the mass murderers of September 11, but few in the rest of the world could comprehend their motives either. In the week after the attacks a leading Muslim writer, Ziauddin Sardar, wrote:

Islam cannot explain the actions of the suicide hijackers, just as Christianity cannot explain the gas chambers, Catholicism the bombing at Omagh. They are acts beyond belief, by people who long ago abandoned the path of Islam.

The rest of the article is an account of how the actions of the terrorists were outside the faith and reasoning of Islam.<sup>14</sup> Mohammed Atta's mindset was no more comprehensible to the Arab street than that of Timothy McVeigh had been to the American suburb.

All this suggests that the image of the West and the Rest should be challenged. This metanarrative reifies 'the West' and other groupings as if they are the categorical realities of world politics. Again, life is more

complex, except for the terrorist. Speaking for the part of the world in which he lives, Umberto Eco writes:

We are a pluralist civilisation because we allow mosques to be built in our countries, and we are not going to stop simply because Christian missionaries are thrown into prison in Kabul. If we did so, we too would become Taliban.<sup>15</sup>

If the first step is to challenge the notion of a bifurcated world, the second is to accept Mark Twain's warning. There is a relationship between the two terrors, if not a direct one. Even as we in the West seek to deal with the immediate terror resulting from the attacks of September 11, attempting to overcome the terror we have not learned to see will in itself mark the beginning of a victory.

### Terror versus Dialogue

Terrorism is a method of political action that uses violence (or deliberately produces fear) against civilians and civilian infrastructure in order to influence behaviour, to inflict punishment or to exact revenge. For the perpetrators, the point is to make the target group afraid of today, afraid of tomorrow, and afraid of each other.<sup>16</sup> Terrorism is an act, not an ideology. Its instruments are assassination, mass murder, hijacking, bombing, kidnapping and intimidation. Such acts can be committed by states as well as private groups.

Western states have consistently sought to deny that states can commit terrorism. The bias of terror has always been 'against people and in favour of governments'.<sup>17</sup> Whether government or group, motivation should play no part in assessing whether terrorism has taken place. Terror is delineated by method, not motives. Even if actors are motivated by noble objectives – such as the liberation of their homeland – these are deformed by terrorist practices. Third World states have consistently sought to deny that liberation movements can commit terrorism. *All* states deny specific accusations of terrorism although *many* routinely use torture, a particular form of terror against individuals. Both terror and torture are justified pragmatically in the context of 'supreme emergency', although neither method is justified morally.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth remembering that the word 'terror' came into prominence during the French Revolution, a moment in history which also witnessed the beginnings of ideas about the inalienable rights and freedoms of individual citizens. In the two centuries that followed,



European states gradually sought to enmesh these values in domestic political constitutions based on dialogue and negotiation. Yet in their external relations, states viewed terror (and terror by proxy) as a legitimate weapon for furthering their interests. One of the tragic paradoxes of the twentieth century is that those states which have most closely self-identified with the path of the Enlightenment have committed acts of barbarism that no modern terrorist group has yet been able to match. As producers of terror, states remain far more significant than non-state groups, although the emerging market in relatively cheap weapons of mass destruction could level this particular killing field in the future.

Acts of terrorism have been seen on every continent. Perpetrators come from diverse religions and ethnic groups, but governments and networks in the Islamic world commit the most extreme forms of terror. This is true of interstate conflict (the Iran–Iraq war) and intrastate conflict (such as the violence perpetrated by Algerian Islamists). According to Walter Laquer, ‘Muslim states and Muslim minorities are involved in almost 90 percent of all sub-state terrorist conflicts.’<sup>19</sup> What Laquer fails to make clear is that in many of these cases (such as Bosnia and Palestine), Muslims are not the primary cause of the violence.<sup>20</sup>

If it is not faith, then is it poverty that forces certain states and non-state actors to terrorize? It has been commonplace to read explanations of this kind, as though poverty itself breeds extremism, yet it is just as easy to think of examples where extreme views and wealth march hand in hand (Christian fundamentalism in the United States, for example). Who becomes a terrorist is not simply a consequence of an unjust environment. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda do not belong to the poor of the Middle East; they belong to an old tradition in which self-serving elites seize upon and manipulate the grievances of the poor.

