

Giulietto Chiesa  
The infinite war

Translated from the Italian by Robert Elliot

\*\*\*\*\*

1.  
The command deck

On the 11th of September we entered the age of the Empire. And the Empire has decided to go to war. Many of the links between these two things are yet to be discovered, none of them being immediately evident. But finding them, responding to the whole series of questions jostling to be answered in many people's minds, overcoming the numbing effect of so many events happening in such rapid succession and placating worries and fears are all things that call for newfound efforts. These questions have to be answered, not just for curiosity's sake or as a token exercise, but for survival. This new war is not a virtual war: it is very real, very fierce and soon will be very near, even if now it seems far away.

Why have we entered the age of the Empire? What exactly is this Empire? Is it the same as previous empires or different? In what way is it different, if it is? Why has this newly formed Empire decided to go to war? Who is it going to war with? How long will this war last? What happens if it wins? What happens if it loses?

I will not be taking the reader back along the paths trodden by the world media system (basically keeping to what they were told by the Imperial Power, as we shall see later on) since the 11th of September. That would be a pointless exercise. These paths are nearly all false trails: blind alleys, tricks, illusions. What little truth they lead to is generally in a kind of trap, set some time ago to catch out all unwary travellers. The questions posed above have been asked by few. Some make passing reference to them. Almost no one has looked for the answers.

It has been repeated ad infinitum that the 11th of September changed everything and that nothing will be the same again. And yet, even though almost everything has changed, here we are, still cocooned in our old ways as if nothing important happened, happy, even, that the dreaded changes haven't upset our daily routine.

Terrorism, Osama bin Laden, bombings, war, victory, Taliban, Al Qaeda: all these words and names, new and old, reeled off before our eyes. Some sink in and others vanish without trace before we can grasp their real meaning. Millions of us, if not billions, can't understand what's happening to our world and our lives, as if our and our children's destiny has been altered. All we can sense is that something really serious has happened, with enormous, dangerous consequences, but we can't quite put it in context. So many things we were sure of have vanished, superseded by uncertainty and a growing sense of anxiety.

The only certain thing is that the versions we're served up with are either totally untrue or so distorted as to be completely unacceptable. And so we have to look elsewhere, but not without first asking another central question: what exactly is it, this media system? Can it really be such an enormous source of deception, the biggest thing separating us from the real world, the thing that stops the person in the street from actually perceiving, seeing or understanding reality?

Let's start, then, from the Empire, because if we can understand what it is we can start getting nearer to the answer about why it went to war. "The world begins 2002 in a situation without precedent in human history." This is how William Pfaff begins an article in the Los Angeles Times at the end of December 2001. And he goes on: "A single nation, the United States, enjoys unrivalled military and economic power, and can impose it virtually wherever it wants".

The bitter words of an anti-American? But no! This is an American writing in a highly respected American newspaper, exercising one of the most sacred and worthy rights of American society: the freedom of the press, as stated in the First Amendment. Pfaff's comment quite simply says things the way they are: not the whole truth, perhaps, but a good part of it, and it provides a useful angle from which to look at news and events. It is also currently true about the United States that: "if it should so choose, it could impose complete social and economic breakdown on almost any other state" in the world.

It's worth stopping for a moment here to consider this point. Is it entirely normal for the United States to want to "impose complete social and economic breakdown" on other countries? Why on earth should it want to do that, if it's so enormously powerful? Why should it want to do harm to other countries when – apparently – it has all the necessary

means, in sufficient quantities, to do them good? Is this not a strange, menacing and gloom-laden way of looking at this newly dawned age? And yet, as we shall see later on, the reasons given by Pfaff are many and convincing.

But everything in its own good time. For now we should try and follow his line of argument, which is by no means banal. It talks of a threat to “almost any” other country in the world. Almost any? Which countries, at the present time, would be able to withstand something like this? Very few. Perhaps only one, China: a single exception that takes on a crucial importance. China is the only country in the world that can take decisions without having to ask anybody’s permission, not even the United States of America’s. The Chinese leaders are the only group of individuals in the world that don’t have to respect Washington’s opinions, abide by Washington’s criteria and be held accountable to Washington for their actions. Nor can they be blackmailed externally.

I realise that there may be flaws in this description and that things aren’t as clear-cut and unequivocal as all that. China, for example, appears to be committed to a process of rapprochement with the rest of the capitalist world, as expressed in its aim – recently accomplished – of joining the World Trade Organisation. 1 But this in no way contradicts its complete independence, despite the fact that at least five hundred big United States corporations have got branches in China and are making immense profits there. What counts is who holds the reins. Nor should it be seen as ambiguous that it was essentially the current American administration that allowed China into the WTO. These are basically leftovers from the China policies of previous administrations, alternating between the punitive approach (because of the irreducible differences) and the more roundabout approach, characterised by friendly gestures and concessions. The dialogue that started between Mao and the Kissinger-Nixon duo finally culminated in the Clintonian definition of Jiang Zemin’s China as “privileged partner”.

But then the Empire was still in its infancy. It is not by chance that one of the first things that the Bush administration did was to redefine China as “strategic antagonist” (10th of September 2001), which was more realistic in a way. But already at the end of 2000, Donald Rumsfeld, not yet Defence Secretary, had put his name to a Pentagon document arguing that China was to be considered a dangerous and ungovernable adversary as from 2017. This should be kept in mind as we go through the following points.

What about the other leading actors on the scene, in other parts of the world? Russia is certainly in no condition to face up to the United States, neither militarily (ever since the strategic balance toppled so unexpectedly and drastically in the years 1993-95) 2, nor economically. It goes without saying that none of the other European countries are capable of taking on the USA. And nor are Japan or India, and the list ends here: there isn’t anybody else. Finally, as for the European Union, even without Zbigniew Brzezinski’s withering definition of it as “a mere geographic entity”, no one could ever imagine it as being capable of reacting collectively with so many Trojan horses in its midst and all-obliging valets like Tony Blair seated on their paper thrones. And now there’s Silvio Berlusconi too, keen to be rid of all European hindrances to his populist presidential schemes. This entirely new London-Rome alignment, in opposition to the historical Berlin-Paris axis, seems bent on aiding and abetting the Empire in its evident aim to reduce the potential (economic) competitiveness of the European Union.

The brief picture painted so far depicts a United States that is not only immensely powerful but that also tends to be very aggressive. And it has no rivals, except for China, which, although now strong enough to repel a possible threat, is not yet at the point where it can actually threaten. At least, not until 2017.

The Empire certainly doesn’t give the impression of being a kind of enlightened sovereign, keeping a watchful eye on our safety. The first thing that strikes us about it is that it wants to bring about the “complete breakdown” of any potential adversary. This is where we have to start from if we want to understand what comes next.

At this point I wish to state a premise: I am not, nor ever have been, anti-American. I realise this is a strange way of pursuing a line of argument, but it may help clear up any possible misunderstandings at the outset. And misunderstandings about anti-Americanism are highly likely, because they’ve been talking about virtually nothing else since the 11th of September. What is just as strange is that there are always so many people ready to accuse you of it (and for them the term “anti-American” isn’t just an accusation: it’s a swearword) as soon as you give the slightest hint of wanting to criticise the current United States administration. If this were applied to the Italian situation, it would be like accusing any non-Italian daring to criticise the current Prime Minister of Italy of anti-Italianism.

It is very evident that these dutiful defenders of America will not allow the powerful, or should we say “the Power”, to be criticised in any way whatsoever. These are people already well versed in the art of bowing and scraping to “the Power”, wherever it may be, so just think what they’ll be like when “the Power” actually becomes “the Empire”! So, quite often, they find themselves in the inglorious position of defending those who already have ample defensive (and offensive) capabilities of their own. And there are lots of these defenders: the majority of political commentators, for

example, would never have got where they are without giving cast iron proof of their absolute loyalty to “the Power”.

The aim, therefore, is to stifle the discussion and silence the adversaries, an aim that is much more ideological than you would care to think. It also explains perfectly, for example, why the whole of the Italian press (and not only the Italian press) often say the same things. The rule is that the people controlling the media have to be totally reliable: they don't even have to be told what to say. They already know it by heart. They have already internalised the rules of the game. Being reliable is something that requires lengthy training and considerable single-mindedness. On every level of the information hierarchy you have to prove that you have a total disregard for the truth, a complete readiness to deceive and an absolutely impenetrable cynicism. This, as a rule, is the only way of getting up to the next level.

To note but a few of the countless examples: “Ideological anti-Americanism knows no bounds,” thunders Mario Pirani in “la Repubblica”, for example, against Tiziano Terzani. And then there's Gianni Riotta<sup>3</sup>, accusing Ignacio Ramocet and Rossana Rossanda of “...seeing America not as a country, but rather as an ideology, a race or a stigma...”

As a rule, obviously, it isn't quite as bad as this, but whenever any kind of doubt arises, there is the automatic tendency to back the stronger side.

The answer is that America is in no way synonymous with whoever happens to be its president at the time and nor is Italy nor any other country in the world, and that is my belief. Even if the majority, the vast majority of a country is identifiable with its leader at certain time you can never legitimately equate a criticism of that leader to a judgement of the whole country and its entire people. But people calling themselves pro-American do just this, and the ideology underlying their attitude is exactly the same as that of self-proclaimed anti-Americanism. Having said this, on the basis of an impartial and intelligent assessment of the Italian (i.e. Western) press, one cannot help but come to the conclusion that it is full to overflowing of pro-Americans and that the anti-Americans find it difficult to get a word in edgeways, so great is the din created by the enterprising defenders of the United States. Thus, any attempt to make a critical analysis of the policies of the USA becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible: any criticism whatsoever of the United States of America is ipso facto classified as ideological anti-Americanism and seen as American hate-mongering.

This process, if occurring within the United States, would be given a name that Americans remember only too well: McCarthyism. Fortunately, to the great credit and honour of American intellectuals, Americans frequently subject themselves to rigorous and often irreversible criticism, much more often than their European exegetes do. If, on the other hand, we take the example of Italian commentators, we can see fairly easily that the vast majority of them are totally uncritical of any United States policy whatsoever. When they can't find anything good to say about it, they prefer just to keep quiet.

In stark contrast to this, Paul Krugman<sup>4</sup> writes incisively that “we Americans are notoriously bad at seeing ourselves as others see us. A recent Pew survey of ‘opinion leaders’ found that 52 percent of the Americans think that their country is liked because it ‘does a lot of good’, but only 21 percent of foreigners, and 12 percent of Latin Americans, agreed”. From this you can deduce instantly that our own pro-Americans are in agreement with only 52% of Americans, but disagree with the other 48%. In any event, they disagree with 79% of the foreigners. Are we to class all these foreigners as anti-Americans? If we did that I think we would be doing America a great disservice. Probably, many of them are critical of the United States not because of ideological preconceptions but on the basis of specific – and, until proven otherwise, legitimate – political judgements on the actions of their leaders. And, seeing as judgements like this are so widespread all over the world, the most intelligent thing to do would be to suggest that the American leadership ask itself why it is so widely criticised. Indeed, it should also be added that exasperated pro-Americanism is a very bad servant: friends that praise you and flatter you but never tell you the truth are the worst possible kind of friends. All you see in their eyes is the reflection of your own defects. In these pages, however, most of the references made will be to the United States press, not only because it is much fuller and more varied than the Italian press but also because it gives us an insight into how they think at the heart of the Empire, how they discuss things and how much they tell us.

In actual fact, the Empire already existed before the 11th of September. Its real date of birth, in terms of significant historical milestones that make things easier to remember, is Christmas Day 1991, when the Soviet Union ceased to be. As and from that date, political and economic processes already begun in the previous few decades took on an increasingly impetuous character. The processes were not linear. Historical developments always take place irregularly, alternating naturally between the planned and the mistaken, successes and disasters, bursts of speed and sudden stops. Chance plays an important part, as does man's unpredictability. But planning can also play a major, often decisive, role in determining events, as can its absence. One of the novel aspects of the global society, related to the impressive development of technology (especially information-communications technology), is the increasing ability to predict and control things, now immensely superior to in any previous age. This is no secondary factor: it helps underline the fact

that a whole series of categories that guided political actions in past centuries, including the one just ended – rightly defined as short by Eric Hobsbawm –, have become obsolete.

The Empire was being born at the same time as the West's only mortal enemy was wilting and perishing in silence, as if committing suicide. But the Empire's consciousness began to form later on, at the start of its adolescence, and the process was completed after ten years, i.e. now. The mortal enemy, clearly, was the Soviet Union, and the imperial embryo was the United States. Time was needed for America to realise the new opportunities and new role offered by these historic circumstances. And time was needed for America to become fully aware of the actual extent of its power, which knew neither bounds nor limits. The victory in the Cold War had, in a certain sense, been unexpected. It was a victory that America had sought with all its might and had invested immense resources in achieving. But, right to the very end, it was never actually sure it was going to win. None, or almost none, of its most illustrious minds and none, or almost none, of its most prestigious research centres had been able to perceive the extreme weakness underlying the very roots of its adversary, defined by Ronald Reagan as the "Empire of Evil". They had sensed victory and located it at an indeterminate point in the distant future. But it actually happened very quickly.

The Empire isn't just the United States of America, even though the American share of it is undoubtedly the biggest and certainly the dominant one. We see the Empire as being essentially American, but the immense power at its disposal is starting to turn it into something different and bigger, with a population that is actually smaller than America's and a territory that is no longer definable. In this transitory stage of its growth, the Empire appears to coincide with the United States of America, and what misleads us even further is the fact that this coincidence dominates the minds of the American leadership, who see themselves as the Empire's permanent leaders. In actual fact, they are merely its interim advance guard.

All this makes the subsequent stages of these processes harder to interpret. For example, the Empire has a virtual capital, symbolised by New York, which, for this and other reasons, has become the main target for terrorist hatred. But the Empire's territory does not coincide with that of the United States of America. It has offshoots in almost every part of the world, apparently bound by different state laws. In actual fact they are all bound by the same logic, the same interests, the same laws – much more cogent than those of the individual states – and an identical culture, that of the global super-society.

This expression is not mine but Aleksandr Zinoviev's, first coined in his article On the way to the Super-Society 5. It conveys the idea perfectly of what looms ahead of us. The United States would never have got to such a privileged, powerful position had it not been better than anyone else at representing this global super-society and anticipating some of its essential traits. This is why it has been given the mandate by all the other global super-society elites. You could say the United States invented it, even though it isn't the only member. Many millions of United States citizens do not belong to the super-society, whereas millions of citizens formally from Europe, Asia and other continents do: they are the elites of these countries.

This is the newly born Empire, already branded for war. In it are the real powers of the Earth. Where they actually live is unimportant: they all have the same standards, meet in the same increasingly exclusive places, send their sons and daughters to the same universities, have fun together in the same spots which, wherever they are, in whatever continent, city or region, are being transformed more and more into fortified, isolated havens, surrounded by high walls and patrolled by security guards. The powerful of the global super-society aren't necessarily the rulers of their countries. That depends. And nor are the members of recognised governments in democratic countries automatically included in the global elite, as election by universal suffrage does not necessarily guarantee admission. If anything, the opposite is true: those admitted are generally allowed in on the basis of criteria diametrically opposed to democratic principles. But nor is access to the elite automatically ensured for unelected dictators or leaders seizing power by means of undemocratic plebiscites or military coups.

It is a totally new kind of mixture, with representatives of all those usually defined as the "major powers", regardless of which country they happen to reside in at the time for tax purposes. It has all the essential ingredients for the final victory of this new power, which is what its members ardently hope for: the heads of all the major economic and financial groups, major state conglomerates, some international organisations, the media system, top military commanders and heads of intelligence. And then there are various mega-corporation CEOs, central and peripheral bankers, a whole series of astronomically rich and medium-astronomically rich individuals, major television and media magnates, sovereigns and dictators (but only reasonably stable and presentable ones) with their courts and current and former political leaders with their entourages. And so the list goes on. In short, the truly powerful plus their most important functionaries, without whom their power cannot be exercised.

Zinoviev, in a generous estimate, maintains that the current population of this super-society oscillates somewhere between eighty and a hundred million people, families included. But this is still a formative stage, the growth phase immediately after adolescence. It's too early as yet to complete the growth curve and consider the process as ended. The physical features of this entirely new social organism that we see coming to life are already distinguishable, though. We are witnessing the beginning of a new era that marks the end of the nation state. Also drawing to a close is the age of Western democracies, with states built on the principle of liberal rights and with an internal dialectic of power within each individual state. The signs of the decline of representative democracy can already be seen perfectly clearly in the ever more powerful attacks launched by the new elites against the separation of power that characterises states and institutions based on the rights of man. National sovereignty is being overruled more and more frequently by external power bases of incomparable strength. And these power bases don't need democratic legitimisation in any form: this kind of thing has been totally extraneous to their functioning ever since they came into being. It is the beginning of the end of liberal democracy as we have known it in the West over the last five centuries. All of what we are seeing could be defined as the beginning of the construction of an entirely new social formation.

The old era is entering a period of transition, with the United States acting as intermediary, or bridge. The American system is leading the way, in a somewhat ambiguous process, which, at first sight, appears to be the affirmation of the greatness of the "American nation". But in actual fact the global super society is also the prelude to the end of the United States, the end of that famous melting pot that has glued everything together over the last two centuries. The fledgling Empire will have less and less need to integrate the rest of the world (although in a certain sense it will always need the rest of the world, but only in a subordinate role), the minorities and the ethnic and cultural components of the old nation states into global processes. The United States too will become an inadequate framework for the Empire and its new dominion functions. This will be in the more distant future, but not too distant: we are now on the threshold of a new social formation, the beginnings of the global super society.

This is why Bush can't be defined as Emperor: he is still the expression of something transitory. He probably isn't even the most powerful person in this Empire: quite simply, he has been called on by history to be its representative, despite being a most unlikely person for the job. It could well be that already, above him, there is a group of people that we have never seen together, although we may have noticed one or two of them at different times in different places. Nobody elected these people and the power they have is so great that it is difficult even to conceive of. They are on a fantastic kind of command deck offering the best possible view of the world, a view that cannot be equalled. From here you can (or think you can) see not only the present but also part of the future.

But now we should go over some of the stages in the gestation of the new Empire. We have to go back about thirty years, to the time around the end of the Bretton Woods regime. There was no talk then of Empire. The United States was definitely the strongest, but not yet strong enough. It was great, and often magnanimous too. It felt the responsibility of its greatness and sometimes, although not always, it thought about the rest of the world. It's difficult to say how long this magnanimity lasted and when it ended. Quite soon the objective conditions of the world started to convince the people on the newly erected command deck at the time that the United States could and should start to take more for itself, given the leading role it was starting to assume in the world. Or, in other words, they felt they had a right to increase the fee for the professional services they were providing. Basically, it was because of them that the other empire, the evil one, hadn't been able to impose itself on the world. They were the ones who – with great strategic insight – invested most of their wealth into the plan for the elimination of the Great Enemy. And so they started, more and more systematically, to implement their own Ten Commandments that would enable them, in time, to make the laws of the market work in favour of the supremacy of the United States, thus making it possible for the American people (the great mass of them) to consume much more than they produced and for a much smaller number of them to "get rich overnight". The purpose of these Ten Commandments should have been – and, in fact, was – to keep any competitors appearing on the scene under control and force them to give up as soon as they seemed to be getting in the slightest way threatening.

The reader must not think that this description is born from a kind of malevolence. The Ten Commandments we're talking about – unlike those of Moses – have been fully implemented. They would now be easily demonstrable, point-by-point, even by those of us not claiming to be specialists in politics or economics, if only the world information system were to make them visible. They act and operate every day. They are the general rule. Besides, the author of this book is no specialist, but quite simply someone who, by profession and somewhat irreverently, collects and sorts the bits of news he can find and puts them in order. The fact that the Ten Commandments have always been hard to see, to the point of becoming completely invisible over the last few years, is explained by the simultaneous, gradual internationalisation, or globalisation, of the media (Information and entertainment magnates of the world, unite!). The tools of communication, which are – very broadly speaking – information, entertainment and advertising, are controlled by a single group of owners, and not a very big one at that. With the synergic use of information-communication technology resources, these people are now able to determine what several billion inhabitants of our planet have to consume, eat and drink, how they have to enjoy ourselves, where they have to spend their free time, how they should make love, how they should furnish their homes (assuming they have one) and what they have to wish and dream for. And all this in real-time, steering waves of emotions, feelings and, of course, opinions, around every meridian and

parallel of the Earth. It is certainly not by chance that these ladies and gentlemen – who nobody elected, by the way – are an integral and decisive part of the global super society. Without their systematic, continuous and numerous acts of interpretation of reality and without their omnipresent work of suppressing, distorting, remixing, filtering and censoring, the Ten Commandments would never have been implemented.

So, here are the Ten Commandments that have created the Empire and that have taken us to war, or rather, the Superwar 6:

- 1) Make your currency the irreplaceable reserve currency for all, or almost all, other countries.
- 2) Do not tolerate any external constraint whatsoever on your ability to create your currency at will. You will be able to finance virtually unlimited trade deficits with the rest of the world.
- 3) Decide on your monetary policy exclusively on the basis of national interests and make other countries dependent on your monetary policy.
- 4) Impose an international lending system at variable interest rates denominated in your currency. Borrowing countries in crisis will have to repay you more when their capacity to repay is less. You'll have them under your thumb.
- 5) Be ready to engineer volatility and economic crises in the rest of the world when needed. Nip any potentially aspirant competitors in the bud.
- 6) Use all means necessary to impose intense competition between exporters in the rest of the world. This will give you an inflow of imports at constantly decreasing prices relative to the price of your exports.
- 7) Keep on good terms with the elites and middle classes in the rest of the world, regardless of their democratic credentials, because their support for your framework is essential. Never allow the elites and masses of a country to unite around ideas of "national" development or anything else hostile to your dominion and hegemony.
- 8) Use all means necessary to encourage completely free capital mobility and international investment. Under the conditions described above, all the capital will flow towards you, because it's the best, safest and most profitable place to put it. As for overseas investment, make sure your corporations are free to come to the aid of the national elites for the management of their financial assets, private and public education systems, health care, pensions and the like.
- 9) Use all possible means to encourage free trade, so that all countries (i.e. all the other countries) are bound by it at all times and you can apply it as and when it suits you.
- 10) In order to ensure that everything is achieved in an orderly way, without too many evident conflicts, you will need international organisations that appear to be governed by members with equal rights, but which in actual fact are financed in a way that allows you to control them.

All this needed time to come about. It was a long, complex and contradictory gestation. It didn't all go smoothly, as always happens when the forces in play are real and not the abstract schemes of utopians that just happen to be in power. You make your plans as you go along, on the spur of the moment, but then you need intellectuals to give them form, glorify them in the eyes of the public, ennoble them and explain them. These propagandists have to be trained, convinced and, if necessary, bribed and corrupted. And then all obstacles, doubters, non-believers and wise guys have to be got out of the way. Playing it clean if possible, but dirty if necessary. For those of you who've forgotten, an instructions manual has already been written for this and it's enough to follow it. It's called *The Prince* by Nicholas Macchiavelli and it's free, because it's out of copyright.

