The War on Terror: The Mother of All Wars?

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The "Global War On Terror" declared by the United States on 12 September 2001 has now been going on for five years, or about as long as the two world wars that scarred the 20th century. However unlike those wars, whose end was at least conceivable by the fifth year, today's war seems to have no end. Marked by uncertain and short-lived "successes" and by unforeseen and unexpected catastrophes, by collateral damage and by tactical, strategic and moral doubts, carried out against a nebulous adversary who seems to benefit as much from his failures as his successes, the war is degenerating into a dubious confrontation where it's hard to know which side is the side of the angels – something that seemed so clear in the days following September 11.

America has fallen into the classic terrorist's trap where the adversary is led to strike indiscriminately, and despite being the victim of the initial aggression, has now shifted shape bit by bit to stand before us, today, as the torturer. Bringing up the rear, Western allies unable to resist America's initiatives or suggest alternative approaches, embarked albeit reluctantly on a counter-productive Crusade – which only serves to increase the violence that pits the Muslim world against the West, bringing recruits to the jihad and raising barricades of hatred and incomprehension. All of which, doubtless, were among the goals of those who brought 9-11 about.

But, at the edges of this uncertain and apparently endless conflict, the US has confirmed its position in those five years as the world's only superpower. In the name of a Just War, they dictate laws, rules and procedures to all those who, whether allies, non-aligned or adversaries, will be designated as terrorist sympathisers if they refuse to go along. Overturning the world order they themselves helped create in the post-1945 world, the US has pushed international institutions to the margins, as for example the "too neutral" United Nations, to the advantage of institutions that Washington easily dominates, like Nato and the G8.

Finally, as a consequence of the "geological scandal" that placed three-quarters of the world's oil under Islamic territory, the US of George W. Bush and his administration of Texas oil-men find themselves in the position – in the name of a necessary fight against Islam-inspired terrorism – of being able to intervene at any moment to bring pressure on local governments, to keep the market under

tight control and to maximise the revenues of the American oil giants. The political, diplomatic, economic and commercial benefits the US can draw from this situation are such that there has been no shortage of conspiracy theories accusing Washington of causing – or at the very least doing nothing to prevent – the cataclysm of September 11 in order to harvest its fruits. Similarly, Franklin D. Roosevelt was suspected of allowing Pearl Harbour to happen as a means of convincing a reluctant Congress to enter World War Two.

The allegation is unfair and groundless but the US, having paid the price in blood, can argue it is justified in reaping any benefit accruing from its reaction, even if the cost is an endless war abroad. The upside is fragile, however, resting as it does on a "phoney war" with no limit and no end in sight, prosecuted without convincing results against a phantom enemy continually renewing himself, against ungraspable strategies and with frequent "mistakes" which discourage the US's allies and strengthen the hatred felt by its adversaries.

Conceptual errors

In fact, the "war on terror" started badly because it was based on three major errors of conception. The first mistake was to consider the attacks of September 11 as the start of a global offensive on the part of Islamist terrorism, of a new era of violence in North-South relations because America had been hit for the first time on its own soil. It was no such thing, no more than Pearl Harbour was the start of the Second World War. The attacks took place on a continuum of actions begun by Islamist extremists in the 1980s to cut the Muslim world off from the rest of the planet so as to take over power without the risk of provoking external intervention. The fact that this continuum was not taken into account led to an unsure response and the establishment of a permanent suspicion weighing on the Muslim world as a whole – though the Muslim world is in reality the primary victim of fundamentalist violence.

It also led to the past being ignored, together with the personality and methodology of the enemy, thus exaggerating the target and enlarging the field of combat well out of line with its real scale.

The second mistake was to declare a "war on terror" – which is about as pertinent as declaring war on evil or anger. And that's not just a semantic quibble. In declaring war on an unquantifiable abstraction like terror, and putting the action about the actor, we lose sight of the fact that terrorism is what terrorists do: people with a past, a history, motives, means, networks of solidarity and collaboration.