Al-Qaeda (literally, ‘the base’) illustrates the extent to which terrorism has more complex causes than material dispossession. To carry out a war against the West, bin Laden and his associates have built an army of around 5000 trained terrorists. Contrary to the stereotype of al-Qaeda as a band of itinerant cave dwellers, ‘they’re modern, and they use modern methods’.<sup>21</sup> One of these modern methods is communicating their message using video recordings, broadcast on an Arab satellite channel and reported in the world’s media. It is in these messages that bin Laden exploits symbolic references to the fate of the world’s Arabs and Muslims. He tells his ‘brothers’ to ‘rise up’ and ‘die defending Islam’ against the ‘infidels’. He gives his followers no choice: ‘Muslims have to ally themselves to Muslims.’<sup>22</sup> Given the widespread feeling of injustice perpetrated by Western states against

Islamic states, these messages strike a chord among many ordinary Muslims. This anger is not easily dissipated given that many governments in the Middle East lack popular legitimacy, and what is more, the educated middle classes are on the whole unwilling to defend alternative values of negotiation and inclusion. Into this void, extremists get to speak for Islam on virulently anti-American TV networks like al-Jazeera.<sup>23</sup>

Terrorism collides with notions of politics grounded in democratic values. In an ideal polity, political action is based on dialogue, one in which participants rationally seek to persuade others of the universal validity of their moral beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Those holding values and beliefs that are at odds with the majority are listened to, free of the fear of violence; questions of cultural difference are negotiated within a framework of equality.

Even if the war against terrorism succeeds in defeating the al-Qaeda network, it will not bring about a resolution to the political problems that they have exploited. This can only be achieved by nurturing the values that collide with fear, hatred and a willingness to commit any acts in the hope of changing the course of history. Here there is a responsibility on all actors involved in the current conflagration to encourage voices of moderation, human rights and religious toleration. Such an approach would be both moral and prudent in a world where nuclear materials can be acquired with relative ease. Unless dialogue can prevail within and between cultures, nuclear terrorism is a real and horrific possibility.

### **Force and Law**

The worlds of force and law collide in ways that are comparable to terror and dialogue. There is, however, one significant difference. Whereas terrorist acts are always unlawful, there are some circumstances where force is justified. Force may be used to disarm or defeat terrorists. This is the position that the United Nations, and many peoples around the world, have adopted since 9/11. But even if we concede that the worlds of force and law are not always in collision, extreme caution must be exercised on the part of those who take up arms against terrorists to ensure the legality of their actions. The great danger is that fighting terrorism might provoke ruthless behaviours that represent some sort of victory for the terrorists.

To prevent the slide into unlawful violence, a number of conditions must be met. First, leaders of the war 'for freedom and justice' must be certain that all pacific forms of redress have either been exhausted or

are ineffective. Second, there should be no doubt about the justice of the cause. And third, those responsible for the conduct of the war must act within the restraints established by the laws of war.

On October 8, 'Operation Enduring Freedom' began as B52s and F14s struck at suspected al-Qaeda bases. Was there an alternative to this strategy of using force against the Taliban? Could the crimes have been met with an international police operation? Many have argued that international law is the appropriate mechanism to establish the guilt or innocence of those suspected of assisting the attacks. True, the US and UK governments published evidence linking bin Laden and al-Qaeda to the atrocities, but this was little more than 'pretty good information', according to Secretary of State Colin Powell.<sup>25</sup> It did not establish guilt beyond reasonable doubt. There is a deeper issue at stake here, and one that is written into the heart of democratic societies: it is not for the victim of a crime (or their political leaders) to establish the guilt of an accused, only an impartial court can do this. Since no court in the US could be expected to be even-handed in this situation, there was a strong case for setting up a court in The Hague, like the trial of ex-president Slobodan Milosevic.