This was how it was at the end of the Soviet Union. The baby was born, already global. The first seven of the Ten Commandments were already operational, and the last three were accelerated and implemented. It was Bill Clinton who got the job of nursing the baby. Before the former Governor of Arkansas was elected President of the United States of America, a group of Democratic financiers and bankers summoned him to a well-known Manhattan restaurant, not far from the Twin Towers. They told him that if he wanted to be elected he would have to start advocating, as and from then, the complete free flow of capital, without frontiers, limits or conditions. The United States' appetite for handling financial resources had become so immense and global that it could (or rather, absolutely had to) swallow the whole world. There wasn't a moment to lose. The hapless Clinton gave his answer, and was elected. 7 To avoid any misunderstandings and mistakes, it was also suggested that he immediately appoint Robert Rubin as Minister of Finance. Rubin gave the bankers every assurance. He too was from a major investment bank, one of the centres of world power. And so it was done. Years later, when some of the people involved in the operation were asked about it, they almost all acknowledged that the whole thing had been quite impulsive. "We pushed too strongly, too hard." All the developing countries, the ones showing the greatest promise, were put under absolutely irresistible pressure to open their frontiers so that their central banks had to yield their financial levers to United States' control. United States embassies became trading posts and promotion centres for United States finance. The big investment banks, they too going through a period of fantastic expansion, laid down the rules, so that the whole financial world was impregnated with their tried and tested systems. With their auditing, rating and evaluation systems they decided who was to be judged as good and who bad, with no possible right of appeal. Unfortunately, the rest of the world, especially the weaker part of the world, couldn't withstand this kind of pressure for very long. In less than ten years there were already signs that the ambitions and greed of an elite, which now believed itself to be all-powerful, had gone way beyond having any sense of responsibility. But, as the disaster approached, they also realised that there was no one capable of keeping those ambitions in check and imposing a set of rules.

Clinton, after his two terms of office, looked back on what appeared to be a series of clamorous victories, the logical consequences of the most astounding victory of all, the fall of the Empire of Evil. A decade of uninterrupted gains, broken records and an inexorable, systematic growth of confidence in the power of his country. Never before had there been such a remarkable period of development in the entire history of the United States.

Somebody, on looking at the achievements of that period, called it the “Dow Jones 10,000 generation”, and this is fully borne out by the figures. In 1993 the Dow Jones Industrial Average was already high-flying over 3500 points. Six years later – just after the end of the war in Yugoslavia – it had rocketed up to over 10,000 points. The American market, dividends included, had put on a fantastic performance: up 242% in less than six years! The euphoria of victory had led to a euphoria of confidence. And this euphoria had both an origin and a home to go to: Wall Street, with thousands of billions of dollars flying into its coffers from all over the world, year after year. Clinton’s banker electors had looked after their interests well. Dynamism, flexibility, the development of ICT (Information-Communication Technology), the new economy: all this had transformed America into a giant consumer of capital and multiplier of additional growth.

It was the explosion of “American globalisation”. The term used here is neither surreptitious nor an expression of some kind of anti-Americanism. What it refers to is not just an objective, inevitable phenomenon (which is what globalisation is), but rather the American interpretation of that phenomenon, based on American “national” interest (or at least that which is perceived as such by its advocates). The inverted commas around “national” aren’t there by chance. They remind us that crossing national boundaries hasn’t been the same thing for everybody. Some countries have been able to defend their boundaries, or rather impose them on others, and some have had to give way.

In any event, the American image in the world throughout almost the whole of the last decade couldn’t have been better for the USA. America, locomotive of the world economy, with zero inflation, giving lessons on flexibility to everybody and exporting its way of life, culture, technology and values to every corner of the globe.

“Our success is the success of the American capitalist model, which lies closer to the free market vision of Adam Smith than any other. Much closer, certainly, than Asia’s paternalistic crony capitalism that so seduced critics of the American system during Asia’s now-burst bubble.” Thus wrote Charles Krauthammer proudly on the 5th of January 1999, an eminent example of the ideology of triumph. And he continued with an invective, which – had it been directed against the United States – would have been branded immediately (and justifiably) as racism: “We are descended from gamblers and risk takers. Europe and Asia are populated by the folks the gamblers left behind”<sup>8</sup>; in other words, not only indolent stay-at-home losers with no sense of adventure, but also faint-hearted entrepreneurs, work-shy workers and failed capitalists. And then there are the underdeveloped, corrupt primitives of the third World, either lost forever to the call of progress or having to be forced into it with the global big stick, to be wielded with the utmost vigour. Krauthammer prognosticated the destiny of us non-Americans, without bothering too much about distinguishing between Europeans and the Third World. This is the Empire’s river of conventional wisdom, brimming over.

Signs of unease and inadaptability began to appear in the rest of the world over this dramatic acceleration. But the inexorable power of the United States of America would not tolerate insubordination. That acceleration had to be imposed, at all costs. An optimistic, self-confident ideology gushed forth from the command deck and it could not be contradicted. The neo-liberal only way theory rode roughshod over all possible critical reflection. A single strong idea amidst many weak, watery ones, the disorderly retreat of left-wing positions all over the world, orphans not of Marxism (which almost everybody had already abandoned in great haste) but, paradoxically, of the Soviet Union, whose very presence, up to a short while before its disappearance, had forced capitalism to moderate its claims.

The sermon whined on incessantly from the other side of the Ocean: wasn’t this acceleration imposed on us by American globalisation going to produce globalising wealth for everybody? Wasn’t it sure to benefit the poor as well? Certainly, we were inclined to admit that the rich would get even more excessively rich, but – and this was the leitmotif of all those missives – the poor would also become a little less poor. So they would have to be forced to join in, even if they didn’t understand why. And so, a sort of global, capitalist version of the communist paradise was rapidly assembled, in which entire peoples were going to be led to happiness, even if it meant dragging them along by their hair. It was also the operational, practical illustration of the only way theory, otherwise known as TINA (There Is No Alternative), and the stark expression of the programme for the 21st century that Clinton had so lyrically christened the “American century”.

Krauthammer didn’t know it, but at the very time he was uttering his words the trend was already past its peak. It was on its way down: a steep, perilous descent that began on the 2nd of July 1997 with the financial crisis in Thailand. Followed by the crash of almost all the East Asian currencies and the Indonesian economic disaster. Followed by the crash of the rouble on the 17th of August 1998. Finally, in January 1999, just as Krauthammer was approaching delirium, there was the sudden devaluation of the Brazilian real. In the autumn before this, the Federal Reserve summoned American banks to take part in a collective life-saving operation. An operation without precedent. It involved pulling long-term credit management out of a disastrous hole of 6 billion dollars that was throwing Wall Street

into panic. Half the world economy had already sunk into a tormented state that a few economists even dared to define as a “systemic crisis”. Krauthammer obviously wasn’t on the command deck. Political and economic commentators aren’t on the command deck. They’re usually polishing the brasses below, even though they may be invited to dinner now and again, especially if they’re good at clowning about or brightening up the conversation with a dirty joke or two. But they left somebody on watch up there, somebody with sharp eyes who was observing the way things were going with growing anxiety.

A serious crisis was gathering on the horizon for which there was no sure remedy. American globalisation still reigned supreme, but it seemed more and more like a big, garish merry-go-round, or a stock index like the Dow Jones – and now the NASDAQ of the “New Economy” – that continued to rise, indeed fly. The only indicator of the only growth still in the running: American growth. The rest of the world didn’t count. It was starting to dawn on many people in Jakarta, Bangkok, Seoul and Tokyo that if the American consumer got out of bed on the wrong side one morning, or if Americans simply started to save a few cents of their income, then it would be like hitting all the Pacific Rim markets with a hurricane. Europe sailed on amidst a sea of anguish, it too unable to keep pace, although moderately reassured by the fact that it wasn’t so closely linked to the so-called “emerging” Asian and Latin American markets, and therefore less at risk from the backlash. And Japan too had been at a standstill for several years, unable to snap out of its torpor, against a general background of uncertainty, instability and volatility that nobody on the stock exchange had been backing for many years and, indeed, were unlikely to back ever again given that, according to conventional wisdom (as Wall Street analysts call it), cyclical crises of capitalism were a thing of the past. Now, all you can do is grow, and the only thing to ask is how fast that growth will be.

There had been early warnings of another kind, from highly distinguished sources. John Kenneth Galbraith, in a remarkable interview just after his ninetieth birthday, even said that if he had written his *Affluent Society* in 1998 he would have called it the *Unequal Society*. He had just finished his preface to the United Nations report on human development, in which he revealed, amongst other things, that “the richest 20% of the world’s population are responsible for 80% of world consumption. The poorest 20%, on the other hand, consume just 1.3% of all goods and services”. Galbraith made a solemn self-criticism, regarding the increase of two types of poverty in the world: “that which occurs in rich countries” and that represented by “the gap between rich countries and Third World countries”. In Africa and Southern Asia, he argued – contrary to all the claims of globalisation copiously spreading wealth all over the world – “the situation has worsened”. And, regarding the rich countries, he talked of “the horrendous inequality” in wealth in the United States, “a gap without paragon in the other developed countries”. A gap that America-worshippers seem to forget about, strangely enough, whenever they describe the marvels of the American model. And, Galbraith went on to say, economists could no longer even see the poor because, whereas forty years ago “they lived in the country’s marginal zones, like the plantations in the South or rural mountain zones [...] now they’re all in the city”.<sup>9</sup> A highly acute observation that touched on at least one of the main points. Poverty too was on the move, like the free flow of capital. It had started moving into the city and becoming apparent, sometimes in a menacing way. And yet we couldn’t see it then and we still can’t now. For the evident reason that the media, which should keep us informed, don’t show it. Or they just give us glimpses of it, reporting it like road accidents or something of minor importance, a mishap affecting only those destined for it, often because of their own indolence (Krauthammer again). They hardly ever explain why it’s there, or what caused it.

But there have also been warnings of a much more “technical” nature, with no trace of moralism, pity or solidarity. The East Asian crisis demonstrated clearly that the architecture of world finance, as conceived at Bretton Woods in 1944 when capital mobility was quite limited, couldn’t handle this new type of global market in which previously closed economies were swamped by foreign capital and where new technologies and financial innovation packages, exported primarily from the United States, revolutionised the speed, forms of movement and use of capital.

In this new context, immense financial resources can be moved to developing countries, opening up new, colossal investment possibilities in emergent economies and offering fantastic profits to investors. But the facts show that this capital can go as quickly as it comes, according to the same, two-directional lack of rules. This is borne out by the figures. Ten years before the crisis, foreign investment in developing countries was about 34 billion dollars. In 1997 this had soared up to 256 billion dollars. But it just needed a momentary crisis to cause a general exodus. The five economies hardest hit by the Asian crisis of 1997 (South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines) had just received, between them, 93 billion dollars in foreign capital in 1996. In 1997, this total inflow was transformed into a net outflow of 12 billion dollars. And so, in less than a year these five countries had had to withstand a “financial turnaround” of 105 billion dollars, equivalent to 11% of their combined gross domestic product. Not even countries as solid as the major European states could have withstood a backlash of this size.

Another important point is that this disaster cannot be attributed primarily to inefficiencies in the local economy or corrupt politicians. These factors undoubtedly played a significant part, but the main responsibility lies with international finance and the big investment banks, which acted without the slightest consideration for the real conditions in the countries in question, concerned only with making a profit and cutting the cord as soon as there was a hint of danger.



It became ever more apparent that this strategy could backfire and have a boomerang effect on the very architects of this monstrous worldwide financial scenario. After a series of crises and errors in Asia, Russia and Brazil, 10 it became increasingly evident that the collapse of the economies and resulting drop in share prices in emergent countries could affect American share prices and these, in turn, could reverse the trend of previous years, in which United States consumers and firms had been spending a great deal more than they earned.

It was feared that even a slight reversal in United States consumer patterns could cause a serious shrinkage in American growth, by “at least two percentage points a year for the next five years”. 11

One of the people giving these warnings most persistently was the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, somebody who definitely has a place on the command deck and who can hardly be described as reckless. Using the circumspect language of Popes ex cathedra (and the absolute number one of world finance, who can cause catastrophes even by getting a single comma out of place, could hardly be expected to talk otherwise), Greenspan, up to December 1996, when the Dow Jones was just at 6400, spoke of the “irrational exuberance” of the market. 12 Then, on seeing that nobody had listened to his first warning, he returned to the theme on the occasion of the collapse of the rouble and, in September 1998, started actually raising his voice: “Moreover, it is just not credible that the United States can remain an oasis of prosperity unaffected by a world that is experiencing greatly increased stress.” 13 Finally, he gave his third warning in May 1999, talking about the “spectacular rise in equity prices that has to many reached well beyond the justifiable”. 14

And to him, to him more than anybody, Wall Street was getting to be more and more like a balloon full of hot air. But, if it's only good news we want, we need look no further than Homer when he said, “the Gods make blind those who wish to lose”. In the case in question, the Gods made them deaf as well. Any appeal to reason would have been pointless, however, as borne out by the elderly Galbraith, when he observed that, on today's global market, “there are more investors than there is intelligence”.

This long series of premonitory signals, which really seemed like warnings sent from the heavens, tell us quite simply that the West has reached a state of something akin to dementia. Every piece of evidence is demolished in a kind of mad euphoria; every call to reason is dismissed or ridiculed on the basis of totally groundless arguments.

The only way ideology, with its “end of history” and “end of contradictions”, reached paroxysmal levels when Michel Camdessus – official “Washington Consensus” commentator on the demolition of Russia a decade earlier – started ranting on in true whited sepulchre style about “getting richer to help the poor”.

The world is now in the hands of people who have come to power by a process of involution, placed at the helm of new, complex mechanisms without having any of the skills required to control them and without being legitimised by the people, put there by powers that are just as blind as they are and exceptionally greedy.

None of them has the slightest trace of moral responsibility. The only criterion they have for evaluating things, necessarily accompanied by an unbending cynicism, is that of corporate profit.

And yet the IMF and OECDs' very own data clearly show that all the enthusiasm about American globalisation was ill-founded and that the entire theoretical and practical basis of the neo-liberal only way is contradicted by the real dynamics of the situation. To understand it all, it would have been enough simply to look at long-term trends rather than fleeting moments of euphoria. It can be seen from the figures that over the last thirty years the average annual world growth in GDP has been shrinking. In the seventies it averaged 4.4% a year, in the eighties it shrunk considerably to 3.4% and by the end of the nineties it was highly likely to have dropped to below 3%. It's still growth, you might say, but it's a growth that is shrinking very quickly. And the fact that the rate of shrinkage decreases as it contracts brings no solace, because, as the percentages get lower, the decrease couldn't possibly be at a constant rate without leading very rapidly to a general seizure. Furthermore, most of this shrinking growth, even then in 1999, had a single address: Wall Street, United States of America.

And so, looking at it coolly and clinically, the situation had all the makings of a red alert: on the one hand a worldwide shrinkage in growth rates and, on the other, the impetuous, ceaseless, growth of the American economy, most notably American finance. Two phenomena that are evidently incompatible over time. To be joined by the completely new phenomenon of the economic growth (i.e. the “basics” of the economy) detaching itself from financial growth.

How could these contradictory trends be held together? How would they cope with it if everything ground to a halt? If the people on the command deck saw this happening (and they must have done), surely they should have found a way of warning the “Dow Jones 10,000 generation” that something bad was about to happen? Surely they should have seen that, in the first place, America's high-flying level of consumption, for example, would have to be brought into question, suddenly, sharply and dramatically?

And then, how could they explain to the rest of the world – with the crisis, the recession, so menacingly close at hand – that there weren't going to be any more crumbs for those waiting in the shadows around the banqueting table because the food was less than before and the appetites at the table had got bigger? Yes, this above all needed explaining, because the people on the command deck couldn't cope with having to look at things from another angle and trying to envisage a new international economic and political order based on justice and the shared responsibility of all nations and cultures. For this they were not prepared. After years of victory and euphoria, the only way had no room for ideas of social justice any more.

Now that the crisis appears possible, indeed probable, everything is based on the survival instinct, that essential law of the jungle that had guided those on the command deck through the age of plenty.

And so now it's a question of reverting to TINA and forcing the rest of the world to accept that there really is no alternative but to maintain, if not accentuate, the unequal system of distributing the world's wealth to the benefit of one fifth of humanity and to the detriment of the remaining four fifths, against a background not of expansion but of shrinkage. In other words, in conditions of growing political and social tension on a world scale.

Who would have had the courage to recount this truth to his or her fellow citizens? Which president of the United States – on understanding the situation – would have had the moral and intellectual stature to say, in an all-channel broadcast to his country, that the development, wealth and consumption that his citizens had so abundantly benefited from could no longer be maintained in those terms and at that level of abundance?

Who could have got up there and said that there needed to be change, no doubt difficult and painful but perhaps achievable with broad, worldwide consensus? Such a president would have been swept away, rejected, certainly not re-elected and probably killed by a people that had become consumers rather than citizens, a people that had been kept totally in the dark about the actual state of the planet and their own country. This kind of approach would have been impossible even in 1999, when America was still triumphant on the winner's podium. Imagine, then, how it would be received with America in the grips of a crisis, faced with recession, or even just a curtailment to its lifestyle?

Up there, on the command deck, they've been considering all these possibilities for some time. And it has been decided to pick up the global stick talked about by Thomas Friedman. Straightaway. Not in a few years time. It would have to be done before the economy started really plummeting.

Little Yugoslavia was chosen, the ideal country and people for wreaking the ultimate, subtle revenge on the last remaining vestiges of "communism" in the heart of Europe. The revenge they couldn't wreak against the Soviets.

Because the Soviets gave in, changed their name to Russians and parted company with the Ukraine and all the other Asiatic and European peoples that had been part of their troupe, albeit not gladly, for seventy years.

And so Yugoslavia was the ideal country and people to try a little warning experiment on, before moving on to the bigger tests to be tackled, presumably with the same means, in the near future.

2.

The end of history

"The main task facing humanity is to bring about a rapid, radical change in the current world situation, which is out of balance and deteriorating quickly." These words could be a perfect description of the state of the planet on any 10th of September 2001.

Stock markets were in free fall almost all over the world. The recession in the American economy was not officially acknowledged until halfway through November of that year (note: after the 11th of September), but then it came out that the economy had already been in recession since April 2001, about seven months earlier (note: before the 11th of September). We all know of course that this delay can be explained by the worry about small savers panicking and making the crisis much worse. But we can't help making three considerations.

The first is that the world public didn't know about the most important news of the decade until about seven months after it happened. This allowed the few who did know about it to take a series of protective measures denied to others, such as selling and buying stock, moving capital from one part of the world to another, changing currencies, etc. And perhaps it also allowed a handful of very well informed people to organise, or at least not stand in the way of, a series of terrorist acts on a catastrophic scale in which the problems would be engulfed and the responsibilities hidden. In hindsight, for example, it comes to mind that the directors of Enron Corp., the world-scale energy colossus, must have known something when they decided to let the company go bankrupt, robbing shareholders and employees alike in one

of the hugest disasters in the history of the American economy.

The second consideration regards the leaders of the top “8” countries, who met in Genoa in July 2001. Did they know the American recession had already begun? If they didn’t, they weren’t as “top” as we thought. And if they did, why didn’t they tell the world about it?

The third consideration stems from pure astonishment. For twenty years now they’ve been singing the praises of the global village with its incredibly fast communications – texting, video conferences, money transfers from one end of the globe to the other, etc. – where everybody gets to know everything about everybody at lightning speed, in real time. And then we find out that the people who really do know everything, or at least the essentials of everything, are very few – we don’t even know exactly who they are – whereas the rest of us, the real “everybody”, don’t even know about really important things that affect our lives.

But this is just a passing media-related thought, like many other in this book, because the more closely you look at what’s happening, the more you realise that information and communication (or the lack of them) are the key to understanding everything. And so, after Japan, that had been stuck on the rails for almost a decade, there came America. Europe should then have taken over as reserve locomotive, but it just kept floundering about at low speed waiting for America to start rolling again. Alan Greenspan, engine-driver-in-chief, cut discount rates eleven times in 2001, but the recession couldn’t be avoided. George W. Bush’s fiscal policy, so generous to rich Americans, wasn’t delivering any benefits in terms of investment and the recovery of consumer levels. And nor could it have done, as unemployment was starting to take its toll on the consumption habits of the average American family.

None of the protagonists had a strategy. They didn’t know how to stop the speculative bubble, the one they themselves had created, from deflating. A lamentable situation, coming on top of a tremendous build-up of the two contradictions that the UPP (Universal Prosperity Party) had managed to hide from themselves and everybody else throughout the whole of the two previous decades: the contradiction between the planet’s rich and poor, ever more acute, and the contradiction between development and nature, development and mankind, for which American globalisation has no solution. The UPP was (and still is) the single party of the future global super-society, whose members “agree on its basic agenda of free markets, free trade and a free rein for globalisation and the technological revolution”.<sup>1</sup> They are united in the conviction that the only globalisation is American globalisation, and that it’s already here. And that it can only work one way, the way it has up to present. And that it works very well, because it produces more, faster and for more and more people. The problem is, though, as we have seen, that most of these convictions are either false or undocumentable. And the rest are just the ideological expression of pure, archetypal self-interest.

Anybody, simply by looking out towards the horizon on the 10th of September would have seen, for example, that in the whole of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the number of people living beneath the poverty line – set at four dollars a day – had risen from 14 million in 1989 to 147 million in the second half of the nineties. They would have seen a certain degree of growth in South and East Asian countries from 1990 to 1997, but the only country they would have seen growing steadily over the previous three years was China.

They would have seen some very black clouds, too. The rich were distancing themselves from the poor at high speed, but the gap was widening much faster in developing and emergent countries, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. And in this simple observation there lies one the greatest deceptions of all: pretending not to know that the GDP in developing, poor and very poor countries – which sometimes increases – is not distributed amongst the population. Even if there is growth, this in no way means that there’s going to be a reduction in poverty. Indeed, very often the figures tell us – those of us who want to listen – that wealth in these poor countries means wealth only for the small minorities that dominate them. And that these are very often great friends of the Western elites with whom they do business and in whose banks they deposit the billions of dollars robbed from their subjects.

The global figures painted a devastating picture, enough to take your breath away. Six billion people living on the Earth and 1.2 billion of them not having enough to eat, to a greater or lesser extent. The President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, was forced to acknowledge that all the international development programmes, such as the one to halve poverty by 2015,<sup>2</sup> the one to reduce infant mortality by two thirds and the one to give all children primary schooling were largely unrealised and were basically just hot air, not worth the paper they were written on. A billion and a half people in the world don’t have enough drinking water. About a billion are completely illiterate. 125 million children don’t even start primary school and the information gap is widening, despite the enthusiasm of Al Gore and other adorers of the Internet. Half of humanity lives on two dollars a day, and half of these live (for want of a better word) on less than a dollar a day. Afghanistan is in the latter, desperately poor, category.

If you look a little further ahead, let’s say, twenty five years on, you’ll see that a child born today will have to share this shortage of air, water, food, space, work, education and cultivable ground with another two billion inhabitants. Look even further ahead, about fifty years on, and you’ll see a Pakistani farmer – one of the 345 million crowded into that country (there are now 146 million) – having to cultivate 0.04 hectares of land, i.e. less than a tennis court, to live on.

Just a load of statistics, say the leader-writers as they prepare their pearls of truth of for the front pages of the Italian (and world) newspapers, shrugging it all off over a game of squash at the local club.

Development aid from rich countries has repeatedly been at its lowest ever levels over the last fifty years. Industrialised countries now give less than 0.25% of their GDP for aid, i.e. 39% less than they did at the start of 1990. It seems like the richer these people get the more mean and selfish they become, and stupid: because they must be unforgivably stupid if they can't understand that behaving collectively in this way means jeopardising the basic interests of the West, especially its security. As in the ancient Israelite saying: "Man in his wellbeing does not understand".