This mistake led the American security apparatus to mystify its adversaries and to walk right into the classic trap set by all terrorists – to bring the enemy to strike back indiscriminately and disproportionately, to feed the vicious circle of repression and violence. And declaring war on an abstraction does not allow one to set the "war aims" that are vital to the proper functioning of any military

organisation looking to determine its objectives. Was the intention to liquidate bin Laden and punish Al Qaeda? To bring down this or that regime that supports terrorism, and if so, outside of the Taliban, on the basis of what evidence? Was it to reduce the influence of Islamic fundamentalism, and if so how? Or perhaps to bring democracy to Muslim countries, but then which ones, and by what right? Was the aim to remodel the "Greater Middle East"? But why and to whose benefit? And so the questions go on. None of these points was ever clearly addressed in the rush to respond, thus leaving the way open to every kind of improvisation, and every kind of blunder.

The third mistake had been to opt for an almost exclusively military response using overwhelming means. Even if the attacks of September 11 were seen as a declaration of war – which they were not, as the fundamentalist offensive against the West dates back to the 1980s – they were first and foremost a criminal act committed by a small group of sociopaths working together. It should have been simple to think of a multi-disciplinary, multi-form response to a defiant gesture that could not remain unpunished, but also to the psychological and socio-political consequences.

In the jihadists' terrorist logic, an act of violence is not an end in itself, and its value is only partially dependent on its success. A terrorist act, which always translates as an act by the weak on the strong, never really succeeds (no matter its scale) unless it provokes a disproportionate and inappropriate response on the part of the enemy. The terrorist movement concerned acquires its importance and its audience as a function of this (over)reaction. Mobilising the full resources of the most powerful army in the world against Osama bin Laden's group is tantamount to giving currency to his nuisance value, his representative worth and his importance, an image out of keeping with the reality.

Finally, the role of the military is to destroy an objective without too much thought to ancillary considerations more in the purview of politicians. They are not to be criticised for that. But designating them for the sole managers of a situation involving a mix – often fantastical – of the most complex ethical, diplomatic, political, economic and social problems in a region suffering particularly from internal problems and from its relations with the West, can only lead to the most enduring "collateral damage".

On a methodological level, the combined effect of these three mistakes led the entire Western security apparatus to question *how* the September 11 attacks could have happened, rather than to find out *why*, which would have been more pertinent and more useful, but would have required the time and the effort for reflection. It is true that American public opinion, understandably moved by the scale of the attack, demanded retribution right away, and had to be satisfied. But the answer to the question "how", even if one is found, offers very little in the way of operationally worthwhile solutions, since it is rare for terrorist operations to work the same way twice at the same place according to the same scenario. All

the more so in this case, as the search to find out "how" was immediately polluted by the unprecedented scale of the terrorist action.

The horror of the strike had been too strong, and the blow to the credibility of Western defence too severe, for the US to admit they had fallen victim to a small group of psychopaths hardly better-organised than the ones who usually attack foreign tourists or US embassies in Muslim countries. In the eyes of America's leaders, the organisation capable of such exploits had to be an entity of "global reach" with ultra-sophisticated and practically limitless resources, conventional and non-conventional, at its disposal.

To any experts who at that time were expressing doubt as to the capacity of this group, based on their experience of violent Islamist movements active since the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, the government replied that "crying wolf" was necessary to the consensus created by the attacks and the need for precaution. The press in the US, closely followed by Europe's media, described bin Laden's nuclear, bacteriological and chemical arsenals in great detail, as well as his Command and Control Center located in the Afghan mountains of Tora Bora as if it was right up there on a par with the headquarters of Strategic Air Command. An anthrax attack in the US, which later turned out to have originated locally, was immediately blamed on Al Qaeda, and the press echoed the director of the CIA's warnings of an imminent attack, possibly nuclear, expected at Thanksgiving, then at Christmas, New Year and on to the Fourth of July. Up to and including an industrial accident on the outskirts of Toulouse in France, the fingerprints of Al Qaeda were sought. The clean-up of the organisation's refuge in Afghanistan showed a different reality: a decidedly rustic set-up, rudimentary military capacity, no sign whatever of non-conventional weapons. Some 500 dazed and confused Taliban militants, abandoned and knowing next to nothing of Al Qaeda, were imprisoned at the US base at Guantanamo Bay, while the head of the Taliban himself made good his escape on a motorbike.