Attempting to capture and prosecute alleged terrorists was only one aspect of a solution that did not involve a global war against terrorists, and those states thought to harbour them. While this approach found some supporters in civil society, they were quickly sidelined. In part this was because of serious practical concerns. A major problem was how to apprehend those suspected of planning the attacks without using military force, especially when they had found protection inside a sovereign state that was believed to be unwilling to give them up. Even if the main suspects could have been captured by careful police and intelligence work, a guilty verdict would not have been acceptable to millions of Muslims if the trial had been conducted in a 'victor's court'. To be effective, the legal process must have a degree of legitimacy in the eyes not only of the prosecution but also of the accused. In the absence of this, the case against bin Laden and his associates would have become little more than a spectacle to be exploited.

Not surprisingly, few in the US supported the idea of an international police action. The White House had to 'do something', and that something was interpreted as military action. This strategy was risky. Even if the military aims had been restricted to the elimination of al-Qaeda's terrorist capacity in Afghanistan, it was unclear what would count as a victory. The problem of fighting a war against terrorism is that one never knows if it has been won. In this 'new kind of war', there

will never be a moment when one can be certain that the last piece of the adversary's ground has been occupied, for it might be in Florida. When, then, can the victor's flag be raised? Terrorists can lie in waiting, or they can move to cells in other territories. They may not fight back at once, planning instead a revenge attack that may take place months or years ahead. Out of the clear blue sky, as on September 11, might come another collision to change our world, harming the innocent and spreading further shockwaves of fear.

The pursuit of a military solution faces many obstacles, especially when victory is defined as broadly as 'a series of decisive actions against terrorist organisations and those who harbour and support them'.<sup>26</sup> It may be risky, but is it just? Richard Falk, a longstanding opponent of previous US military actions, has argued that it was 'the first truly just war since World War II'.<sup>27</sup> It is a just war because the threat posed by Osama bin Laden could not be resolved through dialogue given its genocidal intent against Americans and Jews, and its goal of waging an unlimited civilizational war. Such reasoning combines many kinds of justification, including punishment and deterrence. Yet it was self-defence that representatives of the US government chose to invoke when they needed to make a formal justification for their actions. While there remains an intense legal debate as to what is permitted by self-defence, the crucial point is that the US government's argument was affirmed in two UN Security Council Resolutions (1368 of September 12, and 1373 of September 28) and gained approval in many other international forums. This support, however, should not be interpreted as providing a cover for future military acts against suspected terrorist groups or states that harbour them, not least because of the Taliban's near total ostracism from the international community.

Even if the justice of the cause is thought to be a sufficient reason for using military power, the worlds of law and force will still collide unless every effort is made to minimize harm done to civilians. The official view is that a great deal of care has been taken in identifying targets in Afghanistan, including the involvement of lawyers to assess the likelihood of collateral damage. General Franks, leading the operation, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that 'this is the most accurate war ever fought'.<sup>28</sup> The unofficial view, put forward by human rights groups and researchers, is that there have been thousands of civilian casualties as well as the continuing humanitarian disaster. Who should we believe? It is too soon to tell. When more reliable evidence can be gathered, the question of the extent of civilian casualties will play a prominent role when assessments are made about the rightness of the US strategy.

There may have been no alternative to a military response acceptable to the vast majority of US citizens, but by choosing warfighting rather than crimefighting, critics of US policy argued that it risked reproducing the logic of the terrorists. When we persuade ourselves that war is the only way of prevailing (as the jihadists have), we become self-righteous about our cause (as Islamists are about theirs), and we risk blurring the distinction between warriors and non-combatants (as al-Qaeda has done with its instruction 'to kill the Americans and their allies'<sup>29</sup>). This is not to suggest a moral equivalence between those responsible for the terrorist atrocities of September 11, and those leading the war against terror. Rather, it is a warning that victims all too often become bullies. With this in mind it is crucial to think not only about what our military actions might do to the enemy, but also about what they are doing to us.

### States and Networks

September 11 has begun a new chapter in the historic rivalry between states and non-state actors. Since the end of the Middle Ages sovereign states had come to triumph over other kinds of political orders such as city states, empires, religious orders, dynasties and feudal barons. The wave of decolonization in the twentieth century saw the code of the state initially dominant in Europe being copied universally. In Africa and Asia, the boundaries of the political community were framed by a juridical relationship between population, government and a delimited territory. Even when these new states were weak and unable to control their territory, other sovereign states continued to grant them recognition and all the usual prerogatives that come with being a member of the 'international community'.