But is it just question of poor countries? Are rich countries (the so-called golden billion) exempt from these problems? "In the much admired American economy, with its long boom, where 4 million people can now call themselves millionaires (in dollars) and no less than 170 people have personal net assets of over a billion, for 60 million ordinary workers things haven't gone so well [...]: in real terms, allowing for inflation, these people were earning more at the start of the seventies [...]. And more than 17 million people, employed full-time for 40 hours a week and 50 weeks a year, are now beneath the poverty threshold." 3 The statistics tell us that in the United States there was almost full employment, whereas other figures say that a situation with such a high number of wages below the poverty line cannot seriously be called full employment. So it isn't just a question of the Third World. Because poverty isn't just about income: it's something much more serious. What all those billions of people are looking for isn't just a minimum level of material wellbeing for themselves. What they're looking for is prospects, for both them and their children. "Something, however, which hasn't been taken into account in the slightest way, not even in its basic and most evident implications, is that the upheavals of turbocapitalism, and the accelerated structural change that this brings, condemn many American workers, at all grades and levels of qualification, to a life of chronic economic insecurity." 4 This is a more or less accurate picture of all advanced societies, at different stages and on different levels. What's happening (or rather, what has already happened, quite a while ago, having become normal practice over the last thirty years, an entire generation) is that the few extra crumbs that arrive are more and more often tied to a loss of security or future prospects. We have lived and are living with a set of dominant ideas based on a single, quite brutal line of thought: a kind of economic Darwinism where the strongest always win, and winning is imperative even when you would have been quite happy with a draw, because winning is the only way to improve the efficiency of the system.

What about the losers? That's their tough luck. We haven't got time to feel sorry for them: they can't guarantee a minimum level of efficiency, and efficiency is what guarantees profit. And in this orgy of presumed efficiency, they tell us day after day that the state, with all its bureaucratic constraints, taxes, slowness, inefficiencies, business restrictions and regulatory tendencies, is something else that should be abolished. States are no longer able to guarantee efficiency levels. They should therefore be done away with. And so should politics and democracy. These are the progeny of nation states and are destined to vanish along with the states themselves.

What they were unable to see, it seems – and still can't, even after the 11th of September, which is quite worrying – is that "a world economy split off from politics is an illusion. Without states and public services there is no security. Without taxes there is no state. Without taxes there is no education, no effective health policy and no form of social security. Without taxes there is no democracy. Without public opinion, democracy and civil society there is no legitimacy". 5 A mindless current that the European Left has been drifting along in too, blind to the fact that it was carrying it to its ruin. The Blairs, Schroeders and D'Alema of this world seized on the "American package" without realising it meant the end of all forms of democratic dialectic, but also without realising that the package itself was already in crisis: an illusory, ailing, absurd mechanism. And all this should have warned us that there would be no peace for anyone in the near future. Neither for poor societies nor for those which, according to GDP, are considered rich.

On that 10th of September we saw that the rich had become not only richer but also more inhuman, more miserly and more bullying. Could it be that they thought they were actually liked, as well as being envied and admired? "This nation – said Al Gore during his unsuccessful and ineffectual election campaign – is now looked on by peoples on every other continent and the peoples from every part of this earth as a kind of model for what the future could be." 6 There was an element of truth in this proud remark. It certainly has been a very special society: miraculously anomalous, able to absorb everything, metabolise contradictions and multiply its residual energy in an age-long economic drive that has made it the powerhouse for the most dynamic forces in the whole world. But what Al Gore couldn't understand was that not everything that Americans see as being good for them is necessarily good for everybody else. And this is because nobody else – for reasons of destiny and history – is at the centre of this driving force. But this doesn't mean that the others see themselves as inferior or that they'll accept having unwanted, unpopular laws and conditions imposed on them. Nor could Al Gore see that being admired isn't the same thing as being liked. Nor did he realise that being the sole dominators of the world inevitably means making enemies. And what he failed to grasp was that having this role – a role that most of the American elite undoubtedly want and are happy to have – should have brought a sense of responsibility to the United States and induced it to lead the global fight against poverty, inequality and injustice. But neither Al Gore (like Clinton) nor Bush (like Al Gore) could even see what the problem was, even though it was right there under their noses, as huge as America's debt to the rest of the world. They should have taken it into consideration – had they not been ideologically blinded (as in the Marxist term "false consciousness") – that the United States'

incredible performance over the previous twenty years had been achieved not just through its own qualities and favourable circumstances, but at the expense of the rest of the world, who had paid for it almost in full.

As Oscar Arias, the former President of Costa Rica noted, in the decade 2001-2010, another 60 billion dollars would have been enough to provide basic education for the entire population of the developing world. <sup>7</sup> But the G8 summits at Okinawa and Genoa failed to make the slightest impression on the obtuse selfishness of the rich. Certainly, set against such devastating underdevelopment and poverty figures – which most people didn't know about, having been induced to think the opposite was true –, the colossal, fantastic dream factory of American globalisation couldn't fail to work, and was indeed working marvellously. But sooner or later you have to wake up. The words that begin this chapter were not written on that any 10th of September 2001, but in 1972. They are taken from that famous and yet now almost forgotten document of the Club of Rome, called "Limits to Growth". Those words are thirty years old: thirty years of collective world madness and thirty years of triumphant American globalisation. And they lie at the heart of the second contradiction that was to be there before us all, globalised and globalisers alike, on the 10th of September 2001.

It must be said at the outset that that forecast has been proved wrong over the last thirty years. Since then the world GDP has tripled, without anything particularly serious happening. Not only that, but the Soviet Union has crumbled and communism has died and been buried without causing the slightest ripple on Western shores. Economic markets have carried on churning out more and more gleaming, hi-tech goods. Raw material prices have crashed, in real terms, thus taking the wind out of the sails of the Third World dictators who often controlled them. The scientists of the Club of Rome were scorned by legions of ebulliently optimistic economists. They had forgotten – according to these optimists – to include the parameters and logic of market forces in their models. They hadn't taken into account the basic concept that the scarcity of a commodity leads first of all to a rise in its price, whilst at the same time stimulating the search for cheaper and more efficient alternatives. And these alternative solutions are always found, because that hidden hand of secular providence, the market itself, always steps in with the answer. Wasn't there an energy crisis in 1973-74? And hadn't the resulting quadrupling of energy prices forced the world economy to start looking at cheaper fuels, energy-saving technologies and cars able to run at much lower consumption levels?

When the Berlin Wall collapsed the sarcasm of the optimists brimmed over. The forecast of the Club of Rome – which spoke of a time somewhere towards the end of the eighties – had already been refuted by the facts. And the facts had also put paid to the Soviet Union, the main enemy of global capitalist development under the aegis of the United States. The paeans of deliverance were never-ending, sung to the tune of a line of thought that has now become the only one. So only that there is no room for criticism or differences any more. That's the way it is and that's the way it has to be. Hasn't communism been defeated? And wasn't communism the only alternative to capitalism in its entire history? And once this alternative has vanished, then what else is there but capitalism per omnia saecula saeculorum, amen? History has thus ended, once and for all, concludes Francis Fukuyama. The Hegelian spirit has finally been consolidated in the global form of capitalist society and the dialect is no more. The invisible hand of the market has descended to touch our Western brows with its blessing. As for the other brows, the ones in the rest of the world, it's probably leaving them until later. But, to be quite frank, what happens beyond the borders of the West is of little importance. Anyway, from what little we know about it, the situation elsewhere seems quite calm. It's full of savages, and you can go hunting there and indulge in sexual tourism. And all the less savage ones want to do is to be like us. Don't all the opinion polls and experts say that the youth of Kuala Lumpur, St. Petersburg, Dacca, Lima, Buenos Aires, Rome, Timbuktu and Belgrade dream only of living in New York?

Surely somebody, some time, will start having doubts about whether it will be possible for everybody to live in New York, not to mention how. And when it dawns on them, they might well want to make whoever told them such a tall story pay for it. Because it's true, absolutely true, that American music, American films, McDonalds, Boeings, Hollywood, Disney, CNN and all things made in the USA have been the stuff that dreams are made of all over the world. But then a journalist like Thomas Friedman, as intelligent as he is imperial, happens to meet Mullah Moulana Samiul Haq in a Peshawar Madrasa and listens to him explaining how he can drink Coca Cola and eat McDonald's hamburgers and yet, at the same time, hate America with all his might: "because their policies are poisonous and their Coke is sweet". <sup>8</sup>

This very point underlines a tragic error in perspective: the West believes that its values – duly defined as universal – are equally applicable to all other peoples and countries and that they set standards that everyone wants to abide by.

In the specific case of the United States, this conviction leads to a second one, which is that the American idea of happiness on earth should be shared by the rest of the world. And, still by definition, as American society stands for everything that's the best, most modern and most developed in all spheres, including Goodness, then one can deduce – mistakenly, unfortunately – that other peoples hate America because they envy it. But the reality is much more complex, as are the history and culture of different peoples. When communism fell, the vast majority of people in Russia wanted to live like in the West and turn their backs on communism forever. But, as we have seen in these ten years of post-communism, that didn't mean they wanted to be invaded by American advertising and the American way of life. The Russian idea of happiness, for example, is far removed from the Illinois one. And when Friedman asked

Rahim Kunduz, a twelve-year-old Afghani refugee in Peshawar, what he thought of Americans in general, he answered “they are unbelievers and do not like to befriend Moslems and they want to dominate the world with their power”. This is not envy, apart, perhaps, from a partial envy of the military power. The rest is a defensive reaction. It’s hard to be loved in the midst of a sea of desperation. And so, Friedman wisely concludes: “When we return [after the operation against bin Laden, which we have to complete as “quickly” as possible and then get out – author’s note], and we must, we have to be armed with modern books and schools – not tanks. Only then might we develop a new soil, a new generation as hospitable to our policies as our burgers. Until then, nothing pro-American will grow here”. 9

The decade just drawn to a close saw the incessant, obsessive spread of the neo-liberal only way ideology, in a way that was so exasperating as to become a caricature. The magic words, repeated ad infinitum like incantations, were: total liberalisation of trade, elimination of all barriers, limitless flow of capital, privatisation of all state property and all public economic structures, including those at the core of the traditional Welfare State. All possible means were used to accelerate structural changes, “generating more creation and more destruction, more efficiency and more inequality [...]. Transferring power from public authorities to private and institutional economic interests. This inevitably reduced the room for manoeuvre for democratic control, in a process much acclaimed in certain libertarian circles by which the economy is, or should be, an entirely private phenomenon, whereas the public has no right to put private property under its control, not for any reason”. 10 The international tools used for implementing the plan were the twin sisters of Bretton Woods: the IMF and the World Bank, to be joined later by the WTO, a close relative of theirs, being the direct descendant of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). It is not by chance that these three institutions are external and extraneous to the United Nations. And it is also not by chance that these are the only international institutions that have been given the actual, concrete power to limit and abrogate the national sovereignty of their member states. But, as we have seen, not all abrogations are equal. The “Washington Consensus” has been the key to dismantling the international representativeness of the United Nations, replacing it with the Ten Commandments of American globalisation, the prelude to the Empire.

The points listed by the Club of Rome didn’t get on to the agenda until a few decades later, but they haven’t changed at all: population growth in excess of what can be sustained by the ecosystem, global warming, crisis in the ratio between individuals and cultivable areas, water consumption exceeding the reproductive capacity of the hydrological cycle, oceanic proteins reaching their reproduction limits, disappearance of forests and gradual desertification and dying out of animal and vegetable species. A long list of trends which, if not stopped and reversed in time, will lead to the gradual deterioration of the environment and the economic decline of the planet.

“A world – wrote Lester Brown – in which the needs of the economy push us to violate the limits of natural systems and trust exclusively in economic indicators when making investment choices is a recipe for disaster.” 11 And the optimists keep on telling us that time will prove these predictions wrong too, as it did the previous ones. Nothing could be more stupid and less scientifically grounded: with the development of the new technologies that these very same optimists are so keen on, science has equipped itself with immeasurably more accurate and reliable calculation and modelling methods than forty years ago. Indeed, in many respects, the amount of data, information and statistical techniques now available paint a much more serious picture than was once thought or feared.

To take just one significant example: we now know that the ocean ecosystems are in a far worse state than was thought as recently as two or three years ago. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, we are faced with “a catastrophic collapse in global fish stocks”. The productivity of the oceans is already “six times less than fifty years ago”, but “fishing effort is three times greater than in 1950, while the catch has fallen by more than half”, the result being that the rich of the world are “masking their own crisis” in supplies and “paying fishers in other oceans to grind down their marine ecosystems” in order to maintain their level of consumption. 12

What these eternal optimists, these inventors of the world economic miracle, don’t realise is that if we don’t start rethinking the economic system soon economic progress will no longer be possible, and that the choice is between either constructing a sustainable world economy or going ahead blindly, as we are doing, until growth starts to slow down of its own accord. And we’d better be quick, because the more time we waste the more catastrophic the backlash will be, and we shall be forced to take measures in situations that have deteriorated so much that the changes to the earth’s equilibrium will be irreversible and will affect future generations.

It didn’t even enter American globalisation worshippers’ heads that unrestrained growth, with its exponentially soaring curves, was bound sooner or later to come up against real things and real people, and not just graphs and bits with peaks, asymptotes and infinities. There’s no such thing as an economy without people. Somebody, somewhere was getting carried along on those curves. And when they started heading for infinity the sparks would start to fly because all human ecology, collective history and people’s traditions would be violated. Asymptotes don’t bring peace when they’re transferred from university blackboards to the lives of ordinary people. But the general opinion was that West was best, or rather that America was the best of the best and that we, us Europeans, had no choice but to get up and follow it as quickly as we could, or else we too would lose out and be driven back inexorably into the Third World. And so the categorical imperative was to do as America does to avoid being left behind in a mire of feverish rivalry between

states, peoples, cultures and civilisations.

These warning signs should have alerted the West: if not America, which was too busy admiring itself in the mirror, then at least Europe, which didn't have much to admire but, to make up for it, had a long enough past to be able to tell the difference between the deep, slow-moving currents of history and mere bubbles on the surface. But no, Europe too was dragged, pushed and jostled into the race. The Left included: all of it, without exception, caught up in the same story, just when that very story of modernisation was showing its strategic weakness. The Left, more than anybody, should have been able to see that economic growth under American globalisation conditions would lead to an increase in inequality and not a decrease. And no one on the Left bothered to work out how that growth, assuming it actually occurred, could be sustained at such a high level over time. And nor did anyone on the Left try to work out how anything in this growth mechanism would all of a sudden be capable of reducing inequality instead of making it grow even more.

The savage irony of history! Less than ten years earlier the Soviet system had collapsed, basically because it couldn't keep pace with innovation. Ten years later, those who had helped to bring about that collapse couldn't see that there were no inbuilt correctives in the mechanism of American-style globalisation, and that innovation, left to itself, was capable of producing monsters. And so they couldn't see – just as the Soviet Politburo couldn't – that capitalism would have to be reformed yet again. This time without having to play on the fear of an external enemy, but from within. But they, the leaders of social democracy, together with the ex- and anti-communists, went on saying that capitalism couldn't be reformed, just as they used to say about communism.

It needed a bard of global capitalism – American, lucid and unprejudiced – to tell the European Left where American globalisation was leading. “Everywhere, the logic of turbocapitalism is that nothing must hold up economic efficiency, neither the obstructionism of government regulations, nor customs, nor inveterate interests, nor feelings of solidarity with the less fortunate, nor arbitrary privileges, nor the human sense of stability. In fact, nothing should get in the way of competition, which, left to itself, imposes efficiency, impoverishing the less efficient: individuals, companies, industries, regions and countries, sometimes simultaneously.”<sup>13</sup> Luttwak then concludes sarcastically that “for that kind of Left, which now represents the dominant Left everywhere, magnificently represented by Tony Blair, the only truth is the slogan of the directors of central banks: inflation is the cruellest of taxes”.<sup>14</sup>

And so, everybody falls in with the idea of a world where the nations all race together on a single track. All in the same direction, to “maximise performance”. Without realising that the race is rigged, because there is no yardstick to actually measure that performance, which, one assumes, is the competitiveness of a nation. This was explained perfectly by Giorgio Ruffolo, a moderate, but obviously much too extremist to be listened to by this kind of Left. What could the yardstick be? The current balance of payments? If we used this, we would see immediately that “the American economy, with its monstrous foreign trade deficit, would be the least competitive in the world”. The only way to prevent rigging is to combine market results (i.e. high productivity, high rate of technological innovation, etc.) with other factors “that guarantee social cohesion, i.e.: education, health, work, safety and now the environment”. And “setting the terms of this combination is the political responsibility of the community [...] and cannot be entrusted to the inscrutable laws of the market”.<sup>15</sup> But the background music echoing perpetually in our heads, in true Orwellian style, was telling us something else: that history had really ended and that the war on poverty – to quote the ineffable Fukuyama – had “finally been won, once and for all, with the defeat of the poor”. Was it really worth wasting any more time on this old problem, so “unmodern”?

And so the show went on, all through the last decade, whirling along faster and faster and more and more fantastically. Also because, in the meantime, the stage managers had perfected the productivity of the dream machines in a way that no one could ever have imagined. They had adopted – with incredible farsightedness, in this case – information-communication technology in its infancy. There was no place for doomsters in those brilliant, glittering productions of theirs. The warnings given by the Gods, even very serious ones like the thousands of dead in Jakarta, the ten unexpected nuclear tests by India and Pakistan or the crash of the rouble and the Brazilian real, all ended up in the wastepaper basket. The International Monetary Fund (a rather curious group of aliens, the absolute personification of the future global super-society middle class) travelled round and round the world, never emerging from their five-star Sheraton Hotels, preaching the same universal recipe wherever they went, producing reports praising such things as the “continuous, impressive macroeconomic performance of South Korea and Thailand”. Without even mentioning how, in that climate of lax controls, mindless euphoria, blatant incompetence and downright swindles, certain Korean companies had received a hundred cents of foreign investment for every cent of capital, all in the name of globalising deregulation. Trillions of dollars of speculative capital, of more or less questionable origin, were invested in those markets. And the Asian Tigers, as they so liked calling them, were bloated like balloons. But then, if Wall Street was over-inflated, why shouldn't Seoul, Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur be too?

And so, in this atmosphere of near delirium, we came to the 10th of September 2001. Everything, apparently, seemed to be getting better, but it wasn't. Four years earlier the Democrat Clinton had opened the G8 conference in Denver, Colorado, talking in emphatic terms about the “American century”. Behind him there were seven years of the most

spectacular growth of the United States economy, with millions of Americans becoming shareholders in something that was paying out dividends at an amazing rate. Four years later Bush went to Genoa to set the new working agenda, but the scene had changed dramatically. The propulsive thrust of American growth had petered out. The United States had to convince the rest of the world to support American growth again, whereas in the previous decade the rest of the world wanted nothing else but for it to continue, and so didn't need convincing or forcing in any way. The logical and political foundations on which Clinton stood – and with him America – were no longer there. What was left then, on the 10th of September 2001? There was the immense military and technological power of the United States. There was the control of the main communication systems. There was the really impressive control of the media system. There was the total domination of the entire global financial architecture. Was all this sufficient to guarantee American hegemony for a long time? Perhaps it was, but it was now evident that a dose of coercion was needed. And the size this dose would only be revealed afterwards. But straightaway Bush was putting forward new strategic doctrines, according to which America would no longer negotiate its own national security with anyone. There was going to be all-round American unilateralism. No more disarmament negotiations, but crude, unilateral adaptation of arms systems and armed forces according to American defence needs. The rest of the world, allies included, would only be told about it afterwards.

A certain degree of haste was apparent. Bush, put into power by very important forces in the United States establishment – the energy lobby – seemed to be acting as if there wasn't much time. The first creaks could be heard, as everything started moving. America had to prepare itself for some difficult engagements but before that it had to be sure of its absolute superiority. But wouldn't this attitude put its network of alliances in difficulty? So much the worse for the network of alliances. It was the ideology of the world Right, now coming to power. It had the semblance of continuity, though, because all its neo-liberal premises had been created by the previous president, Clinton.

What the European Left couldn't see – although the big financial operators and technocrats perhaps could – was that nothing good could come of the fact that the ratio between the income of the wealthiest and poorest quintiles (20%) in the world had grown from 1:30 in 1960 to 1:78 in 1994 and then 1:84 in 1999. And they would have been quite worried if they had seen that the combined wealth of the first ten billionaires in the world (according to "Fortune"), amounting to 133 billion dollars in 1996 and approaching 200 billion in 2000, was 1.3 times the annual national aggregate of the 48 poorest countries in the world.

It's as if there are two elastic bands. One of them is on the world social crisis and is already very taut. And the same thing is starting to happen to the other one, on the crisis in the balance of nature, although this is not yet visible. It soon will be, though. We don't know yet what they're going to call these two elastic bands. The first one is known as the "clash of civilisations" for the time being. Some people don't agree: they say it's not a clash of civilisations but a social struggle. But, seeing as the fighters on both sides of the barricades are convinced they're in a clash of civilisations, then we'd better call it that ourselves, as it conveys the idea of what is happening quite majestically. What it really means, before it actually appears, is not quite clear: in fact, over the last few years, the only way ideology managed to convince the world that nothing was going to happen, everything was going well and was going to carry on going well for ever. Now we know what the 11th of September 2001 means.

### 3. What kind of war is this?

So, before the 11th of September, a drastic, dramatic change of course was necessary. A complete transformation of the founding values of Western Civilisation, the strongest civilisation on Earth and the only one strong enough to power through an epoch change capable of influencing the way the world was going. The United States was the high point and by far the mightiest power of this civilisation. And this was the task that lay before it.

It could have made an attempt – which would have been truly historical in terms of its immense intellectual and cultural value – to redesign all the relationships in a world where the inequality and instability of social relations and the contradictions between man and nature had reached unbearably dangerous levels. Something like Bretton Woods, but incomparably more difficult and with truly global consequences: reducing the differences in wealth between North and South, engineering a great compromise between the different civilisations and cultures of the planet, instigating the formation of new international institutions for governing the great global challenges that lay before humanity. In short, starting to build a new world order based on the equal rights of nations and the common recognition of the need for sustainable growth.

In truth, this was the choice it was faced with ten years earlier, with Gorbachev's Perestroika. An extraordinary process of renewal in all international relations had begun. The crisis in the Soviet Union had produced great suffering, but it had also produced a new outlook. Important results had already been achieved, with the conferences in Vienna and Paris, the Middle East peace process, the plans for the elimination of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons and the limitation of nuclear testing. Would it have been possible to continue along that road, in that direction? I think it would. But the American leadership, under President Clinton, went in another direction. They could have brought order, a new world order, with America at the helm, capable of approaching the world's problems in the context of common



interests and the common good. But perhaps this was too far removed from the American model, based on affluence, efficiency and competition and characterised by great, often ferocious, conflict. There was no place for concepts like the common good. Instead of a vision of a possible new world order based on wisdom and compromise between peoples and cultures, there was a pragmatic vision of a world fraught with anarchic tendencies, a kind of global anarchy which could be dominated only by the might of the United States. As soon as he was elected, President, Clinton appointed James Woolsey as head of the Central Intelligence Agency. And when Woolsey was called before the Senate to expound his ideas on the question of national security, the expression he used was blazoned across all the headlines. America, he said, had slain the dragon and was now in a forest full of poisonous snakes.