The Mirror Effect

The fall of the afghan fundamentalist regime and the disappearance of the "grey area" where they offered a territorial shelter and an operational base to the jihadists was certainly an important development. But intelligence gathered on the ground as to the real operational capacity of the terrorists ought to have led the American security community to rethink its strategy in order better to face a threat that was more criminal than military. No such rethink took place.

Keeping on with the search to find out "how" the attacks happened, the US services concludes that if Al Qaeda had no global operational resources of its own sufficient to explain the scope of the September 11 attacks, it must have borrowed them from an organisation or a regional power who did possess them – and who would in consequence also have to be brought down. For reasons we won't go into in depth here, the choice fell on Iraq, the black sheep of the Middle East in

the eyes of the US and the international community ever since the first Gulf War. For anyone who knows a little about the Arab and Muslim world, the hypothesis involving collaboration between Saddam Hussein and the violent Islamists was laughable, despite the confident assertions of American diplomats and security services.

Events would later show this to be the case by demonstrating the lack of any link between bin Laden and the Iraqi regime, as well as showing how it would have been impossible for the regime to supply weapons of mass destruction to a terrorist organisation, since it did not possess any itself. There can be no doubt that, in the words of President George W. Bush, "the world is a better place without Saddam Hussein," (it would be better still without certain other totalitarian and intolerant regimes of the region) but, in the matter of terrorism and political violence, the world is not safer after the American intervention in Iraq – in fact, the reverse.

In deploying their entire military and security arsenal, and in mobilising (often reluctantly) their allies and satellites and declaring a "global war", the US largely contributed to the mirror effect which gave the enemy an aura and a global dimension he absolutely did not merit. All research before and after September 11 shows that bin Laden's organisation consisted of a few hundred people, more or less equal parts international volunteers and veterans of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation, and banned militants of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and some other Middle Eastern countries. Detailed portraits can be found in Marc Sageman's excellent study *Understanding Terror Networks*. They are, it is true, fanatical psychopaths, but together they were more like the London streets of *Oliver Twist* than the hidden lair of Doctor No.

Spectacular as it undoubtedly was, the attack of September 11 was neither very sophisticated nor very expensive. Its originality lay in having been perpetrated by unarmed civilians rather than professionals of violence. Their success was ensured largely by the hijackers' kamikaze determination, and only partly by the lax security which then characterised US domestic flights. Since their target was the world's one hyper-power and its most visible symbols that these attacks were labelled as a manifestation of global hyper-terrorism. But they were a manifestation of wounded pride rather than clinical logic, and had the immediate consequence of strengthening the Salafist, jihadist tendency beyond all expectation. Although reduced to basics and forced into hidden isolation by the Western military response on Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden's organisation was glorified in an almost mythical way by the exaggerated and inappropriate scale of the American response, and as a result went on to reproduce elsewhere.

In the collective unconscious of the Third World and in particular the Muslim world, the "bin Laden method" has proved itself by forcing America to engage all its forces in the battle, without however being able to show one decisive result, and without bringing an end to a cycle of violence that displays itself in spectacular fashion, here or there, two or three times every year. It is useful then

for any activist to borrow bin Laden's discourse and his methods. Any Muslim malcontent, wherever he may be and whatever his motives or convictions, would do well in future to make clear his ideological and personal proximity to the mythical organisation of Al Qaeda, adopt its vocabulary and its way with jihadist violence, if he wants to be recognised by his peers, and if he wants his message to be heard and paid attention to. Thus it is that political opposition to the Muslim establishment in Indonesia, Kashmir irredentism in India, ethnic unrest in Pakistan, the social malaise of expropriated Moroccans, difficulties in integrating among immigrant minorities in Europe – all phenomena with no connection one to the other, either at a structural or a personal level – all translate nowadays into manifestations of political violence using the language and the banners of Al Qaeda.