The reality of the global order has not always conformed to the neat lines on maps. Even strong states have had their sovereignty routinely compromised either by coercion or by consent. The post-Second World War settlement, for example, forced Germany to give up its autonomy in the area of security policy, while the process of European integration led the same country voluntarily to give up a good deal of its economic autonomy. Closer attention to history has shown us that the juridical idea of separate sovereign spaces has always been contested by interventions of a material and ideological kind.<sup>30</sup>

One of the striking aspects of the attacks on the US was the manner in which many of the settled norms of the so-called Westphalian system of states was unhinged. The enemy was not a state, and their

immediate aim was not to acquire territory but to alter the ideological balance of power. Such a battle is only one move in what al-Qaeda see as its longer game; namely, a holy war against infidels. The means of fighting this war are also significantly different from the historic pattern of interstate rivalry. Violence is not carried out directly by agents of the state, and the target is not opposing armies but civilians (these are acts that are in breach of existing international legal norms that apply to states and opposition movements).<sup>31</sup>

Terrorist acts in distant lands have become easier with technological advances. Cellphones and the internet allow groups to coordinate their activities (but also to be traced). Documents on the web assisted the 9/11 attackers to access data on the design characteristics of the World Trade Center. What is more, weapons are now available that have greater accuracy, more destructive power and enhanced portability; their availability is also easy, owing to the fact that the world is awash with weapons of all kinds. In addition, there is great potential to divert non-military power (aircraft, industrial explosives, chemicals, and so on) to destructive ends. What the terrorists had to do on 9/11 was to work out how to release such power and redirect it. Two civilian aircraft were able to deliver 'a kiloton of explosive power' into the Twin Towers 'with deadly accuracy'.<sup>32</sup>

Terror networks need more than weapons: they also need bases, and this is why the US used force against the Taliban government which maintained a 'close alliance' with al-Qaeda.<sup>33</sup> Bin Laden's network had provided military and economic support for the Taliban in the civil war that engulfed the country in the late 1990s. In return, the Taliban allowed al-Qaeda to set up a dozen or so training camps in the knowledge that the warriors and weapons they produced would be used for shared purposes.<sup>34</sup> It was not an alliance destined to prosper. It is commonplace to hear how vulnerable modern societies are to the weapons of the terrorist. This is true. But it does not compare with the vulnerability of weak and failed states to the advanced weaponry of resolute modern societies.

September 11 illustrates the process by which state power is evinced by transnational networks *and* the concomitant attempt by states to reassert the primacy of the interstate realm. Before toppling the Taliban became a stated US war aim three weeks after the bombing began,<sup>35</sup> the US had sought to do business with the new order in Kabul. The prospect of a route to the rich energy resources of central and west Asia propelled US political and corporate elites into an intense round of commercial diplomacy. In 1998, Dick Cheney, now US Vice-President,

said: 'I cannot think of a time when we have had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically important as the Caspian.' More graphically, a US diplomat saw in this tragic land a vision of a new Saudi Arabia, a country 'with pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law', to which he added: 'We can live with that.'<sup>36</sup> It would be mistaken, however, to think that the US was motivated solely by geopolitical interests, since it re-evaluated its stance towards the Taliban largely on ethical grounds. Two factors were important in this respect: first, Afghanistan continued to be the largest exporter of opium in the world; second, the government's appalling human rights record jarred with the democratic ideals espoused by the Clinton administration. As a consequence, both in Washington and at the UN, the Taliban became increasingly isolated. In the words of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: 'We are opposed to the Taliban because of their treatment of women and children' and 'their general lack of respect for human dignity'.<sup>37</sup>

Under the influence of the propaganda of hyperglobalization, many have been dazzled by non-state actors. September 11 underlines the continuing power of states. Al-Qaeda has flourished in places where state structures are either weak or non-existent. Funded by other states and private actors, al-Qaeda was able to establish itself in Afghanistan and the Yemen by brokering deals with the governments to aid them in their own civil wars. The long process of state formation (and decline) in the post-colonial world is connected to transnational networks in complex ways, just as in the era of colonization trading companies and religions aided and abetted the expansion of the states system from its European core to the world beyond its frontiers. In this sense, 9/11 and the global war on terror have not fundamentally altered the dynamic interplay of territoriality and transnationalism.