This position, this new line in the United States defence policy – first emerging in 1992 – aimed first and foremost to stop anybody else from becoming a superpower, to block all possible future global competition and to dissuade anyone, even the staunchest allies amongst the advanced industrial nations and in Europe, from making any attempt whatsoever to challenge or even limit American leadership. “Then there was the euphoria of victory in many Western circles, further heightened by the unexpectedness of it. Precious time was wasted in endlessly celebrating the triumph over communism. And they lost sight of the complexity of the world, its problems and its extremely serious contradictions. Its poverty and backwardness were forgotten about and they cared only about getting all they could out of the existing imbalances, rather than trying to reduce them, control them. The need to create a new world order, fairer than the one that had just ended, was forgotten about. And so, in the last decade, a fuse was lit that smouldered on until there was the explosion of the 11th of September. In a way, that day was also the terrible price to be paid for a wasted decade”<sup>1</sup> Wilfully squandered, rather than wasted. All that remained was the other alternative, the only one that had been prepared and planned over the years: to forge ahead with American globalisation, whatever the cost and whatever the circumstances. In other words, to prolong the prosperity of those dominant classes in the United States who had first perceived and then seized the benefits arising from the end of the bipolar world. And so the Ten Commandments were drawn up, with the trial wars in Iraq and Yugoslavia. In truth, up there on the command deck they were looking ahead to another, more distant engagement: China, due to become the great adversary of the future, by about 2017, according to the Pentagon’s calculations. China’s economic, demographic, technological and military growth would need about twenty years before being in a position to influence, absorb, contrast and, if necessary, fight. There was no way that that date could be approached without preparation. Already, by halfway through the nineties, China was the only country in the world that could take decisions without having to ask anybody’s permission, not even the United States’. It would either have to be neutralised as soon as possible or, if not, preparations would have to be made to confront it. And the first thing to be done, without wasting any time, was to widen the technological-military gap so much that it would be unbridgeable for a much longer time. This too was the meaning of the Star Wars programme, re-exhumed from the Reagan era, first of all by Clinton and then, more decidedly, by George Bush. The rogue states were no other than Dantesque screen-women. So, preparations were made to confront China with tools that it would be unable to equal even in 2020. But these calculations assumed that the American locomotive and its globalisation would keep going indefinitely, this, moreover, being one of the assumptions of the neo-liberal only way theory. But instead, there we were with the American economy going into recession in that very year, 2001. And nobody could understand what kind of crisis it was, whether it was going to be long, profound, cyclic, or, as some wiser observers had warned, systemic. And there we were with the time available suddenly getting less. The radical choice could be put off no longer. The only missing condition for taking the final decision was the Empire’s awareness of its existence. This was produced by the 11th of September.

The surprise, however, was only relative. They were prepared for something like this happening, and had been for a long time. Nobody could have predicted the actual form it was going to take, because those who plan terrorist actions on this scale are not the same as those who try and stop them, but they both necessarily have to think on the same wavelength, using similar criteria. Sometimes they’re so close as to be right next to each other, but usually this isn’t discovered until years later, when the game’s up and the files can be opened, even though they would rather keep them closed forever.

And so they were prepared for it. From way back in 1991 when there was the first post-Soviet war, against Iraq, which was called Desert Storm and classed as a policing operation. Operation Desert Storm started in the evening of the 16th of January 1991. The first news we got on the war was when they talked about the intense bombardment of a large number of Iraqi targets. Television programmes all over the world were interrupted to broadcast images of the war, all courtesy of the Pentagon, showing off the new marvels of American technology. Official sources told us that the missiles and aeroplanes had parted from bases in the region, in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other countries around the Persian Gulf. Other raids had been launched from ships and aircraft carriers in the Gulf and Red Sea. But this wasn’t really what happened, or, to be more precise, this wasn’t all that happened. “Fifteen hours before the raid started on Baghdad, a squadron of seven B52G long-range bombers set off from USAF Barksdale, in Louisiana, on what would later be known as the longest air raid in the history of world aviation”<sup>2</sup> The aeroplanes flew along the east coast of the United States, crossed the Atlantic, over Spain, all the way over the Mediterranean from west to east and then cut across Egypt to enter Saudi Arabian air space. Coasting around the edge of Iraq, and without flying over Iraqi territory for a single minute, they fired thirty-five air-to-surface cruise missiles at eight Iraqi targets. On completing their mission, they turned 180° and headed back to their base in Barksdale. “The entire operation lasted 35 hours, covering a distance

of 14 thousand miles, with a certain number of in-flight refuellings using tanker planes operating from bases in Spain and the Azores.” An operation – according to the writer who reconstructed the events – “that had three remarkable characteristics. The first was its length (the first real demonstration of real global air power in times of war); the second was the kind of weapons used. These were cruise missiles – different to the Tomahawks used by the navy in the same Gulf War – that were originally built for carrying nuclear warheads but altered to carry very high potential conventional warheads. The third characteristic: the raid was entirely experimental. The same targets could have been hit by cruise missiles launched from the ships heading for the Iraqi coast”. 3. The raid – codenamed Operation Squirrel – was not reported until several years later. It was a little experiment to prove that the United States could strike anywhere in the world, starting from its own territory, practically without having to depend on anybody. It was getting ready to act alone. The Empire was still in its infancy, but it was already branded for war.

Another aspect of the war against Iraq was that it was the first arbitrarily prolonged war. In fact, it continued, in fits and starts but without ever stopping entirely, for a decade, conducted by the United States and Great Britain with no international legitimisation. It can't be said to have achieved much as an experiment, apart from a million and a half deaths, many of them children, victims of an embargo that harmed only the civilian population. This war, though, from the point of view of a fledgling empire, had one basic defect. Before it could start it had to have the consensus of the Soviet Union, which still existed, even if it was to be only for another few months. And this was obtained at a price: that it had to be legitimised by the United Nations. The other weak point was Europe: recalcitrant, wavering in its support, an unreliable ally that dug its heels in behind the NATO statute in order to avoid doing its duty to the full. So, another trial of strength was needed, in order to clear all foreseeable obstacles out of the way for future ventures. And so we come to the humanitarian war against Yugoslavia. Engineered with masterly cunning – a real media coup, on the same level as those Hollywood war films produced and synchronised with incredible skill in the television studio – 4, the Yugoslav war managed to drag Europe in by its hair, there on its own territory, under the imperious command of Washington, with no room for manoeuvre. NATO was compelled to change its statute. On the 24th of April 1999, with the bombing of Yugoslavia already under way, the North Atlantic summit in Washington voted unanimously (and how could it have done otherwise?) to change its objectives and role and appoint itself as world gendarme. Clauses 5 and 6 of the NATO Statute, which limited the use of force to the joint defence of any alliance member against acts of aggression, were amended. NATO chose to extend the limits of its territorial authority to anywhere in the world, explicitly allowing interventions outside its own area, no matter how far from the borders of its member states. A sovereign, unilateral act of the world's most powerful nations: they literally decided to occupy a legal space allocated to them by no one, whilst at the same time striking a very hard blow against Article 51 of the UN Charter, the one on legitimate self defence. The right to legitimate self defence against a military aggressor became the unlimited right to intervene against an unlimited series of threats to the security of the nineteen member states: terrorism, obviously, but also organised crime, sabotage, interruption of supplies, migratory movements, violations of human rights, the break-up of states considered dangerous to other neighbouring and distant countries, ethnic, religious and political rivalries, economic contrasts and failed reforms. For the first time, a military response was possible for any one of these problems. War had been elevated to a legitimate means of resolving all sorts of crises, be they economic, social, political or religious.

In another book of mine, written in 1999 when NATO bombs were raining down on Yugoslavia, I defined that war as a “preliminary war”, prior to a serious crisis. 5 The command deck was really taking charge of operations, with an eye to the future. And we finally got to the Afghan war, the epilogue to the long preparatory stage and, at the same time, a new paradigm for future wars. Being entirely unprecedented, it was difficult find a name for. It was initially called the war against international terrorism. But this wasn't enough, and so it quickly became the start of the Third World War. But the over-hasty sloganisers soon realised that this name wasn't suitable either. In actual fact, if anything, it would have been the Fourth World War, because after the First and Second there was the Cold War which, as we now know very well, was a real war, fought on numerous battlefields by millions of people, many armed with real weapons but many more armed with pens, pencils, TV cameras, computers and anything else that makes and broadcasts news. Lots of blood flowed, with millions of dead. And lots of ink, film, television footage and radio reports flowed too. And perhaps the real weapons had less effect than the TV flying fortresses and the gigantic CNN aircraft carriers. So why call it the third one? The journalists and image creators must have been low on ideas.

The Emperor and his helpers were looking for a name for the war too and, with an incredible lapsus linguae, they called it “Infinite Justice”. Then they corrected it, under pressure from the last remaining shreds of reason in America and elsewhere. But that slip of the tongue had already revealed what they were trying to do. The most materialist empire ever invented by man wanted religious legitimacy. Only those anointed by God can talk in infinite terms. Infinite justice. Justice for the new “devil”, the third one to be proposed for execration by the whole world, after Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic. Now there was Osama bin Laden. Three of them in ten years: a devil for every war. The new Empire was born holy, with all those good deeds to its name. One for each victory. One for each bombing. Then the terminological wavering ended on a more modest note: “Enduring Freedom”, leaving a glimmer of hope in the heart that, sooner or later, it will finish, even though it's going to be long. But we still have to believe the Emperor and his deputy Dick Cheney when they warn us that this war “won't end soon”, or when they say in all seriousness that it “won't be in our generation”. Which means, for us, that we're all going to die in war, or at least, while a war is going

on.

It's certainly not easy to define, though: a war that hasn't been declared by anyone and that we're not even sure can be called a war. Especially since Donald Rumsfeld, the real hero of the Afghan operation, told us that Taliban prisoners and members of Al Qaeda are not to be treated as prisoners of war but as "unlawful combatants". And so the rules of the Geneva Convention don't have to be applied. But nor are they to be treated as common criminals, as if charged with perpetrating a massacre in the terms of normal American law, because in this case the rules of the United States Criminal Law Procedure would have to be applied. This perhaps explains why, in this indefinable war, not even the lives of the prisoners are guaranteed, apart from the ones who might have some kind of information to give, or, in other words, who might be useful. So many of them have quite simply been massacred. How many? This we shall never know, because the one thing that hasn't been revealed in this war is the number of deaths, both civilian and military. And the thing we hear repeated most often is: "Take them, alive or dead". Here too, constitutional rights have been ignored, forgotten about. Revered left-wing liberal intellectuals, in jumped-up journals such as the "Atlantic Review" (but also in lots of talk-shows on a number of American television channels), seem to find it quite normal to talk about the possibility of reverting to torture to extract the secrets of Al Qaeda from these indefinable enemies.

Yes, it's difficult to define, this war without rules. And without a battlefield. The fighting, in its many different forms, will be practically everywhere. Wherever the enemy is sighted, even though this is a war without an enemy. But – they say – terrorism is the enemy. Unfortunately though, nobody can tell us exactly what terrorism is. And whoever tries to get caught up in a series of impossible and very dangerous contradictions, in a world where many states – the United States first and foremost – have organised terrorism of their own, in various different forms. Noam Chomsky looked for a definition of terrorism in an American military manual, and he found: "terror is the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain political or religious ideological goals through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear" 6 That's quite a good initial definition, and quite similar to the ones used in a number of United Nations resolutions. So, let's follow Chomsky in his reconstruction of events during and after the war unleashed by Reagan against Nicaragua. "Nicaragua [...] didn't respond by setting off bombs in Washington. They responded by taking it to the World Court [...].they had no problem putting together evidence. The World Court accepted their case, ruled in their favour, [...] condemned what they called the "unlawful use of force," which is another word for international terrorism, [...] ordered the United States to terminate the crime and to pay massive reparations. The United States, of course, dismissed the court judgment with total contempt and announced that it would not accept the jurisdiction of the court henceforth. Then Nicaragua then went to the UN Security Council which considered a resolution calling on all states to observe international law. No one was mentioned but everyone understood. The United States vetoed the resolution. It now stands as the only state on record which has both been condemned by the World Court for international terrorism and has vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on states to observe international law. Nicaragua then went to the General Assembly where there is technically no veto but a negative US vote amounts to a veto. It passed a similar resolution with only the United States, Israel, and El Salvador opposed. The following year again, this time the United States could only rally Israel to the cause [...] At that point, Nicaragua couldn't do anything lawful. It tried all the measures. They don't work in a world that is ruled by force." 7

Besides, it's difficult to accept the idea of a war against international terrorism when several of the states and governments actively taking part as allies of the United States have been some of the main organisers of the kind of terrorism that the United States has been hit by, and when the United States too has been one of the main organisers of the kind terrorism that hit it. The enemies, therefore, are many. Not only terrorists, but also friends of terrorists and anybody endangering the political and economic interests of the United States. How many of them? Scores, hundreds, thousands? In his State of the Union address on the 29th of January 2002, George W. Bush decided to stop at "tens of thousands". You really need an infinite war to tackle such a multitude. You have to believe what Bush and Cheney say when they make their threats. They really mean it. From their point of view (i.e. the Empire's) it's the only thing they can do. What we have to ask, though, is whether this point of view is wise. I've already tried to explain elsewhere that it isn't, but explanations aren't enough.

It has also been called an asymmetrical war. This is an excellent expression, very clear. That's exactly what it is. Even though, like almost all the expressions used about this war, it has several different meanings. Asymmetrical means it takes a different form in different places. In Afghanistan there are bombers, missiles and helicopters, almost like a real war, with American troops actually on the ground, on enemy soil, shooting and killing with their fingers on real triggers, even though they hardly ever die. An army of Achilles-like warriors, invulnerable and powerful, bristling with technical gadgetry. If they get hit it's by chance, because even their heels are well protected. If they die it's because they dared to fight against the Gods and against fortune, like Diomedes. If their aeroplanes or helicopters crash it's not because they got hit by the enemy. It's because they broke down. At a certain point in the war in Afghanistan there were more foreign reporters killed than American soldiers. In Afghanistan, asymmetrical also meant the possibility of getting mercenary armies to fight on behalf of others, as mercenary armies have always done. This is why American troops could be on the ground in Afghanistan, unlike in Yugoslavia, where they remained fifteen thousand feet up in the air. This allowed them to break down the enemy with a combination of bombing from on high, technology and allied troops and Western paid (i.e. American paid) mercenaries on the ground. The Mujahedeen had already done part of the dirty

work beforehand. They were used to it. They did it against the Soviet occupiers, then against each other and then finally against the Taliban. And the Taliban, in turn, had already waged a very dirty war against the Mujahedeen, on behalf of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, together with the oil companies Unocal and Delta Oil. And so, yet again we had to suffer the same old rhetoric about the heroic “Northern Alliance” liberators as they swept into Kabul on a tide of freedom, freeing the women from their burqas and the men from their beards. Absolutely ludicrous claims, both of them, as well as being lies, but nevertheless emblazoned over every television screen and every front page all over the civilised world.

This war is thus “asymmetrical”. In other places, there won’t even be any need to drop bombs from on high. Nor to send in ground troops. The local rulers will be bullied or bribed into doing the job: either the government (like in the Yemen), or the local warlords (like in Somalia). In other places, like the Philippines, they’re already trying out joint operations, local warlords working together with small groups of American commandos, intelligence experts, special and sabotage units and various task forces.

As I write, the first 250 American soldiers have already disembarked at the Philippine base of Zamboanga on the island of Mindanao to start Operation Balikatan (which means “shoulder to shoulder”), a “mine clearing exercise” (note the Pentagon terminology) on the nearby islands of Basilan and Jolo, where Abu Sayaf guerrillas have been sighted. The exercise – as a Philippine armed forces spokesman sardonically stated – will basically be “wargames with living targets” 8

There is also another asymmetrical dimension: American troops have arrived in Eduard Shevardnadze’s Georgia. This has been yet another bitter pill for Putin to swallow, after seeing the Americans enter Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and perhaps also Turkmenistan. Somewhere near the Karakum desert, in fact, the stars and stripes may well have been secretly unfurled. Saparmurad Nijazov, known as Turkmenbashi (“father of all Turkmeni”) to his subjects, doesn’t want any trouble and would no doubt rather keep out of it all, but has probably been unable to resist the pressure from Washington and the tempting prospect of having a network of oil pipelines starting from his country, crossing the “Americanised” Afghanistan and heading down to the Persian Gulf. Here too, for the time being there are only a couple of hundred United States “advisers” with helicopters and various items of equipment, but this has been enough to fire the indignation of the Russian Press. “Too much is too much”, wrote a normally very pro-American columnist. And virtually the whole of the political spectrum, from the extreme right to the extreme left, has been united in complaining loudly about American expansionism in their own back yard.

Shevardnadze negotiated with Washington and Putin heard about it from the Department of State only when the decisions had already been taken. What do the Americans want so close to the Russian border? How long will they be staying? Washington’s explanation is frank and laconic: we came because they asked us to come. Shevardnadze’s explanation is the other side of the same coin: we asked them to come so they could help us fight the terrorists, the very ones that use the Pankisi Gorge as a base for striking at the Russians in Chechnya.

Everybody knows that the Georgians have got no intention of helping the Russians against the Chechens. They haven’t in the past and there’s no reason why they should start now. The truth is that very soon the American aid will be used against the two secessionary movements that have been tearing Georgia apart since the end of the Soviet Union, one in South Ossetia (where they want to become part of the Russian Federation together with North Ossetia) and the other, much more worrying, in Abkhazia (which has kept its independence from Georgia over the last nine years with the military help of Moscow). The United State’s ploy has been to promise Shevardnadze the reunification of the country in exchange for allowing him a free hand against the terrorists.

Washington and Tbilisi both gain something out of all this, but Moscow doesn’t gain a thing. Its reaction, expressed by Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, was icy: “Moscow has well founded concerns that the direct involvement of United States troops in the fight against terrorism in Georgia could further complicate the regional situation”. But the Russians are powerless to oppose the moves of Tbilisi and Washington. They can’t do a thing about it. Washington, on the other hand, is offering a country on the verge of economic collapse something like 64 million dollars to train and equip four battalions of 300 soldiers each, a small army of 1200 men equipped with light weapons, vehicles and communication systems. Shevardnadze has already been promised helicopters, tanks, armoured cars and heavy artillery. Georgia is thus becoming a military appendage of the United States, with military advisers and trainers accompanying the armaments and being stationed permanently in the country.

You would have to be blind not to see that many of these things will be used much more against the army of the so-called Republic of Abkhazia than against the Chechen Islamic rebels. Putin is neither blind nor a fool, but thinks it’s better to pretend not to have noticed. Whether or not this really is the best attitude to adopt is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps he thinks that for the time being it’s best just to let the Americans get on with it and concentrate on defeating the Chechen guerrillas once and for all. And then to think again, when things get a bit better. Moscow has already suffered a long series of affronts, and it’s not clear whether it’s plotting a long-term revenge or just masochistic. For now, though, all it can do is give way to the strongest force.

The Emperor's asymmetrical war against international terrorism works like this: after each "victory" the military bases stay behind and a political dependency is created, under Washington's guidance. This is what happened in Kosovo. It is also what's happening in the Yemen, where American advisers are on their way, the Philippines, where United States armed forces are already in action, and, more discreetly, in Sudan, where the local leaders are preparing to toe the line and stop upsetting Washington. Now it's Georgia's turn, which has no choice. Perhaps the Georgians should finally start asking themselves if this was the kind of independence they really had in mind when they were singing Gamsakhurdia's praises and triumphantly electing him president. Who knows if anybody in Tbilisi still wants to remember this story? In any event, it's a story that doesn't interest Washington. Winners don't have to ask permission. The Global War requires a global presence. The Emperor can't rely on his vassals: he has to send his own men everywhere to control the situation.

What with all these big, medium-sized and little wars and all these assassinations it really is getting to be like a wargame, but with very few players. We'll only be able to see a small part of it, as happened in the Gulf, Yugoslav and Afghan wars. Most of the game will be played in total silence, out of sight. There will be covert actions, each one with its fine codename, authorised by the Emperor in person. Another little detail is that there'll be no place for freedom or individual and collective rights in this kind of strategy. Task forces will be in action all over, operating in complete secrecy, hunting out the various organisations at work in the different countries. They will be guaranteed the fullest cooperation of local intelligence agencies, if they decide to ask for it, which is by no means certain. In fact, it's not even certain that they'll ask permission at all. Because the Empire has jurisdiction over the whole planet and can pursue its enemies "right to their bathrooms", as Rumsfeld has declared. Yes, that's really what he said. The Empire needs new rules. And the only places and institutions where these rules can be defined are at the centre of the Empire itself (we shall be returning to this point later on), and so the Emperor in person has to be the one who decrees, completes, summarises and systemises the Ten Commandments. These new rules mean the end of all state sovereignty, in all countries except the Emperor's (at least until the global super-society comes of age). They also mean the end of all international legality, because we can hardly talk of international legality when the whole planet is under the jurisdiction of the Empire. All the Empire will have to deal with is the problem of public order, albeit on a new and more complex scale.

We all live in "transnational fortress states in which the freedom of democracy and the freedom of the market [will be] sacrificed on the altar of private security". A development which has by now become "only too foreseeable".<sup>9</sup> This is why even NATO, until very recently the apparent bastion of Western freedom, with the whole of Europe so eager to bow before it, was cast aside so unceremoniously for the Afghan war. Because the Empire doesn't need to consult other leaders as equals and share responsibilities and decisions with them.

The new empire recognises only vassals and *vassus vassorum*. This should be a lesson to all those East European countries that would do anything to get under the NATO umbrella, seeing it as the best way to become a member of the international community of strong nations, on an equal footing. Now they realise that this umbrella too has been discarded by the roadside. It is now so obvious that the Empire no longer needs NATO (although it pretends to) that it is even prepared to admit Russia, the latest vassal (at least according to its calculations).

The war is thus the means (the global big stick) to a specific end: continuing American globalisation, at any cost. There's just one problem to resolve: the Emperor and his men seem to have very limited political and cultural horizons. More or less the same horizons as the elite they want to defend. They don't seem to be aware of the huge contradictions facing them, which will be insurmountable even in the event of an out-and-out victory in an infinite war. These are the contradictions that were talked about in detail in the previous chapters: between the world's rich and poor (the former decreasing, in both absolute and relative terms, but getting richer and richer; the latter increasing continuously and impetuously) and between the unlimited growth of this crazy economy and the equilibrium of the planet.

The fact is that the Empire might win, but at an enormous cost in terms of human life, with the extermination of billions of people. No one is safe from this danger.

Perhaps the couple of hundred million elect (although elected by nobody) of the global super-society have a chance of survival, finding a way out to for themselves and their families. For the rest of us, those of us who think or hope that there is more to life than "starting shopping again" (as the Emperor put it), there is only one possible salvation: organise to stop the Empire's war. Without underestimating it. The words of Rumsfeld aren't just the tough-guy talk of the drunk at the bar, even though they seem like it. These are words spoken by men who have decided to use the limitless power at their disposal.

We've got to believe these words. This is a preliminary condition if we're going to be able to defend ourselves.

All the information we have confirms that there has been sudden strategic change of course and an unmistakable rush towards war.

Six months after the tragic events of the 11th of September, the preparations for the attack on Iraq, even if still talked about in the bland, tactful language of diplomacy, were glaringly evident. The passing of time had not alleviated the pain felt by ordinary American people, and nor had it diminished their fear or helped their leaders to find alternative solutions to the Superwar.

“Inaction is not an option,” said Bush on the 11th March 2002 to the diplomatic corps assembled on the White House lawn amidst the flags of the nations. It was a colourful spectacle, specially staged for world television, to show once more, like on the 7th of October 2001, the “exceptional breadth” of the Empire’s support in its struggle against international terrorism. “America is now consulting with friends and allies about this greatest of dangers, and we’re determined to confront it”. He was referring to Cheney’s trip, first to London on the 11th of March and then to an undisclosed number of Middle Eastern, Arab and Moslem countries to seek (improbable) consensus and threaten recalcitrant states on the eve of an imminent attack on Iraq in grand style. “Against such an enemy – Bush declared before the flags of the vassals – there is no immunity and there can be no neutrality.”

Even though the formalities are still being respected (the actual decision, we are led to understand, hasn’t yet been taken), it is nonetheless evident that the basic plan for the attack on Iraq has already been drawn up. All that remains is to fill in the details and arrange the pawns on the chessboard. In the meantime, they’re working flat out at Boeing to produce enough missiles to replace the stock used up in the Afghan war. Saddam Hussein is not Mullah Omar. As this book goes to press, the first arsenal of arguments in support of the offensive is already ready. The job of illustrating it to the world is left, as usual, to the Jiminy Cricket, Tony. As yet there is no mention of Iraq being responsible for the 11th of September terrorist attacks. Indeed, a CIA document of February-March 2002 spoke of the almost total certainty that Iraq wasn’t involved. But, let’s be honest, who believes what the CIA say? However, to avoid misunderstandings, Tony Blair has been told to base his argument entirely on the weapons of mass destruction, which, according to Washington’s judgment, Hussein has in his possession. The theory is Kissinger’s: Saddam must be punished, killed or deposed because he is a sworn enemy of the United States. Once this is established, no other reasons are needed. The only difference between Blair and Cheney – the newspapers say – is that Blair’s American guest doesn’t have to deal with public opinion (with 87% being totally in favour of any form of military action), whereas his European host wants to “manage public feelings” and explain why the second great stage of the asymmetrical war is starting: when you’re starting a war that’s not popular with ordinary people, you’ve got to “process” them, mould them and “win over their souls”. And the world media system is ready to serve.