In the meantime, governments in Muslim countries who face political, social and economic opposition have discovered the benefits of making out their opponents are members of Al Qaeda and jihadist zealots. This is the surest way to dismiss their opponents, to cut them off from any international audience and, in most cases, to obtain security or financial assistance from the US and the West. The model for this rather transparent strategy could be seen in Chechnya, but we have also seen manifestations in the Central Asian republics, and in several Arab countries.

A combination of these two kinds of approach has contributed in the space of five years to the construction of a veritable planetary fundamentalist war machine in a place where before there were only dispersed and uncoordinated spin-offs from Jamaa Islamiyyah, the violent extremist wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were losing influence at the end of the 1990s but who found a real audience in the same way, as seen by their recent political successes in various Arab countries, as well as the extension of their influence on émigré communities in the West.

The confusions of a "simple" war

By means of trying to find terrorists where there are none, by naming an "Axis of Evil" as something coherent where there are the most diverse threats, the enemy is given the picture of the posture he needs to adopt to be recognised and taken seriously. The subjugation of the entirety of American foreign policy to the imperatives of the "War on Terror" have produced the most devastating effects in the centre of the Arab world where the result has been to see the language and practice of Islamic terrorism introduced and given currency. The Middle East is a complex ensemble of religious, linguistic and cultural minorities who feel themselves under threat, often with good cause. America's management of the Iraqi transition after Saddam Hussein has brought once again to the fore a sectarian approach to regional problems which the pan-Arabism of Nasser or the pseudo-laity of the Iraqi and Syrian Ba'athists and left-wing Palestinian organisations had more or less pushed into the background.

The threat which today weighs on the Sunni minority in Iraq, the Alawite minority in Syria, the Christians, Druze and Shiites of Lebanon, is bound to force these communities into violent self-defensive reactions. It is not possible to brutally install a Western-style democracy on the one man-one vote principle in societies whose very basis is the collective membership of an ethnic community. Not, that is, without taking care also to install the means of protecting the rights of minorities, for want of which the majority community will snatch all of the power and all the wealth.

The Sunnis of Iraq are now reflexively defending themselves against the likelihood of an all-powerful Shiite community in the country. To widen the audience for their resistance, and to obtain the military and political support of their Sunni "brothers" in the rest of the world, they need to give their struggle a larger context, on an international if not global scale: that of Salafist jihadism, alone able to wound or humiliate the United States. Who would care about their fate otherwise? So it is that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was not an Iraqi, and who was no more than a small-time gang boss in disgrace with Al Qaeda before the American invasion of Iraq, when he became a Robin Hood figure. So it is, also, that the cause of Iraq's Sunnis can hope for international support, including from the apprentice jihadists of Europe looking for adventure.

Identical scenarios, already in operation in Somalia when the ill-fated American intervention there broke down the local society and left nothing in its place, can be seen at work in Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan and of course Palestine. If the victory of Hamas was largely thanks to the inability of Fatah to ensure the transition from liberation movement to governmental organisation, it was also largely due to the image of fundamentalist political violence as he only way to "move" America and the West, to force them to take some interest in the situation and to break out of an unequal stand-off with Israel. The central place of the Palestinian problem in the collective Arab and Muslim imagination makes it into an example and a role-model. Hamas is undoubtedly a terrorist movement, violent and backward, and opposed to all forms of negotiation for the simple reason that its very existence depends on its nuisance value. If some of its leaders are realistic enough to go in search of compromise, they will soon face an uprising form a small minority bent on ruining their efforts by an escalation of violence which is considered legitimate in the Arab world to the extent that it is seen as obsessional by the US, Israel's main supporter.