### Communities of Power and the Power of Community

Great practitioners of *raison d'état* like Machiavelli tell us that the first responsibility of leadership is to organize power. This means having strong defences and the capacity to punish others that threaten or use force against your people. In its modern guise, the doctrine places primacy on the state as the protector of the community, the condition for the preservation of its values, institutions and culture. Modern states can therefore be thought of as communities of power.

Like all doctrines, *raison d'état* is open to competing interpretations. It can lend itself to an expansionist understanding, where security leads

a state to conquer its neighbours. The fact that *they* are a different community of power, with alternative values and beliefs, is itself thought to constitute a threat to *us*. This is the historic 'security dilemma', the unresolvable uncertainty one state has about the intentions of others.<sup>38</sup> The 'war against terrorism' has already ratcheted up security dilemmas in several regions. Before a satisfactory phrase for the period since the end of the Cold War era had been invented, it looks as though we are on course for a psychological and functional equivalent. The parallels are striking, and we have been here many times: the phrase *guerra fria* originated in the thirteenth century to describe the confrontation between Islam and Christianity in Spain.<sup>39</sup>

The collision between acting as communities of power or promoting the power of community is evident in Western debates about how to respond to 9/11. For the state that was the victim, this represents an old dilemma in the way the United States engages with the outside world, though with a new twist. Can the community be protected by conceiving security as a condition to be achieved *against* others (national security) or can it only be ultimately achieved *with* others (a 'common security')? This distinction is more than semantics. What follows in terms of diplomatic activity and military deployments are poles apart. For the United States in the period ahead the choice is between the search for safety through the exercise of narrowly defined national interests or the cultivation of political community on as wide a scale as possible. It is a choice between thinking about the US as a singular community of fate, as *raison d'état* suggests, or one among many 'overlapping communities of fate'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite emphasizing the right words about 'coalition building' in the period shortly after the attacks on the United States, it seems clear that the Bush administration's impulse to go it alone has won out. Where is NATO now? Or the EU? Or the UN? Some US officials and commentators do not think they need a multilateral approach, nakedly proclaiming, like Charles Krauthammer, that 'the US can do whatever it wants regardless of anyone else'.<sup>41</sup> Even more cautious voices like that of Secretary of State Colin Powell believe that the US does not require authorization for its actions from *any* international institution. A US-led war against Iraq will be a major test of the US-led coalition, particularly in the Arab world. And what if that war happens, and is successful? Will the reaction be a further spreading of US military might around the world? Will the United States then over-reach itself like so many great imperial powers in the past? Is the 'axis of evil' less about the real and present danger they face, but more about rationalizing



geopolitical ambitions, together with the tendency of great empires to reach beyond the present frontier?

In the 1980s, the idea of common security coincided with the growing sense that so many problems transcended national boundaries, and that there was a mismatch between narrow national security perspectives and the realization of shared goals concerning peace, the environment and the pursuit of basic rights. The idea of security as a shared value has been dramatically highlighted by the direct attack on the US homeland. September 11 showed that the world's most powerful state is not inviolable. Some parts of the world – notably Western Europe following two world wars – have learned that a shared sense of community is the strongest basis of security. In contrast, it is almost wholly absent in Israel–Palestine relations. Several weeks before the attacks on the United States, Faisal Bodi, a Muslim journalist, wrote an article extolling the virtue of 'Bombing for God'.<sup>42</sup> 'In the Muslim world,' he wrote, 'we celebrate what we call the martyr-bombers'. He referred to polls showing that 75 per cent of people in the Middle East supported the martyr-bombings against Israel. The message of the martyr-bombers was 'brutally clear', he said: 'as long as their people cannot live with dignity and in peace, Israelis should not expect to, either'. This blunt warning is one the now violated United States must heed, while at the same time pursuing the terrorists.