It would be useful to show that Saddam Hussein isn’t allowing any kind of inspection on his territory. This is what Blair says, insinuating perhaps that, if Iraq allowed the inspections, it would be possible to go and see what he was hiding. But Washington had already made its move to nip this little diversion in the bud: the inspections – according to a “high-ranking State Department official” – must be “any time, any place”, which practically means a massive international presence (i.e. American and British) all over Iraq. More or less the same conditions that NATO set for Milosevic to make the Rambouillet peace talks fail. As Michael Gordon wrote in the New York Times, in Washington “they’re afraid that Saddam will use these arguments to drag out the time needed for the UN to come to a decision and take the edge off the drive for military action” by the United States. And for this reason they’re “upping the level of what is considered to be an acceptable type of inspection”.<sup>10</sup> So, there has to be a war and it has to be soon, while the effect of the victory over the Taliban is still fresh in people’s minds, as Henry Kissinger wrote. There’s no point wasting time over diplomatic wrangling and dressing it up in fine words. The United States has decided. The Axis of Evil is not just rhetoric. First Baghdad and then the others, although it can’t yet be said in what order: not for political reasons – which by now count for very little – but for tactical, practical and pragmatic ones. They need to know if there are enough weapons and weapons carriers, where to deploy them, how to organise the electronic reconnaissance, which quislings to put in place of the deposed or killed leaders and which local allies to bribe or coerce. The usual things when preparing for a war. In this specific case, the ever-servile press describe it as “being wise”, “moderation”, “consulting allies”, etc. In truth, this preparatory stage, described by the Western Press as a “time for reflection and thought”, is not so much to decide “whether” to eliminate Saddam Hussein but rather “how” to eliminate him.

The problem remains of “when”. The answer to this (which could well be known by the time the reader reads these lines) depends on a multitude of factors we don’t know about, because they’re obviously secret. But the “when” won’t be very far off because, as Kissinger says, we’ve got to make use of the motion generated in the run-up, the impetus of the success over the Taliban and the surprise factor over the allies.

As well as this, there are other things yet to be included in the preparations (which will also help to spin out the general air of hysteria that is building up again), and these are a number of strategic adjustments that need to be made for the next steps in the infinite war. One of these adjustments, conspicuous because of its conceptual grandeur, is the new nuclear doctrine of the United States of America, defined elliptically as the “Nuclear Posture Review” (NPR). The changes it proposes are on the same scale as the unilateral denunciation of the ABM Treaty of 1972 and are based on the same kind of arguments the wolf used when he accused the lamb of dirtying the stream water, when the lamb was actually downstream. The old ideas – says the secret Pentagon document that someone kindly decided to leak to the American press in March 2002 – are “incompatible with the flexibility now demanded of the United States in planning

its forces requirement". The United States has also vetoed any proposed improvements to the Biological Weapons Convention, and has done the same thing in all negotiations on all types of armaments reduction.

The new nuclear doctrine – defined by some as "unilateral assured destruction", as opposed to the "mutual assured destruction" that saved us from nuclear war during the Cold War – lists Russia and China amongst its targets. Nothing new so far. One might have had the impression – reading the newspapers – that Russia had by now become a definite strategic ally. Not so. Russia, indeed, is now threatened with a "nuclear first strike", in place of the "nuclear response strike" of the previous doctrine. China, as we have seen, is not yet considered as potentially offensive, but could require a nuclear strike in the event of a "military confrontation over the status of Taiwan". These two countries are both nuclear powers with strategic intercontinental strike capability, but in the past it has never been suggested that a political crisis, and a regional one at that, could involve the use of nuclear weapons. Now, with the new NPR, this is a possibility.

The other potential targets in the NPR are even stranger, if that's possible. The list includes Libya, Syria, Iraq, Iran and North Korea. These last three countries, as we know, are part of the Axis of Evil. But what do these five states have in common? They don't have nuclear weapons. What's more, all five are signatories of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty. Furthermore, in 1978, in order to encourage other countries in the world not to procure nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain (but not France and China) signed a solemn pledge not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries, unless one of these countries launched an attack together with, or in alliance with, a nuclear power. 11 There was even a big step forward in 1995, when the three former major nuclear powers (with Russia instead of the Soviet Union, which didn't exist any more), joined by France and China, jointly declared their commitment to strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty (which had lasted twenty five years). The pledge was ratified in a solemn resolution by the United Nations Security Council in April of that year, endorsed by 182 non-nuclear countries.

The new NPR, therefore, evidently means the end of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And it heralds a forty-year plan to develop and build new nuclear weapons. New ground, sea and air based carriers and launch platforms are planned (one of the variants being the militarisation of space), to be built by a fixed series of dates in 2020, 2030 and 2040, together with projects for the diversification of warheads and strike power for strategic and tactical use. This inevitably implies the resumption of nuclear testing. Needless to say, all this will produce a generalised nuclear rearmament race and will also force currently non-nuclear countries to acquire nuclear weapons. As the Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandez declared, "before one challenges the United States, one must first acquire nuclear weapons". 12

We are thus entering an era in which nuclear and conventional arms will be thought of in the same way, as a means of responding to "unexpected threats" and "offensive strike systems" that may be used separately or in combined attacks. "Nuclear and non-nuclear strike systems – the NPR document states – can strike at an enemy's war-making capabilities and thus contribute to the defeat of the adversary and the defence of the United States and its security partners." Just a theory? Whoever wrote this document obviously has a precise set of objectives in mind. "Nuclear weapons could be employed against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack (for example deep underground bunkers or bioweapons facilities)". 13

And so, little by little, we can start to get a better understanding of what Rumsfeld meant when he announced that "we are entering a new, very dangerous period, of American history." A period in which the United States will have to "confront two important challenges. The first is to win the war and destroy the terrorist networks. The second is to prepare ourselves for the next war, a war that could prove to be very different [...] to all the wars of the last century". "Over the next few decades we will have to face up to threats that now seem [...] inconceivable." 14 So, for a start, the next Iraq war could be nuclear. It all depends on how deeply underground Saddam Hussein's bunkers are.

4.

Where storms gather

*Ita finitima sunt falsa veris, ut in praecoitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere.* "So near is falsehood to the truth that a wise man would do well not to trust himself on the narrow edge." These are the words of Cicero. But you could also start this chapter with Montaigne: "They make me hate things that are likely, when they would impose them upon me as infallible".

In the few days after the 11th of September we got to know a whole lot of things in rapid succession, things that were completely unknown to us before the 10th of September. Furthermore, it seems as though all these things were newly discovered by people who, because of the nature of their work, should have known about them a long time beforehand. I'm talking, of course, about the Western intelligence agencies, led by the CIA and FBI and the other twenty or so United States intelligence agencies and followed by (or perhaps we should say accompanied by) the Israeli MOSSAD, which, incidentally, they say has always been the most precious source of information on this matter. Almost always, that is, with a few exceptions, because the MOSSAD has always been a rule unto itself and no one else, not even the United States. Take, for instance, the case of Jonathon Pollard, an employee of the United States Navy, condemned to life imprisonment in 1986 for spying for Israel. That was probably such a serious incident that it couldn't be concealed,

but there have been others, resolved by various diplomatic means without ever coming to light. Complicated stuff, like all secret service affairs.

Here, though, we're interested in what happened in the time around the 11th of September, both before and after. And the things we've managed to discover (with difficulty) raise a lot of very worrying questions.

According to "Le Monde", which quotes the editor-in-chief of "Intelligence Online", Guillaume Dasquié, the United States counterespionage service "captured and expelled almost 120 Israelis". This news is taken from a sixty-one page report, dated June 2000, drawn up by a joint task force from the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency), the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), the FBI and the USAF Inquiry Service. A small army of informants operating in the United States. What were they all up to? This has not been made known.

Immediately after the 11th of September, news filtered out, in a very confused way, of the arrest of sixty or so Israeli agents in the United States. Fox News TV broadcast a four-part investigation into Israeli spying in the United States in the programme "Carl Cameron Investigates". The investigation provoked a chorus of outright denials from the Israeli embassy and Jewish organisations. Fox immediately withdrew all the material linked to the case from its Internet site and refused to show it to a "Le Monde" correspondent. But "Le Monde" managed to get hold of the transcript. Cameron talks of "140 Israelis claiming to be art students from the University of Jerusalem and Bazala Academy. They tried to make contact with personnel from the DEA, FBI and other agencies and penetrate their buildings". All very strange and not at all clear. It's evident – says Cameron in the broadcast – that the MOSSAD knew much more than they eventually told their American colleagues. One of the journalists interviewed by Fox said literally that "some reports confirm that the MOSSAD sent some of its agents to the United States before the 11th of September to warn people about an imminent large-scale terrorist attack". Did it really need more than a hundred MOSSAD agents to tell the United States? And why did they pose as students? The affair is much more intriguing than these simple initial questions suggest.

As well as the transcript of Cameron's programme, "Le Monde" also managed to get hold of the report sent to the Department of Justice in June 2001. It reveals that many of the "students" were from a military intelligence background. Some of them went frequently back and forth to the United States and many were linked to Israeli high tech companies such as Amdocs, Nice and Retalix. More than a third of the "students", who were spread over 42 American cities, said they were living in Florida. At least five of them were traced in Hollywood and two in Fort Lauderdale.

This would all mean very little, were it not for the fact – as revealed by the investigation into the 11th of September suicide attack – that at least ten of the terrorists were living in Florida, some in Hollywood and some in Fort Lauderdale. America is big and the coincidence is incredible. It makes one think that the MOSSAD (or perhaps a "deviant" MOSSAD group) were very well informed about the movements of the terrorists, well in advance. And that they were following their every move.

Why didn't they tell the American intelligence agencies? 1

The Devil Osama has got spies right down to the very inferno of his thoughts, it seems. We shall be coming back to this point in the next chapter.

We know, for example, that there were twenty suicide-hijackers. Nineteen of them died together with the approximately three thousand civilian deaths they caused. Of the presumed twentieth, alive and under arrest, standing trial in a United States court, we shall have more to say later on. Their identities were discovered, or rather, the names on their passports were discovered. 2 We know that fifteen of the nineteen were Saudi Arabian citizens, two were from the United Arab Emirates, one was Lebanese and one Egyptian. We now know where and how they lived, how and where they entered the United States, the details of their bank accounts and their family status. In short, we know lots of things. But perhaps it wasn't them who died in the aeroplanes.

We know a lot about bin Laden too. To tell the truth, many of these things we already knew before the 11th of September, but now we know them better: a wealth of detailed information. For example, we know he is now stateless, after being a Saudi Arabian citizen and a member of one of the richest, most high-ranking Saudi families. Whole books had been written about him and his deeds long before the 11th of September. But, for now, the important thing to remember is that his origins are Saudi Arabian. We know that Saudi Arabia is the main religious centre for all Arabic Islamic countries. Mecca and Medina, the most important holy places in the Islamic world, are there. We also know that the reformed puritanical form of Islam known as "Wahabite" originated in Saudi Arabia, especially in some of its provinces (such as the South Western provinces of Asir, Jiran and Narjrar), and is also the State Religion.

And, furthermore, we know that Saudi charitable institutions have been financing Wahabite religious proselytism all over the Islamic world for decades. Needless to say, we know, and have done for many years, that Saudi Arabia, by the grace of Allah, is incredibly rich in oil reserves. And we know that the Taliban regime in Kabul was recognised by only three countries: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.



On the basis of this information, any normal criminal investigator looking for the perpetrators of the 11th of September would immediately head for Riyadh, Islamabad and the capitals of the Gulf Emirates to hunt for more clues. Instead, as we know, it was decided to bomb Afghanistan. This kind of incredible logic has been quite commonplace since the birth of the Empire.

It's very true that Afghanistan, thanks also – but not only – to Osama bin Laden – has been turned into a base for training an international army of terrorists, with thousands of militants from forty or so Islamic countries. It's also true that Afghanistan has become the refuge and base for fundamentalist Islamic resistance movements that pose a threat to the stability of many countries, near and far: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia (i.e. Chechnya), the Philippines, Egypt and so on. It's equally true that the land of the Taliban was the most suitable place for getting on with things and preparing subversive actions without being interfered with, at a safe distance from any unwelcome onlookers. But Afghanistan is also a state, a country with people who have already suffered twenty years of war and who are surely innocent. The logical, political, ethical and international legal grounds for making it the only, main target in the “war against international terrorism” are highly questionable. And yet, as we shall see soon, the United States government, with the consent of the entire West, chose this very line, based on the concept that “war runs on expediency, not on logic or morality”.<sup>3</sup> This is the exact same principle that Osama bin Laden applied when he influenced the minds of the people responsible for the 11th of September attack.

As for the “expediency” they talk about, this is quite clearly a question of having to do something, as quickly as possible, for the sake of the external and internal image of the United States. They had to keep the President's popularity rating high. They had to take revenge. And so the simple and most monstrous option was chosen: bombing a country without even declaring war on it or receiving a declaration of war from it. A war they were sure to win, guaranteeing maximum political returns. Just like Yelstin and Putin's Chechen war and NATO's Yugoslav war. The era of the Empire is the era of cowardly wars, wars you can't fail to win.

The hunt for the perpetrators of the 11th of September terrorist attack was therefore made to take second place to propaganda needs. And yet – I repeat – the investigation could have followed a number of different lines, much more effective and realistic than bombing. This is demonstrated by the fact that the United States government, surely not by chance, set up a special investigatory body just a few days after the attack. It was called the FTATC (Foreign Terrorist Asset Tracking Centre) and its purpose was to coordinate domestic and international intelligence work in the identification and hunting out of organisations (banks, financiers, trusts, agencies, etc.) that provided aid and financing to terrorist networks. What the FTATC actually achieved, after several months work, isn't very clear. It isn't clear, for example, whether the supporting columns of the bin Laden family financial empire (known as the “Saudi bin Laden Group”, well established in the Arabian and United States real estate market and the world oil market) were really targeted. Nor is it clear where they looked, with what help and with what methods. All that we knew, a couple of months later (on the 7th of November 2001, to be precise<sup>4</sup>), was that the concerted forces of the United States and European countries, with the help of the Arab Emirates, the Bahamas, Australia and Liechtenstein, managed to single out two Islamic financial networks, Al Taqwa (devotion) and Al Baqarat (fortune), which may have been used as financing or money transfer channels for, or in connection with, Al Qaeda. These networks are hawala, which are traditional and well-known systems for transferring money on the basis of trust and at a very low cost, and therefore used by millions of Arab émigrés for their currency transactions. This is no great discovery. The ABA (American Bankers Association) asked immediately for offshore banks to be left out of the investigation.<sup>5</sup> The inquiry, therefore, produced very little, even though it was evident, according to highly reliable United Nations and World Bank estimates, that over five thousand billion dollars of illegal assets were hidden in these very offshore banks, assets deposited not only by front organisations, companies specialised in recycling suspect funds and more or less well-known go-betweens acting for dictatorial governments, but also big investment banks and even the central banks of highly dubious countries.<sup>6</sup> It's here, in these phantom banks, where the financial centres of New York, London, Paris, Moscow, Islamabad and Zurich cast their long shadows, and everybody knows this. And it's here, in these exclusive havens, where it's easier to hide because nobody wants to come looking for you there. But these are the very places where you would be able to find out whether, and how, apparently impeccable Western financiers of various origins have found it profitable to back the projects of Osama bin Laden and others doubtless involved in highly adventurous and very, very profitable operations.

Perhaps this is why no results have emerged from investigations of this kind. If any of these investigations actually started, they will no doubt have been blocked indignantly by these financial power centres, which have enough money and influence to prevent the unveiling of their dealings. This, after all, was what happened at critical moments in other colossal scandals, such as the one involving the BCCI (Bank of Commerce and Credit International), a Kuwaiti-owned bank implicated in large-scale arms and drugs trafficking, including the famous Iran-Contras case, in which the United States financed and armed terrorist guerrillas (mentioned previously) against the legitimate Sandinista government of Nicaragua. And so you don't need to probe too deeply to guess that there are lots of skeletons in cupboards that nobody, Washington included, wants to see opened. It would thus have been extremely imprudent to bring out the FBI and CIA files on the history of relations between the bin Laden family, the Kuwait emirate and President Bush in the years

between 1974 and 1985. Even though these details have been kept off the main news, somebody with a long memory has delved in the archives to rediscover the story of “Arbrusto Energy”, an oil company owned by George W. Bush which had Sheikh Salem bin Laden, Osama’s step-brother and owner of the airline company “Bin Laden Aviation”, amongst its shareholders. Note that on the board of directors there was also Khaled bin Mahfouz (listed as one of Osama bin Laden’s faithful followers after the 11th of September) and James Bath. Both were involved in the BCCI scandal, which happened in 1988. In that year, Salem bin Laden was killed in an aeroplane accident, in Texas, of all places, but there is evidence that the relationship between the Bush and bin Laden families continues over the following years, a fact fully explained by the long-standing ties of mutual gratitude that bind them. In 1982 George W. Bush merged “Arbrusto Energy” – which wasn’t particularly profitable – into “Bush Exploration Oil”, later to become “Harken Energy”. In both cases, it was Saudi Arabian capital that bailed him out, under Daddy’s powerful, watchful eye.

And so we get to know about the extraordinary, unbelievably close links between the current president of the United States and people in the criminal world, very high up in the criminal world, including people destined to become directly involved in Islamic terrorism in subsequent years. Surely this must make you suspect that there were more close links of this kind? Poor Clinton, who had to say sorry for smoking a joint when he was young! The United States press treated this kind of news on George W. Bush with the utmost delicacy. It could be said that there’s no reason why financiers and businessmen have to know about all the secret details of the lives of their business associates. And that no one can be held responsible for the fact that one of his partners becomes a criminal and terrorist later on. But, in Bush’s case, the parallels (with the BCCI) are striking. As in the famous proverb “you can tell a person by the company he keeps”. And then there’s another coincidence, Italian this time. It concerns Al Taqwa, a joint venture between the bin Laden family’s “NASCO” group and the Ethiopian Ahmed Idris Nasreddin family, which was once a customer of “Fimo”, one of the company’s in the Berlusconi empire implicated in the ENI-Montedison funds inquiry and the investigation into the transfer of the footballer Gianluigi Lentini to AC Milan. 7

But these initial points regard only the Western side, with all its corruption, avidity or foolishness, unscrupulousness and scheming. The whole story, though, is much more complicated and interesting. We know that thousands of young Saudis, Egyptians, Algerians, Jordanians, Yemenites, etc. took part in the holy war against the Soviets from 1979 to 1992, when the Najibullah government fell and Kabul was taken by the Islamic Mujahedeen and the Peshawar seven-party coalition. It was a golden age, in all senses of the word. Billions of dollars were pumped into training, paying and organising an army that finally managed to defeat the Soviets and force them into retreat. The main source of funds for this enterprise – which made use of Pakistani intelligence with the support of the United States – was Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government was only too pleased to be able to divert the attention of its youth away from domestic problems into an adventure ennobled by the idea of Islamic solidarity with a brother country against an infidel oppressor. Riyadh could thus regain some ground, permanently, it hoped, against the hostility felt by many of its people towards the excessively close relationship between the Saudi monarchy and the Americans, who supported Israel.

It could be defined as a brilliant diversionary move. According to some estimates, about two hundred thousand Mujahedeen passed through the training camps in Pakistan, financed by the CIA and Saudi Arabia. One certain fact, from an absolutely reliable source, is that “from 1984 through to 1987 over eighty thousand Mujahedeen went through our training camps, hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons and ammunition were distributed, while active operations were being planned and carried out in all of the 29 provinces in Afghanistan”. 8 Of this enormous number of trained, armed fighters, it is reckoned that at least twenty five thousand came from Saudi Arabia. Where did they all go after winning the holy war against the Soviets and their epigone Najibullah?

If they had all gone back to their own countries (especially the Saudis, who were the most numerous, but also the Egyptians and others), the moderate, pro-American governments in the area would certainly have had problems keeping them on the leash. It’s one thing to repress or corrupt a disarmed clergy and a population living in a state of mediaeval servitude, like in Saudi Arabia, but it’s quite another to cope with the return of thousands of fanaticised soldiers, bristling with pride from their recent victory and eager to carry on with the social struggle in their own country. Many of these, most of them, in fact, didn’t realise that their victory against the Soviets was due not so much to their fighting skills but more to the Stingers received from the American secret services and the intelligence gathered by the American spy satellites and so on. And this is why, as they returned from the war, they believed themselves to be not only bearers of glory but also sure winners in the struggle for the rebirth of Islam in their society.

This was why the moderate pro-Western regimes of the Arab world started playing a deadly dangerous, but almost inevitable, game. Above all else, to save their skins, knowing that anti-American feelings were brewing more and more openly.

The Gulf War against Saddam Hussein forced the Saudi Arabian rulers to let the United States use bases in their country. After the war, these bases remained on the “sacred earth of Islam”. So, after defeating the Russian infidels on Afghan soil, the devoted Wahabite Moslems, instead of being rewarded, helped and further financed, were just discarded and forgotten about. And now they come home to be greeted by more infidels, yet another Satan, the very one

they have never trusted and that has used them so cynically in the past.

All that could be expected of them was revenge. This is how Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rashid expressed his state of mind in an interview released a few years later, after being condemned by a United States court for his part in the 1993 Twin Towers attack: "Everybody sings for the things they love. In effect, this means that everybody sings for different things. And this is exactly what happened in Afghanistan. Do you think we were so naïve as to think that the United States were helping the Afghans because they believed in their cause, in the Jihad and in Islam? That they were helping a people, a country, to get free? Absolutely not. The Americans were there to punish the Soviet Union, and when they were sure that the Soviet Union had taken a heavy blow and was about to collapse, they stopped everything, all the aid, all the material, at the speed of the shake of a finger. It meant nothing to them that there was still a communist government in power in Afghanistan. They simply turned their backs and their wallets in another direction. And the Saudis? Oh, the Saudis, and the Egyptians too, did exactly the same thing. It took the Mujahedeen another three years to overthrow the Najibullah regime. Thousands of lives, harvests and livelihoods were lost. But those lives meant nothing to the Saudis, Egyptians and Americans". 9

We should also note that the ingenuous Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman was the man chosen by the CIA for the task of uniting the Peshawar Mujahedeen 10, and that he did it by encouraging the two most extremist and anti-Western groups, the ones led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf. 11

After the exit of the Soviets, the blind Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman, on receiving his testimonial from the Americans – which he didn't seem very pleased with – started travelling the world laying the foundations for an international Islamic network. And, what is particularly intriguing, he arrived in the United States in July 1990 via Saudi Arabia, Peshawar and Sudan with a tourist visa issued by his previous employers, friends of the CIA. The purpose of the journey was to build up an American infrastructure to act as an organisational base for militant Egyptian Moslems. The result, three years later, was the attack on the Twin Towers. This singular series of events and operations, which should be kept in mind as we go on with our account, can be summed up as follows: a known Islamic extremist is brought into America by the CIA, who know that he will be organising an extremist network. But then the CIA is careless to the point of not realising when he organises an attempted attack in the heart of Manhattan.