In fact, one of the major effects of the "global war on terror" is to have globalised – that is, to have linked to each other – political, economic and social problems that had nothing to do with one another before, and to have made them impossible to solve other than on a case-by-case basis. By designating an "Axis of Evil" linking problems of international coexistence as varied as those of Iraq, Iran and North Korea, American foreign policy effectively cut off its last margin of manoeuvre to treat each case in a focused and suitable way. Since in every "war" one must choose one's camp, by accusing any state that would not sign up wholeheartedly to its "crusade" of support for terrorism, America ostracised

countries which, often having nothing else to lose but their pride, now run a real risk of finding themselves in the camp of the partisans of violence.

The "big fish" ignored

In its obsession with investigating the "how" and its responding to the threat with exclusively military means, American strategy only targeted the perpetrators of the violence, and not its instigators. It tackled only the effects and not the causes of Islamic terrorism. There are doubtless some "madmen of Allah" among the perpetrators, since you have to call on some seriously unstable individuals if you want to find kamikaze volunteers. But political violence dressed up as Islam in an attempt to find legitimacy is neither a pathological phenomenon nor an aberration of Islamic culture. Like any strategy it has its objectives, tactics, ideologues and sponsors.

The personality, the discourse and the actions of the known protagonists of Salafist violence indicate without a doubt their collective adherence to Jamaa Islamiyyah, the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, which arose in Egypt in the 1930s and which has spread its roots ever since throughout the Muslim world. The Brotherhood's strategy is to attack the power; to use violence to provoke a historic rupture between Muslim lands and the rest of the world by making Muslim countries hateful and hated so as to be able to seize the power and the wealth without running the risk of an external intervention on the side of the regimes in place[1].

As the only structured Sunni organisation operating internationally, the Brotherhood has benefited since the early 1980s from financial resources coming from the Saudi desire to defend their control on a world Islam threatened by the Shia Iranian revolution, as well as from operation military resources that became available as US and Western services manipulated fundamentalist religious movements in their struggle against the Soviet Union and communist parties in Third World nations. The Brotherhood today uses this capital to take to itself a monopoly on interpreting the Quran and to turn any political or social crisis within a Muslim country – or between a Muslim country and the West – to their own ends. Their activism is carried out, depending on the area in question, via volunteer organisations, and within militant organisations representing a range of causes from quietism (Tabligh) to social and political militancy (Union of Islamic Organisations) all the way to unfettered violence (Takfir wal Hijra, Jamaat) and local versions from Morocco to the Philippines, including Al Qaeda, which was never more than a sub-group, and certainly not the over-arching organisation.

The "war on terror" takes a purely military expression, targeted on (mainly) armed perpetrators, and we remember little more than the most aggressive,

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[1] See the article *The Association Of Muslim Brothers: Chronicle of a Barbarism Foretold* by the current author on the site of ESISC – www.esisc.org.

pathological behaviour. It pays no attention to the ideologues who instigated the violence and who finance it. We're not talking here of the financing of operations and actions, which are anyway not expensive and against which a considerable arsenal of national and international regulatory measures – albeit not very effective ones – have already been taken. We are talking about the financing of everything else surrounding publicity, recruitment, membership, training and putting to work the hundreds of thousands of young Muslims throughout the world from whose ranks the Brotherhood will, when the day comes, select the next candidates for violent action.

This whole progress is indeed very expensive, and takes place within associations, clubs, schools and mosques run by members of the Brotherhood with money 90% of which comes, we know very well, from public or private "generous donors" in the petro-monarchies. The operations in New York, Madrid, Bali and London could not even have been imagined without this ensemble, which the "war on terror" nonetheless ignores. In a public hearing in front of the US Senate on 8 November 2005, the author of the Treasury Department report criticised the situation whereby four years after September 11, numerous Saudi donors continued to give substantial support to the ideological and operational infrastructure of the violent fundamentalist movement. This cold and clinical statement by a bureaucrat who could hardly be accused of polemic was not picked up or commented on by the Western press, and led to no concrete measures by diplomats or by anti-terror executives and decision-makers.