The debate about how the US and its allies should respond to the attacks has focused for the most part on immediate measures rather than long-term strategies. There has been an absence of defining statements of radical alternatives on the lines of common security. A notable exception was Tony Blair's speech to the Labour Party Conference in October 2001. The Prime Minister said:

Round the world, 11 September is bringing governments and people to reflect, consider and change ... There is a coming together. The power of community is asserting itself. We are realizing how fragile are our frontiers in the face of the world's new challenges.

His tone was evangelical but his themes were Kantian.<sup>43</sup> 'This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder the world around us.' He concluded his speech with the words: 'By strength of our common endeavour, we achieve more together than we can alone.'<sup>44</sup> Blair was both right and wrong. He was mistaken in thinking that a real global community might come from merely re-shaking the existing

pieces of the kaleidoscope. A truly reordered world needs new pieces. Where he was right was in thinking that people(s) can achieve more collectively than unilaterally. He was also prescient in guessing that old patterns might soon settle: they have, and the moment has not been seized.

### **A World of Whose Making?**

Who can we trust to guide us through the collisions of thought-worlds and power-plays that shape these stressful times, with some hope of moving beyond the colliding worlds of 9/11? Who is able to see through the smoke and debris of that infamous morning, and understand what really must be done to ensure that nothing like it ever happens again? Who will remake global order? And in whose interests will it be? Timescale is a traditional way of distinguishing mere politicians from great statesmen. For the former, problem solving means attending to today's agenda, and the next election. For great leaders, today's problems are not the real ones. This distinction shades into a difference of approach based on concern for symptoms as opposed to causes. In this respect, the overwhelming priority for the White House has been to attend to the symptoms, by seeking out the terrorists responsible for the attacks and threatening those who harbour them. In the short term this strategy has been more successful than its proponents could have predicted. A low-cost, mostly victorious, almost casualty-free war in 'self-defence' is not only the definition of a model military campaign; it is also the foundation for a successful presidential re-election campaign.

There are many voices around the world for whom today's problems – including 'the war against terrorism' – are not the real problems. September 11 was the deadly symptom of a hot-house global order in which rage germinates, and out of which ruthless leaders are able to pick suicidal accomplices. As it happens, extremism was in season well before the attacks on the United States. At the end of the twentieth century we witnessed a growing disposition of people in many parts of the world to say goodbye to reason. This was evident in the hypernationalism of the Balkans, the genocidal mentality of Rwanda, the fanatical religious beliefs of the Taliban, the fundamentalism of the religious right in the US, the intolerance of parts of the Islamic world, anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, and the interest in the paranormal, extraterritorial possibilities and 'new age' beliefs in many societies. We not only learned that God is not dead, but also – as G.K. Chesterton put

it a century earlier – that many people found it easier to believe in anything rather than believe in nothing.

The terrorists had beliefs that gave their lives meaning, though what those beliefs were remain contested, theoretically, psychologically and politically. What Mohammed Atta left in his delayed luggage, which serves as his only testimony, did not identify with any great political struggles. This is not an option for states and societies, as they construct their frameworks of meaning. At the end of the Cold War the United States lost the Soviet Empire but did not find a role. It did when the 'post-Cold War' collided with the future on 9/11 and became the 'war against terrorism'. Extremism and fear have given the US society a framework of meaning that was never possible from the 24/7 transactions of globalization. Some security measures of course should be taken, for many terrorists are beyond both appeasement and deterrence, but if terrorism is simply matched by escalating violence, then fear will be sovereign in world affairs, and the terrorists will have won some sort of victory. Writing in 1757, in his book *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke wrote that 'No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.' This is an important warning for societies that have already experienced the power of fear in the recent months, and seen the way that it fertilizes suspicion, groupthink and ruthlessness – and sometimes, insidiously, the most primitive of feelings about others. When fear rules, it is not difficult to offer pessimistic scenarios for the months and years ahead.

How much worse can it get? This may seem a strange question, because six months after the attacks, the war in Afghanistan has been declared a victory, the Kashmir crisis did not blow up, the 'friendly' governments of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are still in power, Osama bin Laden has disappeared from public view and may be dead, and no other major cataclysmic terrorist attacks have occurred. This is all true, but dangers are all around.