It's not surprising that the Riyadh government was happy to see its extremists travelling all over the world, as far away as possible from their sacred earth. It was as clear as day that they were soon to become a danger to the United States, but they would have been much more of a danger to the Saudi monarchy. Besides, according to Wyche Fowler Jr., United States ambassador to Riyadh until the beginning of 2001 (who was therefore very well informed and had no reason to lie), the United States never put any pressure on the Saudi government about this, even though it was fully aware that Islamic extremists continued to enter and leave the country, swelling the ranks of international terrorism. 12 Both partners in this spurious alliance avoided touching on awkward questions for about a decade, so as not to upset the very fragile balance between the interests of a corrupt monarchy and American energy interests, "...because we just looked on Saudi Arabia as a big gas station to be pumped and defended but never to be taken seriously as a society". 13 And this was when, in at least the last six years of this decade, Saudi citizens took part in no less than four terrorist operations against United States targets, these being in Saudi Arabia itself (attack on the United States headquarters in Riyadh, November 1995), Kenya (1998), Tanzania (1998) and the Yemen (2000). It is thus unanimously acknowledged by European and American observers that the Al Qaeda network was built up "often with the knowledge of local intelligence and security agencies". 14

For example, it has been confirmed without the slightest shadow of doubt that Pakistani intelligence played an active part in this process, right from the start. It is also well known that the intelligence agencies of the Saudi kingdom knew (and know) lots of things about extremist infiltration into religious organisations, schools, the police and the army. But they just let them get on with it, probably providing the Western intelligence agencies with names and information. Both these countries tread quite warily in all this, though, knowing that getting too close to the Americans in the struggle against terrorism would cost them dear, but knowing too that it would be equally dangerous to let the Americans think they were getting too close to Islamic terrorism.

So, everything centres around two simultaneous lines of action: leaving things be, discreetly, perhaps playing a double or triple game, and lending a hand, just as discreetly, although very actively in some cases. The Saudi Arabian Government started arresting a few suspected terrorists only in October 2001, when the war had already begun and after breaking off diplomatic relations with Afghanistan only on the 24th of September, under intense pressure from Washington and with an openly recalcitrant attitude.

On looking more closely at this tragic story, the mysteries in it are less than they seem. From 1996, when the Taliban took over Kabul, to 2001, when their rule ended, Riyadh donated not less than 150 thousand barrels of oil a year to the Afghan emirate. This was one of the reasons why the Taliban were able to survive.

Somebody who definitely didn't help the American intelligence agencies was Prince Turki al Faisal Saud, head of Saudi

intelligence and cousin to both the dying King Fahd and the acting regent Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz. Turki was thrown out of the leadership of the Riyadh intelligence service in the summer of 2001, his job being taken over by Prince Nawaf ibn Abdulaziz. But it's no secret that Turki and Nawaf are both cousins of Osama bin Laden. After the 11th of September, the new head of Saudi intelligence expressed the important opinion that Osama bin Laden was a puppet controlled by others and that the planning of the attack was not his work. Perhaps this was an attempt to divert attention away from the Saudi capital, or perhaps it was a coded message to perceptive listeners. Nawaf, however, was more than explicit: "The killing or arrest of bin Laden will not mean the end of Al Qaeda. In any event, the Saudis involved were tools of non-Saudis". 15

In all probability, we'll never know the real truth about the 11th of September and we'll never know with certainty who Prince Nawaf was referring to. But if we keep on looking, as we are, we'll find lots of clues on the way that will help us piece together the context and, eventually, direct our thoughts towards more intelligible objectives. Because here we see a victim, the United States of America, that seems not only incapable of understanding things when they happen and foreseeing possible developments, but also, at times, even of being accomplice (through its financiers, businessmen or people linked to the intelligence agencies) to the attackers, or at least of being guilty of serious oversights, collusion and apparently masochistic behaviour. A blind, bullying victim: sharp-eyed but defenceless.

So, what are the origins of this ambiguous relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and how can it be explained? To start with, things are not as they seem. Many people think that the Saudi monarchy is one of the richest states in the world. True, but only partially. Of all the immense oil wealth that the dynasty has been drawing on for decades, under the constant protection of the United States of America, only a small part has remained in the country. And virtually none of it has gone to the population. The first point, then, is this: ordinary Saudi citizens have gained nothing from all that wealth, which has now been frittered away and can never be replaced. The Saudi royal family has more than seven thousand members, equivalent to a small town of billionaires: mediaeval, absolute sovereigns enjoying a sumptuous lifestyle, spending and squandering beyond all decent limits, in all the casinos of the world, in all the night clubs of the Middle East, they alone consuming sufficient quantities of luxury goods to keep the economies of several countries going. A kind of arrogant, obtuse caste, bound by family ties, internally corrupt and quarrelsome but externally compact, eager to enjoy the luxuries and freedom of the West whilst jealously guarding their Oriental privileges. Modern in London and New York and in the stock exchange, reactionary in Riyadh. A sort of *casta compradora*, absolutely incapable of understanding and accepting the democracy, civil liberties, human rights and all that their Western fellow guests in the luxury hotels of the capitals of world power claim to have but never demand of them. This explains why, amongst other things, the conditions of women in Saudi Arabia have never been far removed from that barbarous lifestyle imposed on Afghan women by their Taliban menfolk, which so enflames the purist souls of our Western political commentators at the slightest sign of war. They never mentioned it, obviously, in all those long years when it was more convenient for them to keep quiet about the unpleasant details of life in certain countries.

So they're billionaires, these lords of the Saudi royal family, but under strict control and within the limits set by a cogent power hierarchy. In fact, the main flow of money hasn't been from the consumers of the energy towards its producers-exporters, but in the opposite direction: not from the West to Riyadh, but more or less vice versa. Riyadh pays most of its earnings from oil sales to the United States. Why? Basically, to ensure that its current form of government can continue to exist, in exchange for protection. What kind of protection? This is no mystery either. First of all, it is a known fact that the Pentagon has been funded largely by Saudi Arabian finance for decades, with vastly disproportionate purchases of armaments of every description, often way in excess of their needs and without the slightest possibility of ever being able to use them. Secondly, the Saudi monarchy has made huge orders with United States oil companies. Enormous sums of money have been literally given as presents, either directly or by various corrupt means, to American corporations such as "Halliburton" (to note but one, in honour of the United States Vice President, Dick Cheney, who was its longstanding chairman and managing director virtually right up to when he became second in command in Washington). Finally, there is the third and latest powerful mechanism that has continued to pump money directly from the Saudi oil wells to the American Treasury: the financing of the American public debt by means of the Saudi Arabian purchase (obviously enforced but technically above criticism) of United States government bonds. According to the official data, 38% of the United States public debt is in the hands of foreign creditors and 22% of this sum is in the hands of the Saudi royal family. A sum of not less than two hundred billion dollars. And the same applies to the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, who are creditors for most of the remaining amount.

Poor Arabian billionaires, held to ransom by their protectors! The United States has thus appropriated a very large share of the entire world oil expenditure. And this also explains why the US, apparently acting against its own interests as the world's biggest oil consumer (and trying to keep the price per barrel down), has helped OPEC to keep the price of crude oil high. The losses have still been much less than the profits. Naturally, as anybody can understand, for a mechanism like this to exist and survive over time it means that the dominant classes in a country must agree to their country being systematically fleeced by a foreign predator. A predator that guarantees them their power: this is the *do ut des*. The ones who pay for this are the people, who are deprived of all development, prosperity and rights. This is why the dynasty (and indeed all those dynasties that we in the West call "moderate" – who knows why?) has had to finance

fundamentalism behind the scenes, in a stream of charitable donations that feed terrorism and bring a few extra crumbs to the poor. A kind of mediaeval by-product of financial globalisation, and something that hasn't stopped the Wahabite Sheikhs from seeing the Saudi monarchy as the prostitute of Babylon, not without good reason. Perhaps those who see the gap between the Arab world and the West as less important than the gap between rich and poor in the Arab world are right. 16 And so, when the tension increases and becomes unbearable, together with the fear felt by those who've got a lot to lose, these are the very regimes that try to shift all the blame on to the West or the Zionists.

All the blame, including the things they're to blame for themselves, although this in no way lessens the responsibility of the West, and the United States in particular, the creators and main benefactors of this mechanism. This is undoubtedly all too complicated for Oriana Fallaci, who chooses the easy way out: blatant racism. And yet it should be clearly evident that, if different social policies are to make any headway in the Arab world, by regimes actually capable of introducing them, the first requirement is that the United States' greed be contained within limits that are, if not acceptable, at least reasonable. Because it seems to me that the first, most urgent question is not so much and not only the democratisation of those regimes (which would, in any event, need time), but rather the drastic redistribution of their wealth. This is the real way, the sure way and the only way to beat terrorism. Unfortunately, there are no signs that anyone wants to head in this direction. Instead, they bombed Afghanistan, the last miserable consequence, the last symptom of an illness whose origins, as we have seen, lie in other capitals, other latitudes.

Now they've started discussing it even in the most influential Washington circles. People finally are starting to ask questions about something that has been evident for a long time: that "Saudi Arabia's autocratic system, while convenient for negotiating arms and oil deals, is itself one of the root causes of Islamic extremism". 17 And yet again it's worth noting that these criticisms come more from inside the United States than from its servile European allies, always ready to applaud but quite incompetent when it comes to looking for causes. Because it's evident that the 11th of September tragedy came also because the United States kept clinging tightly to their partners right up to the last minute, inextricably, as they had been for decades. Up to the point of "doing themselves harm". "The Saudi Princes know that overt dependence on a Western power incites the rage of Islamic militants at home, but they feel they must preserve a military alliance with the United States in order to ensure their own security. The United States, in turn, knows that its backing of the corrupt and authoritarian Saudi regime damages its image throughout the Middle East and makes it a target for terrorism, but it sees that as the necessary price for stable oil supplies and secure Middle Eastern bases" 18 Even the previously quoted Jim Hoagland, one of the most hawkish writers in the United States press, in looking for a link between the "energy-wasting habits" of the Americans and the fifteen Saudi Arabians who crashed into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, comes to the conclusion that "the need for imported energy has kept the United States deeply entangled with decadent regimes of the greater Middle East". 19

Even Prince Saud al Faisal, a leading figure in the family behind one of the most reactionary regimes of all (after the Taliban), on observing the phenomenon of relatively well-educated Islamic suicide bombers from not the poorest of families, finally realises that there's a limit to the brutality and cynicism of power and violence. "History shows – he says – that it is not only the poor that can be deluded." 20 It is not only the poor that are sucked into this spiral of hatred, revenge and violence, but also well-educated young people, proud of their origins and culture – which in the Arab world often coincide with their faith – and profound believers, but it's not for this that they are fanatics. One has to understand that the Arab world is now dominated by a great disillusionment, together with a great anger. The suicide bombers act in a context in which the ancient laws of their world have been discarded, twisted and offended. Modernity, which, according to the more enlightened minds, should have overtaken them, has almost never reached them. When it has, it has brought with it fashions and customs that are often unacceptable and offensive, and in any event incompatible with the common feelings of many of the population. According to a survey by Saudi intelligence (subsequently used by American intelligence) of medium and well-educated Saudi adults aged between 25 and 41, "95 percent of them supported Mr. bin Laden's cause [...] even though they rejected the attacks in New York and Washington". 21

These phenomena are not exclusively Saudi Arabian. In the eyes of millions of people, the world that is now unfolding before them is largely incomprehensible, and justice and respect have been completely thrust aside. In this disaster I see, like a mirror image, the tragedy of the failed colonisation of the former Soviet Union. If it wasn't possible to drag a Christian people into Western modernity, the vast majority of whom, at the end of Soviet communism, wanted nothing else but Western approval, then it's inevitable that similar attempts in the Islamic world are doomed to drastic failure. The lesson of Iran has not been learnt. And it's quite useless and fanciful to announce majestically that the 21st century has to be the "American century", as Clinton used to love doing, because this is the road to war, as the facts are demonstrating. Because they can push through their more or less iniquitous agreements, impose their business interests and transform entire areas of the world into imperial dominions, but if they fail to acquire a thorough knowledge of the subjects they want to dominate, if they don't make the effort to understand their history and feelings, they can never hope to foresee, let alone dominate, their potential fury, those "spirals of hate and rage – in the words of Ivo Andric –, the consequence of "age upon age of tyrannical injustices", "storms yet to burst" when "their time comes". 22

5.

Osama bin Laden did it. Who else could it have been?

It has been rightly said that if the truth ever comes out it won't be in the next hundred years. A typical characteristic of terrorism on a grand scale, the terrorism of secret services, the terrorism of the powerful, is that nobody claims responsibility: it covers all its tracks and sends you off on false ones. And everything leads us to believe that this is exactly the kind of terrorism we have here, proceeding by coldly calculated steps and immersed in vast, unfathomable plots. The aim is not to achieve an immediate result of any kind, but to terrorise entire peoples and nations, throw them into panic, disorientate them, force their leaders to act impulsively under the pressure of instinctive, irrational and spasmodic mass feelings and reactions. In this kind of terrorism – rightly defined as “state” terrorism because its objectives are to do with the state – vengeance is not the main ingredient. If anything, vengeance is a minor, tactical factor and can even be dangerous because it may point investigators towards the source and reveal the motive. At most, it can be a necessary ingredient for motivating the perpetrators, who may be only partially aware of what they are actually doing.

And so it's all very difficult. But not impossible. Even though it won't be easy to trace the perpetrators and planners and their accomplices, there's no such thing as a perfect crime, not even in state terrorism. In this specific case, we can at least prove that the public version emblazoned all over the world, immediately agreed on by all the most important mass media organisations, is not plausible. It just doesn't hold water. There are elements of truth in it, but these are only the tiniest part of a much bigger scheme, whose partial outlines can be glimpsed faintly when held up to the light. But even these grains of truth, taken out of context, are meaningless, ambiguous and contradictory. Is Osama bin Laden implicated in the 11th of September terrorist acts? The answer is yes, probably. The evidence? The United States administration said it had the evidence, just a few days after the day of the attacks. And that it was “irrefutable” and “without the slightest doubt”. Now, as I've said before in this book, I am inclined to give credit to the things the people at the top of the US administration say. And so we have to give credit to an expert like the previously quoted Robert Baer, former head of the CIA's anti-terrorism operations, who, six months after the attacks, said “the investigation is yet to begin”. I shall limit myself here to mentioning a curious thing: right up to the 11th of September nobody knew anything, but then, just a few days afterwards, out came the “irrefutable” proof that it was Osama bin Laden. This proof was then shown to the NATO leaders, the Russian and Chinese leaders and the heads of the “moderate” Arab countries, who, generally speaking, albeit without enthusiasm, agreed that it was sufficient for an initial guilty verdict. But it wasn't revealed to the international public. They said it had to be kept secret to avoid affecting subsequent investigations. Perhaps this too is true, at least partly.

But then another doubt arises: this same proof, that the public hasn't seen, was made available to many governments who certainly can't be considered as reliable, in so far as those carefully guarded secrets could easily find their way to the ears of terrorist leaders via the representatives of those very same governments. To take just one example: according to Robert Baer again, “the Riyadh government has not been in control of its intelligence agencies for some time”. And so, what conclusions can we draw? Perhaps the proof wasn't as important as they said. Or perhaps it proved Osama bin Laden's involvement in previous terrorist actions but not the 11th of September one. In any event, this is the first time that the governments of a large number of countries have gone to war not only without declaring it, but without even giving their respective peoples the true or assumed reasons behind their decision. For example, the Italian parliament voted to send a fighting contingent to Afghanistan by an enormous majority – a completely misled majority, it has been said – without even members of parliament and senators (let alone the electorate) knowing what that “irrefutable” proof was.

Was Osama bin Laden the only person responsible for those attacks? Was he the single creator and instigator of the strategy underlying them? This is highly unlikely. And this alone leads on to a whole series of possible consequences that are both important and worrying at the same time. Because, as is very clear, the two criminal icons – Osama bin Laden himself and Mullah Omar – who have been rammed down our throats obsessively for months on end, are merely a synecdoche of truth, preventing us from finding out the whole truth about that tragedy we saw live on the 11th of September.

Several more questions must be added to the already long list that have to be answered in order to trace the culprits. The most important of these are: are any facts linked to the attacks being concealed? What are they? Who has an interest in concealing them, apart from the perpetrators themselves? What relationship is there between the organisers of the terrorist attack and the people who want to conceal these presumed facts?

“An extensive review of American anti-terrorism efforts shows that for years before Sept. 11, terror experts throughout the government understood the apocalyptic designs of Osama bin Laden. But they had never reacted [...]”<sup>2</sup> Why not? It seems as though the writers of this article either didn't think of this question or just didn't see it as important. Could it have been naivety? But can we really believe that the intelligence agencies of the world's number one power are naive? Certainly, there is evidence of the CIA and FBI making a whole series of mistakes in different parts of the world over the last few decades, some of them very serious. But it's difficult to put these mistakes down to naivety. Inefficiency, sloppiness and incompetence undoubtedly played a part, but the credibility of this kind of explanation is drastically reduced when subject to “extensive review”.

Scores of interviews with people at different levels of the current government and the previous Clinton administration paint a very disconcerting picture. Eight whole years of Clinton presidency and eight whole months of Bush Junior presidency haven't been able to produce a single preventative measure. It's as if they weren't aware of the danger. Or perhaps they were aware but thought that America was, by definition, invulnerable. And yet, according to statements made by the head of the CIA, George Tenet, the CIA and FBI "alerted the government months earlier that the agencies had been getting reports warning of attacks that would cause 'massive casualties' ". In July and August, when "a slowdown in 'operational tempo' " was occurring, "we talked about it, we warned about it". 3

What was this "slowdown in 'operational tempo' "? What caused it? This is all very strange. According to the CIA, then, the United States was indeed in serious danger and wasn't invulnerable at all.

The first warning signals about the conception and growth of an awesome Islamic Jihad threat against the United States came to light in 1993, following the attack on the World Trade Centre. On the 26th of February of that year, a month after Clinton's formal inauguration in the White House, the World Trade Centre was attacked by Islamic extremists operating from bases in New York, New Jersey and Brooklyn. There were six dead and a hundred or so wounded. The conclusions drawn by FBI analysts were "worryingly clear": they realised that there was now a large number of young Moslems of various origins who had fought alongside the Afghan rebels in the Jihad against the Soviets in the eighties and who were now bringing a new Jihad to the shores of America. It was also discovered – and this is a very important detail – that many of the terrorists had been entering and leaving the United States repeatedly until 1985: this means that the Mujahedeen were already preparing the Jihad against America when they were still fighting against the Soviet Union. It was in the course of this investigation that the name of a certain Saudi exile appeared in the CIA's antiterrorism dossier for the first time: Osama bin Laden, according to the writers of the previously quoted article.

But we know that Osama bin Laden's name must have been already on file somewhere in the CIA before this, because he was in Peshawar in the second half of the eighties organising and distributing Saudi and American funds to the Mujahedeen in the war against the Soviets. We have already seen how a very important associate of his – Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rashid – entered the United States in 1990, with the help of the CIA. Can we deduce from this that the CIA, or at least part of it, didn't give adequate information to the FBI? Or was it certain CIA offices (or parts of them) acting on their own initiative?

Even more significant is the fact that, a few months before the start of Clinton's second term, there was an important defection from Al Qaeda. The "deserter" was Jamal Ahmed al Fadl, who took refuge in an American embassy in Africa and revealed details of the organisation's plans and long-term strategy. From these it emerged that the objective of overthrowing the "infidel" governments of the Arab world, starting with that of Saudi Arabia, had been superseded. The primary targets were now the United States and other Western countries. Even then, the US administration didn't seem to understand, or at least, it didn't react.

In 1996 President Clinton was handed a special dossier. It contained, amongst other things, the debriefings of Jamal Ahmed al Fadl. Clinton even got his experts to sound out the possible public mood in the event of an American offensive against terrorism. The response was encouraging: there would be broad public consensus for an eventual "war on terror". But nothing came of it.

This is the background to the tragic and fatal story of John O'Neill, head of the FBI department responsible for operations against international terrorism. In June 1997 O'Neill said publicly that "practically any one of these terrorist groups would be able to strike in the United States if they decided to". His words caused a scandal. O'Neill, nicknamed "Mr. Bin Laden" because of his great tenacity in the pursuit of the Al Qaeda chief, was sent to the Yemen to investigate the attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden. But he was expelled from the Yemen on the 5th of July 2001, apparently with no great resistance from the American government. Although this kind of hearsay is difficult to prove, there is no doubt that O'Neill was furious at being treated in this way, so much so that he handed in his notice at the FBI to become head of security at the World Trade Centre. Just two weeks before being killed, along with thousands of others, by the suicide bombers of the man he had been trying to capture.

Right on cue, in August 1998, just over a year after the scandal of O'Neill's public statements, two African American embassies, in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), were blown up by lorries packed with explosives. There were 224 dead, including twelve United States citizens, and more than 5000 wounded, of different nationalities. As serious as these attacks were, though, they were still against American agencies abroad. The only terrorist attack on United States territory, the one against the Twin Towers in 1993, was still an isolated event.

But there was another very serious sign that the Jihad was moving to the United States. On the 14th of December 1999, Ahmed Ressam was arrested at Port Angeles in the state of Washington. Police found about 60 kilos of explosives and detonators in his hired car. Subsequent investigations revealed that at least three terrorist attacks were being planned, two against American targets abroad and one in the United States. It was then established exactly where the two foreign attacks were going to be: one against an American ship in the port of Yemen and another against a hotel in Jordan

frequented by American tourists. All they could find out about the third one was that it was being prepared. Nothing more. The information given by Ahmed Ressam must have been very detailed. But it still didn't stop the deadly attack on the destroyer USS Cole in the port of Aden on the 12th of October 2000. Nothing more was heard about the Jordan attack: perhaps it was put off by the terrorists, or perhaps it was secretly foiled by the CIA. Nothing was known about the third one: could it have been the 11th of September?

In 2000, after the arrest of an Algerian citizen entering the United States with explosives, a secret White House report recommended proceeding with the elimination of "potential sleeping cells in the United States". The report contained a detailed plan of action that was never implemented. And this wasn't the last time that happened.

On the 16th of August 2001, less than a month before the Twin Towers attack, the FBI arrested a 33-year-old French citizen of Moroccan origin named Zacarias Moussaoui in Eagan, Minnesota. The charge was contravention of the immigration laws, but the arrest was really a rapid FBI response to a tip-off received the day before from one of the managers of the Pan Am Flight Academy, where Moussaoui was attending a training course. The informant, evidently a good patriot and very vigilant, became suspicious of Moussaoui and decided to tell his superiors about it. But he did more than this: he warned the investigators that Moussaoui was organising the hijacking of a Boeing 747-400.

The FBI agents took the tip-off very seriously and immediately arrested Zacarias Moussaoui. As well as this, a few days later they sent a coded message to the French intelligence agencies requesting information on Moussaoui. The reply came in the same month. He was described as having "radical Islamic beliefs" and had a friend who had fought in Chechnya with an extremist Algerian group in which there was a well-known member of Osama bin Laden's organisation. 4 Surely enough to put them on their guard.

So, an alert member of the public and the local FBI agents noticed something, were alarmed by it and acted. But not the Washington authorities, the central FBI, the CIA and the US Department of State. It was as if somewhere, above a certain level, somebody was trying to cover things up, delay and obstruct. The word that comes straight into an Italian's mind is derailing. Had a person been assigned to derail the investigation? It's important to know this, because that person couldn't be an extremist Moslem fanatic. It would have to be an American citizen.

The elderly James Woolsey, former director of the CIA, came to a damning conclusion about the affair: "[it all] stems from putting flight safety in the hands of the airline companies. It's a failure in the organisation of the air defence, a set of failures in our foreign intelligence, a failure in the internal surveillance systems and a failure in the visas and immigration policy". But other documents and interviews show that they weren't just failures.

There was much more: there were "competing interests" that stopped decisive actions being taken. And, to be quite honest, you can't even point the finger at the FBI and CIA. As we have seen, the information was passed on to the political leaders and important terrorist activists were arrested. In some cases, even the targets were identified. The signals got through to Washington. Despite all this, the country's political leadership remained inactive, apparently distracted by other, more urgent matters. So we should look more closely to try and find out what these "competing interests" really were, that allowed the terrorists to act unhindered on the 11th of September, to the point of the entire American leadership seeming to be caught entirely off guard by such a tremendous blow.