Some claim to see in this incoherency the signs of the duplicity of the US government, unwilling to sacrifice its special relationship with the Gulf monarchies, who provide the guarantee of US energy, to the collective interest. But it is clear that such a Machiavellian calculation on behalf of a few profiteers, however cunning they may be, would not be conceivable for long in a democracy. The history of the United States shows that if such had been the case, someone would by now have stepped outside the system to denounce it with the full support of a media ever avid for the scoop of an error on the part of the Executive.

In fact, these incoherencies are a logical result of the conception of the "war" along conventional lines, against an adversary whose military capacities have surely been overestimated in order to cover for the US's original embarrassing defeats.

The uncertain successes of an unsuitable approach

It would have been difficult, clearly, to explain to the average American tax-payer that the billions of dollars invested in the most powerful defence system ever conceived was not enough to stop a small band of fanatical extremists from sowing massive death and destruction on US soil within the space of a few minutes and hours. As is normal under such circumstances, blame for failure to foresee the catastrophe was cast on the intelligence services. But the act of

placing blame was also implicit recognition that the attack was a matter of their jurisdiction, meaning it would have been a good idea to rethink the defence system and adapt it to the needs of a world where strategic threats are now more criminal in nature than military (terrorism, trafficking, money-laundering, industrial espionage). Instead, the US executive opted for an intensified and more sophisticated military approach, which since it was not suited to finding its target and subjected to the need for results, came down indiscriminately on everything suspect or strange-looking to the North-American security culture, resulting in the outbreak of new hatreds, new grounds for complaint and new conflicts.

The results could appear less than entirely negative for the foreign policy of the US, and the policy of dominance. Domestically, the restrictions imposed by the "war on terror" have allowed the federal authorities to tighten controls on the states of the Union, and make people recognise the security problems they paid little attention to before, from a position of insularity, the territory of the US being separated from the conflict zones of Old Europe and the Middle East. But the result was only obtained at a cost of severe strains on the principles of transparency and civil rights that are at the basis of American democracy. The country has now been "bunkerised" with the risk of provoking a backlash that would make it even more vulnerable to non-military attacks in future.

In terms of foreign policy, the results seem considerable at first glance. The "war on terror" and the need for everyone to choose a camp have allowed Washington to mobilise its allies and marginalise opponents to its policy. Friends who signed up for the war have been forced to undergo a standardisation and unification of military and security procedures which go as far as passport formats, and a shared global list of "suspects". This has been all the less effective as the designation "Arab" remains uncertain and ambiguous. Faced with a consensus, the less enthusiastic partners like France and Germany – who until the end of 2002 has expressed reservations on the validity of the concept, and had reason to value their own results, obtained by more subtle and more carefully-adapted means – found themselves obliged to "get in line". And to win pardon for their reluctance, to give signs of submission – one might almost say servility.

Most Arab regimes, shamed by manifestations of happiness on the part of public opinion that had greeted the exploits of bin Laden, were unable even to discuss the options of US policy in their own part of the world. One country submitted after another, often with the sort of rancour that never bodes well for the stability of an alliance. The United Nations, the bête noire of the US foreign policy establishment for the way it places member states on a basis of equality, thus denying the hyper-power its privileges, found itself essentially rudderless in the face of a situation which concerns national authorities only indirectly. Dreamed up as a means of harmonising relations between mutually-recognised sovereign states, the UN had no grasp of problems caused by transnational, more or less clandestine, criminal enterprises.