In Afghanistan, the situation remains very uncertain, with ground fighting and bombing still continuing, and key members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda having escaped; the country is in turmoil, poverty-stricken and warlord-dominated. It could yet, as so often in history, be a graveyard of hopes. In neighbouring Pakistan, the present 'pro-Western' government is vulnerable, and a coup by fundamentalist forces, incited by events in Kashmir and India, remains a possibility, and with it the nightmare of an 'Islamist bomb'. In India, levels of communal violence between Hindu nationalists and Muslims escalates dangerously, with hundreds already killed. Kashmir is therefore still the

most likely site for nuclear use since 1945. If south and west Asia are simmering, the Middle East has already boiled over. The conflict between Israel and Palestine both feeds upon and exacerbates turmoil elsewhere, and threatens to become a bloodbath whose consequences are hard to imagine. If the war against terrorism widens to include Iraq, Saddam Hussein might be expected, as an early gambit, to attack Israel, in order to polarize the region. The 'Arab street' has been ready to erupt, and this would be the spark. As it is, the House of Saud is thought to have shaky foundations (and with it supplies of cheap oil to the West). Could Osama bin Laden yet rise and return to Mecca, like the triumphant Ayatollah to Tehran two decades ago? Further afield, anxieties are frequently expressed about the stability of the Philippines and Indonesia, and indeed any country with large Muslim populations.

Many countries in the West, of course, have extensive Muslim communities. A widening and more violent war on terrorism, with growing numbers of Muslim victims, would strain multiculturalism to breaking point. Already, the erosion of civil liberties in the name of 'security' is a cause for concern in civil society in the US and the UK. Regressive attitudes towards outsiders such as migrants and asylum seekers are widely in evidence. Tougher still, leaders everywhere are using anti-terrorism to legitimize confrontations with their domestic opponents. President Putin is but one leader for whom all this has been an unexpected political bonus.

President Bush always said that it would be a long war, and in this he was certainly correct. How long will it take to suppress al-Qaeda in 40 countries in which it is supposed to have sleepers? Will it ever be possible to have a victory parade in this particular war, given that, as Northern Ireland shows, one is never sure that the last terrorist attack has taken place? In a traditional war, victory is assured by the occupying of ground; in a global war against terrorism not only has territory to be occupied in some sense globally, but also hearts and minds have to be won over. US strategy is gradually spreading its infrastructure of military power across the world in pursuit of the former; its diplomacy is not so far proving as effective in the latter. Although the assertion of US power seems to have been successful in the short run – a degree of business as usual has been re-established – victory is remote. How many suicide bombers were born today? More immediately, a 'spectacular' may be at an advanced state of planning as these words are being written – nuclear, biological, chemical, or simply devastating by traditional means. In the few months between the manuscript of this book

being submitted and its publication, the world could yet again be shaken to its international political core.

The choice facing the most powerful Western societies, and especially the United States, is not simply one between short-term and long-term, an age of terror versus the construction of a world of community. The short terms have to be managed if there is to be hope of anything better, beyond. Here it is helpful to recall Albert Camus and his conviction that the means one uses today shape the ends one might perhaps reach tomorrow.<sup>45</sup> This challenges the Machiavellian notion that the ends can justify the means. For Gandhi, 'ends and means amount to the same thing'. A concrete 'end' might be out of reach, but the 'means' are not.<sup>46</sup> This is not a call for human perfection but for a reconceiving of the meaning of victory. Rather than letting terrorism win, by allowing fear to be sovereign, terrorism can be defeated today (if not yet eradicated) by employing the means, however imperfectly, that are the moral equivalent of the ends we seek. The treatment of prisoners in Cuba or of dissidents at home are test cases. In addition to taking necessary security measures, the means approach to victory involves a steady commitment on the part of the world's dominant states to behave as if law is not just an instrument of the powerful, as if the humanizing of globalization is a priority, and as if the creation of a global human rights culture will be the consequence of dialogue not diktat. These means-as-ends would represent a daily victory over terror. If the goal of policy is restricted to one of national security, narrowly defined, then we can say that September 11 was not only our shared yesterday, but risks also being all our tomorrows.

### Notes

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