There were many other things it would have been impossible for them not to have known in Washington, not all of them necessarily linked to intelligence. They had known for some time, for example, that Osama bin Laden was a guest of Mullah Omar. They certainly knew it by the 22nd of February 1998, the date when Osama came from Sudan to settle in Afghanistan with his newly formed International Islamic Front, because on the 16th of April 1998, William Richardson, US Ambassador to the United Nations, was already in Kabul negotiating with the Taliban government for the handing over of Osama bin Laden. They must have known that Mullah Omar had links with the Pakistani intelligence agencies. It's hard to believe the Americans didn't have their own people inside the Pakistan ISI (Inter Service Intelligence), especially as we know for sure that the American intelligence agencies were directly involved in at least some stages of the operation against the Taliban (as demonstrated elsewhere on these pages). Also, the American leadership must have been informed that Saudi intelligence had been working together with many fundamentalist Islamic groups, both directly and indirectly, for many years. Could they have been unaware of the fact that Saudi Wahabite groups had been funding Chechen guerrillas abundantly? Could they not have known that the Saudi intelligence agencies, together with their Turkish equivalents, were the essential supply lines for the Chechen separatists? You didn't need access to classified information to know all this: it was enough just to read the newspapers and put two and two together. Besides, there was the evidence that the Taliban regime had been recognised right from the start by three countries friendly to the United States: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

What was done, what pressures were exerted to get them to overlook the Taliban and Osama bin Laden? Is it not strange that the United States, with all the means at its disposal for forcing its allies (both Arab and non-Arab) to obey Washington's orders, wasn't able to impose measures to safeguard its own internal security?



The deeper you probe, the more you get the feeling that many things aren't explained by the extremely simplified formula of a satanic Osama bin Laden and a collective monster known as Al Qaeda, born from Islamic fanaticism. In other words, even though there were undoubtedly religious and fanatical elements in that terrorist act, one begins to suspect that it was also part of something bigger, something yet to be discovered. The resounding question mark over the resounding general silence of all the Western intelligence agencies compels us to deduce at least one thing: the extensive information, skills and cover that the plotters of the attack had at their disposal were equivalent to those of a powerful intelligence organisation.

But let's take things in order. After the 26th of February attack on the Twin Towers, Ramal Yussef, a Pakistani citizen arrested and sentenced by American law, declared at the end of the trial that "the towers will fall, one against the other, causing the death of at least two hundred and fifty thousand people". We now know that this plan was put into effect almost perfectly. Only the number of victims was much lower. But Ramal Yussef's declaration – along with other information come to light since the 11th of September – tells us that preparations for the plan started several years beforehand. The group of planners, therefore, must have been very small, because the only way the secret could have been kept for such a long time was that if it was known by just a handful of people. Very few and very powerful. This is the first logical conclusion. This was confirmed by George Tenet when he said that the crucial information probably resided "in the heads of three or four people". 5

As we scroll through the list of extremist Islamic organisations, we see many names and initials that crop up frequently in newspapers, periodicals and specialist analyses. It's impossible to think that they don't crop up in intelligence reports all over the world as well, especially Western and Israeli intelligence reports. Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement, granted sanctuary and protection in Syria and Iraq), Abu Nidal, Aby Sayyaf (Philippines), Sunnite Islamic Jihad (bases in Egypt), Al Tarkin al Hijrah (Egypt again, perhaps more moderate than its sister organisation), Al Qaeda, Tunisian Islamic Front (many links with the Taliban regime and Pakistani intelligence), Ennhada (Tunisia), GIA (Armed Islamic Group, Algerian Sunnite), Al Harak al Shaija al Maghribia al Mokatila (Morocco), Hezbollah (links with Iran), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Jamma Islamijia (Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore), Laksar Jihad (Indonesia), Larkar Mujahedeen (Indonesia), Harakat ul-Mujahedeen, Kurdish Workers Party, Mujahedeen-e-Khalq...and so the long list goes on. These are all Islamic organisations. Only some of them are included in the list of twenty-eight organisations issued by the American Department of State on the 5th of October 2001. Not all of them are definitely connected with the Al Qaeda network, but the very length of the list – with the addition of the organisations operating in the former Soviet Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Caucasus, Tatarstan and, of course, Chechnya – means that there are thousands of militants in all corners of the world: not just Moslem countries, but all over the West, the United States of America and all European countries, without exception. But if we look at each these groups in detail, in the light of what we actually know about them and what we can deduce from their operations, claims, attributable actions, etc., we can safely say that their activities do not coincide in any way whatsoever with the terrorist act of the 11th of September, in terms of operational and organisational power.

What I mean here, above all, is that none of these organisations seem capable of carrying out an act of this level and complexity: they are just not compatible with the terrorist network that everybody's been talking about so much since the 11th of September. The network – which definitely exists – guarantees many things, such as a presence in many areas, more hiding places, increased recruitment possibilities, etc., but between the network and the organisation that planned and carried out the 11th of September attack there is – and has to be – an enormous gap, an unbridgeable abyss and a total block on communications to keep the plot secret for such a long time. A network is not capable of carrying out such a huge terrorist operation, with such technical, political and economic implications that it has been compared (correctly, in this context) to an act of war. And, what's more, against the leading country in the West, a superpower with all the anti-terrorist defence measures imaginable. Networks and nets are made of holes as well as string, and the tiniest bit of information getting out through any of these holes would have ruined the entire plan. As we have seen, the plotters were able to stop this happening. And it shouldn't be forgotten that, despite all the mistakes made by Western intelligence – not only the numerous United States agencies but also the equally capable and careful MOSSAD – there can be no doubt whatsoever that almost the entire galaxy of extremist organisations was under strict surveillance and systematically monitored and spied on. You could say that, by definition, almost all these organisations, especially the ones thought to be more dangerous, were and still are infiltrated right up to the very highest decision-making level. Western intelligence (and this really applies to all intelligence organisations, including those of Israel and the Arab and Islamic countries) has got eyes and ears to see and hear things, either directly or indirectly. The CIA and the MOSSAD have always had their channels of communication and action in the countries that interest them. Finally, we mustn't forget the fact – quite irrefutable – that many of these terrorist leaders have, at certain stages in their career, been financed, helped and advised by Western intelligence agencies, and have performed functions on behalf of and in close contact with these agencies. All the leaders of the so-called Afghan "resistance" against the Soviets: Gubuddin Hekmatjar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Masood and the leaders of the Peshawar seven parties were, to a varying manner and degree, armed and trained by the ISI, the Pakistani military intelligence service, which, in its turn, acted as intermediary for American and Saudi Arabian military and financial supplies. The obvious consequence of all this is that there has always been abundant, close links between terrorism and intelligence agencies. To give the network anything more than a marginal role would have meant getting found out very quickly, as crucial details would have

inevitably leaked out.

There is also the time factor. The longer the attack took to plot, the greater the chance of news of it being leaked out because of mistakes made by the plotters. If it's true that the operation was planned years beforehand, then it's logical to assume that the organisers must have taken incredibly stringent measures to stop the secret getting out. The number of people involved in this concerted effort couldn't have been less than several hundred. The danger of it being found out by mistake was increased even further by the fact that, as we now know, most of the terrorist cells were acting for several years not in training camps in the remote Afghan mountains or inaccessible deserts, but right in the midst of American and European cities, exposed to all kinds of contamination, temptation and possible mistakes. They usually talk of about thirty or forty people being involved in the attack. But if you try and list all the operations necessary for the four highjackings, not just carrying them out but planning them (choosing the cadres, technical preparation, psychology, bank transactions, communication systems, falsifying documents, checking and transmitting data, logistics, transport, coordination, secret code systems, etc.) you realise that many more than a hundred people are needed. If we then try to imagine other hit squads, ready to spring into action in the way we're describing, then we have to think in terms of a small army, deployed and "dormant", something like the special commando corps of some of the G8 countries.

But there's one important difference: this little army has to be made up of people capable of leading a normal life, totally camouflaged, whilst being committed to and training for actions that are certain to end in death, with absolutely unparalleled discipline, greater than that of any other special corps ever known. Above all because no army in the history of Western civilisation has ever been asked to die, with absolute certainty, in order to fulfil its mission. This also partly explains why nobody was able to plan any kind of defence. Because, even though the concept of defending against individual suicide bombers existed, the idea of a terrorist act being so drastic as to involve the simultaneous suicide of all the people involved had never been considered. With the added complication, even more unforeseeable in terms of a normal (i.e. Christian-Western, according to Oriana Fallaci) mentality, of the collective suicide attack being at such a high technological level, carried out not by very young, desperate and fanaticised people, but by quite well-educated adults with nerves of steel, able to live a normal life next to normal neighbours for years on end, whilst planning consciously to commit suicide in order to kill.

The absolute level of secrecy required (and actually achieved), together with all the other aspects considered here, lead us to think that the real organisers and strategists were at another, higher level, above the network. In which case, the role of the network was to perform two very secondary functions, without being involved in the strategic planning in any way whatsoever. These two secondary functions were the selection and recruitment of cadres and the performance of supplementary duties, such as assigning tasks to people who were totally unaware of their significance, tasks which had been passed on to them by intermediaries, they too completely ignorant of the whole plan. This higher level, which we can call the cupola – borrowing the Italian expression for the Mafia high command (as we shall see, not too far out of context) – is the real thing to find. I don't think this cupola has been constructed by one intelligence service alone, by one Islamic country. This wouldn't explain the extraordinarily efficient way things worked in the United States, and nor would it have guaranteed cover for the people involved. Another idea that doesn't hold water is that of an alliance between the intelligence organisations of several countries, perhaps without the formal consent of their respective governments. This would have made the chances of keeping the secret even slimmer, to the point of making the actual terrorist act impossible. The most likely hypothesis is that the cupola had members of intelligence agencies from several countries. Plus some other very important instigators, not necessarily known (in fact, very likely unknown) to all the members of the cupola.

This conclusion should be no surprise to the Italian reader, whose country has been subject to the helping hand of deviant services on several occasions in the perpetration of very serious terrorist acts: the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura bomb in Piazza Fontana, Milan, in December 1969, the Piazza della Loggia bomb in Brescia, the kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro and the Bologna station bomb. Scores of dead and hundreds of wounded may seem very few compared to the 11th of September, where the dead were thousands. But this is only a question of how much was at stake. In the Italian incidents, there was the need to stop the communists getting to power in Italy, at all costs. What was at stake on the 11th of September was world domination. And it is for reasons such as these that state terrorism is used. And this usually means that deviant sections of intelligence agencies start moving secretly. These deviant sections work under a double cloak of obscurity because they are unknown even to the official secret service chiefs and thus out of the control of the political leadership of their respective countries. But they always act according to plans, plans drawn up in the innermost circles of the ruling classes which can be allowed to proceed, stopped, speeded up or slowed down, according to political developments. Plans that involve massacres: mass murders of innocent people devised to produce political results. In operations of this kind there are always criminal organisations at various levels performing supplementary individual tasks, whereas top state functionaries, with centrally important roles in the police, army and judiciary, provide "cover", i.e. take discreet measures to lay false trails, remove traces, release suspects, block investigations and so on.

Very often, as the Italian experience has taught us repeatedly, even the perpetrators themselves don't actually know who

they're working for and are often convinced that they are acting in the name of their ideals, whatever these may be. And that they are acting completely independently. And the false trail-layers and deviators, at least up to a certain level in the hierarchy, can be convinced of the same thing: that they are acting in the greater interests of their country. Osama bin Laden himself describes this little detail of the technique to us when, in the famous "confession video", he tells us that "the brothers, who conducted the operation, all they knew was that they have a martyrdom operation and we asked each of them to go to America but they didn't know anything about the operation, not even one letter. But they were trained and we did not reveal the operation to them until they are there and just before they boarded the planes. Those who were trained to fly didn't know the others. One group of people did not know the other group." 6 These techniques are well known to secret service organisations all over the world. What makes them ideal is that the vast majority of people are totally ignorant of the existence of this kind of cynical, brutal power logic and can't even conceive of such monstrous things happening. Then, when the explanations eventually come (always a long time after the event: in these cases the truth takes many years or decades to emerge) they reject them because they are just too terrible to believe.

A good example of this can be taken from many years ago, when the US attempted to free the American hostages held by the Pasdaran in the US Embassy in Teheran.

It was 1980, the last year of Jimmy Carter's presidency, when Zbigniew Brzezinski was National Security Adviser. The task of drawing up the plan was assigned to a group of elderly CIA officials recalled from retirement. One of these, Miles Copeland, later revealed some of the details of the plan, which could have been written expressly as a case study of the 11th of September 2001. 7 "The plan – writes Copeland – was "undercover" from start to finish. There were at least two layers of cover and a complex disinformation campaign, with the aim of pointing the finger of blame – or merit – in every direction except the right one. At first the people in the raid were made to believe they were acting on behalf of a credible regional authority, such as the Iraqi or Libyan government or a respected Moslem organisation. But once the cracks started to appear in the cover, it could be revealed that the operation was actually being backed by the Iranian government itself. In any event, the important thing about the cover is how the operation appears to the outside world. To those who actually witness the raid (students, hostages, spectators outside the compound, etc.) it will appear as entirely indigenous." 8 And he continues, "it goes without saying [...] that people who are quietly and intelligently patriotic are difficult to influence. For fanatics it's different. Provided the fanaticism hasn't gone too far into complete madness, those affected by it are particularly susceptible to the kind of sweet-talk CIA undercover agents are able to give. In any event, considering the number of possibly recruitable agents – and for professional CIA agents every student is a potential recruit – the law of averages is on our side. Using thoroughly tried and tested recruitment techniques, CIA agents posing as Iraqi, Libyan or Iranian agents can assess the group of students, present the problem to a handful of the more "promising" ones, kill the ones with "unsatisfactory" reactions and send the other ones to the "target", setting psychological traps to expose any attempted ploys and then counting on the ones that remain to complete the assigned tasks" 9.

Could this be seen as analogous to the 11th of September events? Readers can decide that for themselves. To me it seems extremely feasible. And, getting back to the Italian-style deviant services, just imagine how much easier this kind of "deviance" will be in countries where tribal or family ties are strong and state institutions are very fragile, if not nonexistent. And there's another factor to consider. The cupola strategists have to be highly sophisticated and westernised. For example, they must have a heightened sense of media "spectacle". And this doesn't just mean like McLuhan. The cupola decided to time things to coincide very closely with the development of the American economic crisis and the world recession. The American recession wasn't officially acknowledged until midway through November 2001. Which, of course, comes after the 11th of September. But we know that the data were already available in the spring. And spring, as a rule, comes before autumn. It took eight whole months to announce to the world the most important news of the last twenty years: the American locomotive had ground to a halt. This tardiness is quite strange in a world of such lightning-fast virtual communications, a fantastic universe of the Internet and real-time global financial interconnectivity.

And, on this subject, there are two more amazing pieces of news, all the more amazing because nobody followed them up after the 11th of September, even though they could have lead to a whole lot of information on the organisers of the attacks. One of them was that, on the 6th and 7th of September, 4244 United Airlines put options were bought on the Chicago Board Options Exchange, as against only 396 call options. 10 Nothing can justify such a quantity of sales on those two days. When the market reopened, after the attacks, United Airlines stock fell by 42% from \$30.82 to \$17.50 dollars. The operators involved in that transaction pocketed 5 million dollars. One of the two aeroplanes that crashed into the Twin Towers was United Airlines. A coincidence?

But the stock of the other airline in the hijacking, American Airlines, suffered the same fate. On the day immediately prior to the attack, the 10th of September, 4156 put options on American Airlines were bought, compared to only 748 calls. Twenty-four hours later, American Airlines stock fell 39%. A coincidence? The people behind that operation pocketed about four million dollars. Still on the Chicago exchange (note that all this trading happened a long way from Wall Street, to lessen the likelihood of immediate detection), a similar operation took place with the stock of the major investment bank Morgan Stanley Dean Witter & Co., which occupied twenty two floors of the World Trade Centre:

2,157 of the bank's put options were bought in the three trading days before the fateful 11th of September. Prior to this, the average was 27 contracts per day. Morgan Stanley's share price fell from 48.9 dollars to 42.5 dollars in the aftermath of the attacks. The people who guessed this pocketed 1.2 million dollars. A coincidence? 11 What happened on the European, Japanese and other stock option markets we don't know. Have parallel investigations been carried out, perhaps on insurance company stock trends? We don't know. In any event, there doesn't seem to have been any further news about all this since the above events. But is it possible to trace the people behind these suspiciously insider trading operations, very probably based on prior knowledge (much more detailed than Osama bin Laden's, at least from what he said in the confession video) of the date of the suicide attacks? The experts say that it would be difficult, but not impossible. Difficult because the trading is sure to have been done under a false name, behind shell corporations and through different intermediaries. And the trading will no doubt have been done by a highly sophisticated dealer or, more likely, a team of experts. Could they all have been Arabs, fanatics and Islamic fundamentalists?

One of the Copeland-style "innumerable covers" could have been that it was presented as a commemoration of the Sabra and Chatila massacre (even though this didn't happen on the 11th of September). Yet another reason to presume that they wanted to hide other objectives that were much more than purely symbolic. In any event, the singling out of Osama bin Laden as the one and only culprit, like a modern-day Satan, smacks too much of James Bond, or Ian Fleming's SPECTRE, to be really credible. Hollywood – unfortunately – is not Manhattan. This is revealed involuntarily by Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld in their terrifying declarations about a global war that's going to last a long time. If it was just Osama there would be no need to talk about going to such great lengths. If, on the other hand, we put all these pieces of evidence and details together, it may be possible to draw some conclusions, albeit very provisional, that would save us from being so surprised were we to discover one day that the cupola really exists, in a much more extensive and varied way than we were able to show. A collective identikit could be as follows: people with an expert knowledge of the West, people with an equally expert knowledge of the social desperation of the South, brilliant and extremely rich manipulators of Islamic religious fanaticism, members of the most exclusive financial circles and skilful inside traders with access to political, diplomatic and military classified information.

If my description of the state of the world is anywhere near the truth, you could say that part of the cupola is on the command deck mentioned in the first chapter. Up there, quite high but well below the clouds, perhaps you'll see not only oil magnates, but also a few investment bank CEOs, high-ranking politicians and military commanders, members of the global super-society, members of regimes that are impeccably reliable friends of the West, who have done their sums and come to the conclusion that the West's protection won't be enough to guarantee their wealth, power or even their lives, fierce offspring of threatened dynasties, millionaire businessmen who live on the pickings of the capitalist market without ever having been converted to Western ideas, indeed, who hate the West with all their might. All mixed, or rather, blended, in a deadly secret gathering, together with the Jihad theorists. In short, a mad cell growth of globalisation gone mad.

Osama bin Laden could be one of them. Perhaps he is. The background and biography are right. But he's not the only one and, probably, not even the most important one. You won't strike at the cupola by bombing Kabul or Baghdad. If you take this Hollywood kind of logic to its natural conclusion you should be bombing Islamabad, Riyadh, Cairo, Amman and perhaps a few European capitals where impeccably Christian bankers and brokers, more or less knowingly, have been working for that cause, and where the cupola has probably got offices.

In the scores of meetings I've been to in Italy and elsewhere, I've come across lots of people who have had similar kinds of suspicions, even though they may not have come to the same conclusions. On the other hand, though, they see – as does the writer of this book – the actual monstrosity of the terrorist act, its disproportionately murderous enormity and its deadly cruelty. How can it be? Are there really people prepared to plan things on such a vast and bloody scale, so coldly and calculatedly? Perhaps fanaticism would even be more acceptable. It's monstrous, true, but at least it's mad. It would be terrible to think that we can do this for reasons of state. So, let us read together the complete version of an interview given by Zbigniew Brzezinski to "Le Nouvel Observateur" in 1998.

Question: The former director of the CIA, Robert Gates, stated in his memoirs ["From the Shadows"], that American intelligence services began to aid the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan 6 months before the Soviet intervention. In this period you were the national security adviser to President Carter. You therefore played a role in this affair. Is that correct?

Answer: Yes. According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahedeen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise. Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention.

Question: Despite this risk, you were an advocate of this covert action. But perhaps you yourself desired this Soviet entry into war and looked to provoke it?

Answer: It isn't quite that. We didn't push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.

Question: When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against a secret

involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, people didn't believe them. However, there was a basis of truth. You don't regret anything today?

Answer: Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter. We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War. Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war unsupportable by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.

Question: And neither do you regret having supported the Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?

Answer: What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?

Question: Some stirred-up Moslems? But it has been said and repeated Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today.

Answer: Nonsense! It is said that the West had a global policy in regard to Islam. That is stupid. There isn't a global Islam. Look at Islam in a rational manner and without demagoguery or emotion. It is the leading religion of the world with 1.5 billion followers. But what is there in common among Saudi Arabian fundamentalism, moderate Morocco, Pakistan militarism, Egyptian pro-Western or Central Asian secularism? Nothing more than what unites the Christian countries. 12

Back in 1979, according to UNO figures, there were about 23 million people living in Afghanistan. Twenty years later, we can calculate the effects. Approximately two million dead, at least five million refugees and approximately one million disabled. The country is a carpet of ten million mines. In order to destroy the Evil Empire, Afghanistan was transformed "knowingly" into a trap. With twenty three million mice in it. They were Afghans, though, and of little value. So if the goal is conquering the whole world, what's three or four thousand dead, even if they're Americans?

6.

## Penal Empire

"On assuming the office of the presidency, George W. Bush swore a solemn oath to 'preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the United States'. Since the despicable terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the Bush administration has pushed through a series of unprecedented laws and executive orders that fundamentally upset the checks and balances established by the constitution. Under these new laws, non-citizens will no longer be accorded constitutional rights to free speech and association. Government agencies will have the power to detain non-citizens indefinitely on immigration-related offences without having to justify their decisions before a judge. Waving the flag is not enough. Americans must also uphold their Bill of Rights. If Mr. Bush continues along this path, American patriots will rightly demand that he be impeached for violating his oath of office." 1

The writer of these lines had quite an impressive array of legal novelties to quote from, starting from just over two months after the 11th of September attacks. Some said it was all because of the terrible shock, a kind of reflexive defensive reaction. Others defined it as a "physiological" attempt to respond to an entirely new kind of threat by restricting basic liberties. An initial step before taking more rational action; tightening up the loose mesh that people can pass through so easily to strike at the very core of a free society. Extreme repression to cope with an extreme emergency.

Was it just this? If we look more closely we can pick out the lines of a repressive strategy that doesn't seem to be entirely improvised and which, in fact, seems to fit very snugly with the designs of the people behind it. The new "Territorial Defence Department" is nothing more than a new internal intelligence agency whose task it will be to coordinate existing agencies. New procedures now allow the unlimited preventive detention of foreigners suspected of committing crimes, with no formal charge required to justify the arrest. Police can act more or less without restraint against organisations suspected of terrorism, whereas the FBI now has unlimited power to search offices and private dwellings secretly and intercept private communications in any way whatsoever. These measures, already quite worrying in themselves, become even more so when placed in the context of a logic – increasingly predominant in the United States over the last twenty years – that sees repression and imprisonment as almost the only way of dealing with crime.

Statistics show that the prison population of the United States has tripled over the last fifteen years to over two million. An all-time world record, and "if one adds [this figure] to the 3.7 million people on bail awaiting trial, then the total number of individuals subject to criminal prosecution is more than 5.5 million, equivalent to 2.8% of the adult population, double that of 1980." 2

One out of every 189 American citizens is in a state of detention, children included. "An impressive figure, compared with the already high ratio of one prisoner to every 480 inhabitants in 1980." 3 Would it be hasty to link these figures to the internal effects of globalisation, or – to use Edward Luttwak's expression – "turbocapitalism", in the United States? I think not.