It was therefore easy to marginalise the UN and replace it, in the context of the "war", with Nato, a military organisation where the hegemony of the US is uncontested. One that principle had been accepted, it was to Nato that the call then went out in situations concerning the states, and where the UN would have had the competence to intervene (Afghanistan, Lebanon, Central Asia, the Caucasus). But the problem here too is that Nato is set up to provide a military and political treatment to the problems of states and armies facing each other overtly or covertly, and not to the activities of more or less structured criminal groups. Nato's effectiveness in the anti-terrorist fight has still to be demonstrated.

The "mother of all battles"?

Five years after it was launched, the "war on terror" has shown various but unconvincing results. Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and now Lebanon are turned into human and material ruins where there are more "terrorists" – or at any rate violent fundamentalists – than ever. And even though the Pakistani secret services have tried, in the face of a certain political and financial opposition, to sell Al Qaeda off piece-meal to the US authorities, bin Laden and Mullah Omar are still at large. From his inexplicably impossible-to-find lair Ayman Zawahiri, a historic member of the Brotherhood freed from prison in Egypt after insistent pressure from American humanitarian organisations, acting head of Al Qaeda and the brains behind September 11, continues to pour vitriol on the US and call down vengeful fatwas upon Westerners, "Jews and Crusaders".

Every four or five months, or the length of a news cycle in the Western media, Jamaa Islamiyyah or one of its local franchises commits a spectacular and bloody attack in a Western or West-friendly country (Madrid, London, Mumbai) or in the Muslim world (Karachi, Bali, Casablanca) reminding the world of its presence and thereby increasing its influence and its fame.

By amalgamating his intervention in Iraq with the "war on terror"; by crushing the army of Saddam Hussein without much heroic effort, the United States gave proof for the second time in ten years of how vain it is to defy the West on its own territory with its own arms. But, on the other hand, and in fulfilment of the prophesies of Saddam Hussein when he spoke of the "mother of all battles", they also made it clear that only terrorism on a grand scale can reach them. The lesson is one to be meditated upon by all those – states, political groups or armed bands – who have, or think they have, a complaint against America and her Western allies.

Because it committed itself rashly and at great cost, in human, financial and image terms, in a military, political, diplomatic and strategic *terra incognita* without being in full possession of the facts, the American army will leave Iraq, sooner or later, and leave behind it – as it did in Cambodia, in Somalia and in Afghanistan – a grey area of ruins, with no social framework remaining, delivered up to the whims of local warlords and adventurers. Jamaa Islamiyyah will find a

territorial base for itself there, and the manpower needed for new terrorist attacks against the "infidels" who are the reason for their very existence.

All those who have had anything to do with it know that the anti-terrorist struggle is not a matter of the laws of war or a military approach, but a multifaceted approach involving intelligence methods, undercover preventative operations, political interference, police investigations, maintenance measures and repressive legal actions. It also involves an improved understanding of and treatment of social, cultural and economic problems which lead to clashes between Third World and the West, and between them and often unsavoury local governments upheld by the West out of concern for "regional stability" – a concern that the growth of fundamentalist violence renders illusory.

In these conditions it seems that the essential fight against violent Islamist activism can only be collective and global, and not subordinated to the vengeful or geostrategic aims of any given state. At the risk of losing legitimacy and, more important, efficacy, it cannot be a pretext for settling other types of conflict, upholding allied regimes or bringing down adverse regimes often no less respectable than the others. Beyond the necessary emergency reactive measures, it cannot be only reactive.

To uncover and neutralise the "unforeseeable" it has to be proactive, far in advance of the act of violence itself, at the stage of recruitment, at the stage where the perpetrators are taken in hand, at the training stage, the financing stage, and the stage where networks of solidarity are being created. It requires a far greater knowledge of the activist phenomenon, its culture and its players, so that the inevitable "rush to judgement" involved in prevention – by definition prior to the violent act – can be carried out against justifiable targets and not turn into a global combat against Islam, Arabs or Muslims – the objective sought by activists in the classical terrorist cycle of "provocation-repression" of which the War on Terror, looking more and more like an Endless Crusade, is proving, unfortunately, to be the perfect illustration.