In a nauseating stream of rhetoric, remarkably similar to the old Soviet-style propaganda but set against a backcloth of very real feelings of shock and grief, we are reminded repeatedly and insistently of the extraordinary virtues of the American people. We hear over and over again what a great country the United States is, with such an extraordinary reserve of democratic resilience, which it has always drawn on deeply to counter any authoritarian tendencies (sometimes serious) threatening to warp its political system. Of these authoritarian tendencies there is no shortage of examples: McCarthyism was a dangerously slippery slope, racism has always been – and still is – a deep sore in American democracy, the massive tensions of the Vietnam War pushed the country in an antidemocratic direction, the assassination of Kennedy highlighted the proximity of criminal and political power and there is the complete cynicism with which successive United States governments have imposed their order on the world, from during the Cold War to the present day.

And so, even though the United States has always defended its interests in a uniquely brutal way, putting aside all principles when called to order (and yet continuing to impart moral lessons to others), the truth is that this has never translated into the permanent, antidemocratic warping of its domestic politics. We also know that the United States has a long tradition of holding laws and moral principles in very high regard. The question now is whether all this can withstand the turmoil that the birth of the Empire is causing in the world and in the United States itself. Because it's plain to see that the overtly imperial impulses of the United States' political-institutional system are overflowing and spreading to the rest of world, in a kind of "exportation" of the US "penal state model". 4

The next (for now) supreme step in this direction is the setting up special military tribunals, as ordered by President Bush on the 13th of November 2001. Antonio Cassese wrote that "American society stepped back fifty years" 5 towards judicial barbarism with this directive, "Badly advised by a Minister of Justice in the grip of panic, the President assumed dictatorial powers and committed his first historical error." 6 If these words had been written in an Italian newspaper they would have caused an indignant backlash, with vehement accusations of anti-Americanism. But no, they were written by William Safire, a conservative Republican from the intransigent right wing of United States politics. Not much different to the words of the liberal Richard Cohen, who wrote that "the Minister of Justice is the most dangerous man in our government, the modern equivalent of the police chief in the film Casablanca, rounding up all suspects with pre-emptive hauls and trampling roughshod over all constitutional rights. This is what Bush and his minister are doing: rewriting the American Constitution in a salvo of edicts and decrees". 7

What is it exactly that worries American intellectuals, both Right and Left, when they so readily accepted the idea of a global war on international terrorism in the first place? It is, of course, the sheer legal vastness of that Presidential Decree. But, above all, thoughts such as these inevitably come to mind when one reflects on what kind of future may be in store. It's the thought of the President of the United States – here very much in the role of New Emperor – being able to issue autocratic decrees on the basis of the information available to him for the setting up of special military tribunals which: a) can try only foreign citizens, who have taken part in, cooperated with, or simply provided cover for, terrorist acts either against the United States or which seriously harm the political and economic interests of the United States, b) can override the most basic rights to a fair trial, c) can ignore the right to be deemed innocent until proven guilty, d) can do away with habeas corpus, e) can stop the accused from choosing his or her own defence counsel, f) can hold trials in secret (in other words, nobody knows what goes on: the most they will ever get to know is that somebody has disappeared), g) can use kinds of evidence that are generally not accepted as valid in civilian courts, h) can sentence to capital punishment even if the judges (military, obviously) are not convinced "beyond reasonable doubt", i) can deny the defendant's right to appeal, with sentences being considered as final, and j) can sentence to death by a two-thirds majority of judges (two out of three).

It seems like a measure specially drawn up to get even with Osama bin Laden. Courts like these can work behind closed doors, don't need evidence and can sentence with no right of appeal. Cases don't need to be made public until after sentence has actually been passed (if at all), thus avoiding the embarrassment of everybody hearing the proclamations or revelations of the accused. And God alone knows what Osama bin Laden would have to say about his dealings with the CIA. But the rule, even if it was designed just for Osama, immediately becomes general and can be applied to anyone. According to the "New York Times", which subsequently carried quite critical reports on the Decree, some of its more abnormal aspects, such as passing a death sentence without a unanimous decision from the judges or using hearsay as evidence, would have been amended during the implementation procedure. But even the "New York Times" leader-writer had little hope of the decree being amended in any significant way, and concluded by suggesting the government find a "better response", which would be "to try suspected terrorists under the normal American criminal justice system". "No other type of judicial proceeding [other than the existing military and civilian courts] could offer Americans and the rest of the world as satisfying a verdict, or a more resounding vindication of American justice and freedoms [...]. To try Qaida leaders in a forum of such dubious legitimacy would taint any resulting verdict in the eyes of much of the world." 8 The crude legal implications of the decree are clearly evident: subjects of the Empire, (i.e. American citizens), will have the privilege of being tried in civilian courts, whereas secondary citizens (i.e. "non-citizens") will have to face secret military tribunals. Furthermore, the United States, whilst opposing the institution of an international criminal court to avoid US citizens being tried for war crimes or crimes against humanity (even though their defence rights would all be guaranteed), reserves the right to try anybody else, in America or elsewhere, with no guarantee of observing any rules regarding trials, proceedings or international legality.

The US administration's handiwork has been criticised at authoritative levels within the United States itself (in Italy the scale of the controversy was much more contained. In fact, information on this hugely important question was so scarce that millions of people knew either very little or absolutely nothing about it).<sup>9</sup> But Bush has also been applauded and, indeed, urged to go even further in his demolition of the Constitution. Further, to the point of legalising the use of torture and violence against prisoners and the extermination of the enemy, who are presented as either criminals (as if criminals can be killed without trial) or soldiers (as if soldiers, or prisoners of war, have no rights, not even those embodied in the Geneva Convention). As for the defeated fighters in Afghanistan, there were no limits to the way they were treated: the massacre in Dostum after the taking of Mazar-I-Sharif, the aerial bombardment of the prison where at least six hundred corpses were found and the massacres of Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad, where American troops took part in acts of revenge with a total disregard for all international conventions. And then there were the wounded Taliban and Al Qaeda militia prisoners, left without medical assistance and food in miserable hovels with neither water nor toilets.

We shall never know what really happened in Afghanistan after the capitulation of the Taliban. But we can be sure that the victory brings very little satisfaction, being as devoid of glory as the victory in Yugoslavia, obtained by bombing the civilian population pitilessly from on high and reducing the country to a black hole. A barbaric, vile West, incapable of raising itself above the barbarism it claims to oppose. A barbarism that prompted these unusually harsh words from Cardinal Martini: "Can the things that have been done and are being done against terrorism, especially in wars, be classed as legitimate self defence, or can they, at least in some cases, be seen as reprisals, acts of excessive violence, revenge?"<sup>10</sup> The question is rhetorical, and the answer can be found in the Bible: Cain killed Abel, but "whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold". And these terrible words are words of a Christian, not Moslem.

Then there was Guantanamo bay, which even the pro-war papers had something to say about. Not much, of course, but enough to give us an idea of how little that group of men and women in charge of United States policy-making care about the laws of the international community. The surviving laws, that is. Those old, faded documents, signed long ago, saying that prisoners have to be treated according to the rules of the Third Geneva Convention (1949). Perhaps not all of them can be defined as prisoners of war,<sup>11</sup> but first and foremost they have the right to be treated in a humane way, according to the Convention. And, in any event, even though it's not always easy to define the status of a combatant, the Convention states that "should any doubt arise" about the status of any persons, these cases should be referred to a "competent tribunal". And that, while awaiting the decision of the tribunal, such persons shall be treated as prisoners of war, at least provisionally. The Taliban fighters can surely be defined as lawful combatants, as can the Al Qaeda militiamen captured in combat. We can't be so sure about instructors in terrorist training camps, but who can tell the difference? We don't even know who all those people detained in Guantanamo Bay are, nor where they were brought from and on what charges. And the lack of humanitarian rules in the way they are being detained is all too evident. If the photographs and other little bits of leaked information weren't enough to confirm our worst suspicions, then the declarations of Rumsfeld and Cheney would be. "We treat them only too well, considering the crimes they're tainted with" is what they both basically said. And you realise that Rumsfeld and Cheney aren't even aware of the fact that, in countries where democratic rights exist, the way a prisoner is treated doesn't depend on the seriousness of the crime he or she is charged with. And this is even more unacceptable before his or her guilt has been confirmed by the regular sentence of a regular civilian or military court, on the basis of a fair, free judgment. The situation, therefore, is even grimmer than these initial comments lead us to think. "Since the 11th of September the US government has secretly transported dozens of people suspected of links to terrorists to countries other than the United States, bypassing extradition procedures and legal formalities." "The suspects have been taken to countries, including Egypt and Jordan, whose intelligence services have close ties to the CIA and where they can be subjected to interrogation tactics – including torture and threats to their families – that are illegal in the United States." In some cases, "US intelligence agents remained closely involved in the interrogation". This procedure is called "rendition" in intelligence jargon, and it's nothing new, having been used many times by United States intelligence agencies in recent years. In many instances, the "kidnapped" people – often carried on flights chartered directly by the CIA without even informing the judicial authorities in the host countries – are "interrogated" in the way described above and then left in the hands of lawless police and tribunals and executed. In other instances they are subsequently taken away to the United States. "The details of most of these operations, which often ignored local and international extradition laws, remain closely guarded."<sup>12</sup> This means that there are many other operations that have remained secrets and that the numerous cases we know about are simply the ones that slipped through the secrecy net. Of the approximately three hundred detainees in Guantanamo Bay (many of whom as yet unidentified), the majority weren't captured in Afghanistan but in at least 25 different countries, many of them directly by United States agents. In other cases, the "rendition" has been entrusted to local intelligence agencies. At least until the subjects are loaded on to unmarked American aeroplanes waiting in military airports, often without being officially logged by airport authorities. The advantages are evident. No publicity, no protests, no legal battles, no appeals, no risks and no negative image of the United States. And, of course, it's an excellent way of eliminating suspects and gathering of information with the use of torture, bypassing the American legal system.

These methods were common practice before the 11th of September. Scores of members, or presumed members, of Al

Qaeda fell victim to them. The Empire's gendarmes could do whatever they wanted, and did. So why didn't they work? It's all increasingly suspicious and makes us wonder whether there was something much worse than the inefficiency described by Woolsey. Anyway, they have now become standard procedures, justified and legalised by decree of the President-Emperor.

So, we ask ourselves, saying as we came into this war together with the United States to defend Western values, why don't we protest? It seems like we're more American than the Americans, because in America they are protesting.

"Any detainees who qualify for prisoner of war status cannot be brought before the military commissions proposed by the Bush administration, but must be tried under regular court-martial procedure or in American civil courts." 13 "Are these ideals simply a facade that can be dropped whenever it is convenient or are they – as Americans like to think – deeply embedded in the national psyche? [...]. Mr. Rumsfeld is absolutely wrong when he calls the Afghan prisoners 'unlawful combatants' who thus have no rights under the Geneva Convention." 14

Unfortunately for them it will be Rumsfeld himself deciding on the composition of the secret military tribunals, even though scores of American intellectuals have tried to speak out about it, with great difficulty, amidst the frantic patriotic fanfare. Are they all anti-Americans too? Apparently yes, at least according to all those other American intellectuals, journalists and political commentators calling for even harsher measures. For example, on the question of torture: why not use that as well? This was what the historian Jay Winik wrote in the "Wall Street Journal" about Abdul Hakim Murad, the man who exposed a plot to shoot down a dozen American aircraft in 1995 (incidentally, another very early signal that Washington didn't take much notice of) when he was tortured by the Philippine police. "What would have happened – exclaims Winik – if Murad had been captured in the United States?" Nothing, probably, because on the 10th of October 1984 the United States had ratified the UN convention "against torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment". 15 Winik, evidently, regrets this. He thinks that if Murad had been captured in the United States the attacks would have happened. So, long live torture and back through the centuries we go. Here we have a historian that can't read history and can't even conceive of the importance of rights in hugely decreasing the likelihood of terrorist acts. Again, the words of Gore Vidal come to mind, when he defined the "Wall Street Journal" as a "cheerful neo-fascist daily, [...] blissfully ignorant of how unknown it is to the majority of Americans". 16 But the would-be torturers writing in the newspapers of free America and talking on its television screens are many. Perhaps they're just cynically audience-seeking or perhaps they really believe it. I couldn't say which is worse. And things aren't much better in the Italian press, even though nobody has actually had the nerve to talk about torture. There's the authoritative "Newsweek" with Jonathon Alter 17, there's Shepard Smith, Bill Shine 18 and John Du Pre on Fox TV and there's Tucker Carlson 19 and Dahlia Lithwick 20 on "Magazine Online Slate". Even the "New York Times" has joined the festivities with a comment by Jim Ruthenberg. And here Gore Vidal's epithet fits very well: "A newspaper that only prints news that falls within its not dissimilar vision of the world". 21

Re-reading these comments can't help but raise other questions, all the more worrying. Here we have a decree, a set of legal measures that cancel the distinction between executive and judicial power, putting the latter drastically at the service of the former. The constitutional rights of the United States are being erased, together with the national sovereignty of every other country in the world. The civilised state ends here. In fact, it's the equivalent of making a permanent thing of Bush's "state of siege", proclaimed just after the terrorist attacks. It's like having wartime legislation in peacetime, because, even though the word war is incessantly on the lips of the top figures in the US administration, nobody has actually declared war against anybody. But the consensus on all this seems to be huge, seeing as just one person in the United States Congress, Congresswoman Barbara Lee of California, voted against the granting of special powers to the Emperor. And, at the start of the victorious march on Afghanistan, the opinion polls said that the overwhelming majority of American citizens were in favour of war, "even if thousands of innocent civilians could be killed". As we know, this is what happened.

The authoritarian disease is already spreading beyond the borders of the United States, attacking human rights as it goes. This was to be expected though, as the new law of the Empire can't be limited to the United States of America alone. European governments immediately agreed to introduce legislation that violated the right to self-defence, human rights, national legislation and international treaties.

Following a letter from George Bush to Romani Prodi on the 16th of October 2001, the European Union drafted a document stating that "extradition should be considered legal when juridical guarantees can be obtained from the state that is to try the person", and that the extradition procedure should take into consideration not only the individual rights of the person to be extradited, but also, in the light of the 11th of September, the security interests of the state making the request. 22 What it means, in short, is sacrificing rights in the name of security.

And so France handed over a number of radical Moslems to Algeria, knowing fullwell what kind of treatment awaited them there, a country with no proper legal safeguards. Austria authorised the initial extradition of Bilasi-Ashri to Egypt. Sweden, known until recently for its great respect for the right of asylum, organised a special flight for handing over two Egyptian citizens, Ahmed Hussein Agaiza and Mohammed Zari, to the Egyptian authorities in December 2001. Great Britain, Germany and Denmark are drafting restrictions on asylum rights legislation with new clauses that can cancel asylum rights even after they have been granted. Similar situations are arising more and more often in countries with either less solid or nonexistent legislative frameworks. Azerbaijan had extradited three Egyptians and three Saudis



by the end of October 2001. Pakistan has handed over scores of suspects directly to the United States. US troops arrested five Algerians, a Yemenite, an Egyptian and a Jordanian in Bosnia and extradited them to the United States, without even getting the approval of the Bosnian authorities. Hoping that this will always be confined to suspected Islamic terrorists is nothing short of naive.

We are faced with two interconnected facts. The Emperor and his cohorts tell us that the war will be long and that it won't be over in our generation. And the measures being taken confirm that they're preparing for a long war. They're not joking. It's not just empty talk. If they are mad – and this isn't to be ruled out entirely – then they are coherently so. They think civilisation is at stake and they're convinced of being the representatives of the supreme civilisation on the planet. They identify this civilisation, i.e. themselves, with Good, and their enemies, i.e. the rest of the world, with Evil. There's no middle way in this scheme. "You are either with us or against us," Bush has been saying right from the start. The only possible way is permanent, infinite, eternal war, because Good and Evil are both eternal. And another thing: in the conflict between Good and Evil there's no such thing as a state founded on the rights of man, or compromises between nations. There are no such things as international organisations to which countries delegate part of their national sovereignty for the common good. And there are no limits to the power of Good, as it has every right and the absolute, ethical duty to impose its rights. What we have is a theocratic vision of the future world: a Religious Empire.

Exaggerated alarmism, say the optimists. But you can only be optimistic if you ignore what's been happening over the last decade: the systematic, organised and planned downgrading of all international institutions other than those of Bretton Woods. The United States is the main and most coherent force in this process of destroying an international community of sovereign, equal countries. The United Nations has been the first victim, dragged down to a subordinate level where it can't perform its conciliatory functions. After being forced into a corner over the Yugoslav war, the United Nations was compelled to draft two unprecedented resolutions in the wake of the 11th of September, legitimising a military response on the basis of the "inherent right of individual and collective self-defence". This brings Sandinista Nicaragua to mind: if these resolutions could be backdated, the Sandinistas would now have the right to return to power or ask for justice to be done against Reagan's United States. They would have had the right (theoretical, obviously) at the time to bomb Washington and the Pentagon. And to make matters worse, in the rush of passing the resolutions, the Security Council actually forgot that it had never before had to deal with the problem of handling military interventions directly. The fact that it had never done so certainly wasn't the fault of previous UN secretary-generals but rather of the powerful countries not wanting to delegate their power to anybody, least of all the UN. But it is now eminently clear to everyone – except the leaders of the European Union – that unless we get down to the problem of planning and implementing a system of international institutions actually capable of governing the immense global challenges now facing humanity, then the only alternative will be to leave the government of the planet to the logic of the only existing global power. This means preparing for an infinite war, or rather a countless series of finite wars. Because, putting aside the evident incapacity of European leaders, the thing (one of the many) that these theologians of the Empire can't see is that they only represent the strongest part of the West, not all of it. What they represent is the ruling class of the budding global super-society, but there exists another West that refuses to go along with them in this delirium of omnipotence. But they seem to be fully aware of this too, and they've realised that it fits in exactly with their designs. And so the decision to go ahead without that other West was easy, because it suited them. This other West, the one they left out (which includes a large slice of Europe), still believes in democracy and rights. But the global super-society no longer has any need for democracy. Quite simply, they can do without it. People's elected assemblies are not required for the management of necessity. This is the land (or rather the empire) of TINA, where the only things that need to be done are technical, the same for everybody, no explanation required. The budding absolute power is already changing the rules to fit the new situation. There is no longer any power other than money. Money decides not only how the economy has to be run but also – directly – how America has to be governed. When the Supreme Court decrees that "the money spent to have a candidate elected, just like that spent to further private and commercial interests, is a form of constitutionally protected freedom of expression", which means that "a change has occurred that has transformed a representative republic into a plutocracy".<sup>23</sup> The sovereignty of the people (and all other things) no longer exists. They have become consumers. Didn't Emperor Bush tell his electorate to "start shopping again" just two days after the tremendous terrorist shock? An extraordinary insight into what the United States has become: a people forced into consumption, with the entire world economy depending on its frantic level. Consumption that must and can remain theirs and theirs alone, because if the other billions of people on the Earth start consuming like them, it would be the end of the delicate balance between man and nature.

The words "collective responsibility" come to mind, as used by illustrious liberal economist Lester Thurow when lambasting the Serbs with such a vengeance as to lose all sense of semantic judgement, with Milosevic being grouped together with Hitler and other devils from Hell amidst talk of the Holocaust and genocide: "The Serbs have got to face the consequences [...]. The important thing is to make the ordinary people of Serbia pay, openly, before the eyes of the world, for this behaviour. A period of limitations to public services and infrastructure will be an important lesson for others who might be tempted to behave in a similar way".<sup>24</sup> Bombing bridges, factories and power stations are blandly classed as limitations to "public services and infrastructure". But that's not the point. The point is that here we're talking about the collective punishment of civilians, imposed externally, without trial, for indiscriminate charges that have been neither proven nor directly attributed. What would Thurow say now, after the 11th of September, if Osama bin Laden or one of his followers were to take those terrible words literally and turn them against the American people

to justify their acts of terrorism? I'm sure Thurow and the many worshippers of America wouldn't like it. And yet they are based on exactly the same concept that has been dominating the Western press for months, to justify the "humanitarian" bombing of Yugoslavia. They are both terrorist acts, motivated by the same preposterous arguments that attempt to make the massacre of civilian populations legally acceptable. If applied to Americans, the argument would be as follows: Americans have to face the consequences of the fact that, over the last decade, the evident plunder of the world's wealth by the financial system of the United States of America has been widely supported in America. Hundreds of millions of men, women and children continue to die of hunger or live in a permanent undernourished state while the American middle class, the only section of the population that goes to vote and which therefore must bear the main responsibility (for electing leaders that perpetrate mass terror against defenceless populations), continues to increase its superfluous consumption, consuming more energy than anybody else and polluting the planet more than the whole of the rest of the world put together. It's important to make the ordinary people of this country pay, openly, before the eyes of the world, for this monstrously selfish behaviour. A period of limitations to consumption, public services and infrastructure, hitting ordinary people, the elderly and children alike, would be an important lesson.

It's quite hard to accept this line of argument applied to our own societies, isn't it? And so why apply it to others? Wouldn't it have been (and wouldn't it still be) wiser to forget these Nazi-style monstrosities with all their warlike implications and face the common problems of the world together? Unfortunately, the world of political leaders over the last decade has been full of lordly figures claiming to be realists who – I am quite sure – would see this proposal as idealistic, utopian and impracticable. Not all of them, though. When James Wolfensohn opened the World Economic Forum in New York he had the courage to say that a good insurance policy against terrorism for the United States would be to double the amount of aid it sends to the Third World, raising it from the ridiculous figure of 50 to 100 billion dollars. He made his point reminding people that every year Europe and the United States spend six or seven times more on domestic agricultural subsidies than they do on aid, flying in the face of all free competition rules for merchandise on the world market. Wolfensohn also explained to his audience of billionaires, all definite exponents of the global super-society, that you didn't have to be an idealist to understand this. "I am not saying this as a dreamer – he said – I spent 30 years in business. I am saying this as a realist who has visited 114 countries." He understood, and wanted to warn us to be on our guard because we were sitting on a powder keg. 25 The Waldorf Astoria Hotel audience didn't pay much attention to him. They were just hoping for a rapid recovery so they could forget all the bad dreams of recent times.

And so, from up there on the command deck, where you get the best possible view of the present and part of the future too, what you can see is that the rest of the world must not consume the same amount of goods and resources. And they have to be stopped from doing it with all possible means. Many of these outsiders are unable to defend themselves and will be either subjugated or crushed. The problem, though, is with those who can't as yet be brought to heel or controlled. China is definitely the biggest problem, and it's China they're thinking of on the command deck as they prepare for the future war.

They've already worked out that China will become a force to be reckoned with by 2017, according to four basic parameters (demographic, economic, technological and military). This, at least, is what it says in a Pentagon document, which, not by chance, bears the signature of Rumsfeld. And in the meantime, the American locomotive has ground to a halt. But a new, intermediate enemy has appeared, perhaps unexpected or perhaps not, but in any event, welcome: Islam. This enemy can be used to prepare for the greater and more decisive struggle that lies ahead. Terrorism serves a purpose in this design, and international terrorism even more so, being not so much a problem to resolve as an "interpretative category of reality", or rather as the way to construct a "society under surveillance, the modern version of a police state". 26

Certainly, the scenario has changed. The nightmare of Islam came before China. But there's some good in the worst of things. The 11th of September is like a spark starting a great blaze: it stops the dallying, forces us to show our hand. It is by no means certain that the command deck is going to win. Lots of things could happen to upset plans and change the course of history, which never goes in a straight line. But they're having a go, with all the means at their disposal, with a war machine that they intend to use and are already using. They've just got to work out the plan of action. It's quite possible, indeed, highly probable, that this plan will be unattainable. But this is of secondary importance: if they try, it will be a catastrophe anyway for billions of individuals. Colin Powell, the dove (the only one in the group of winged creatures without talons) – and for that reason definitely not allowed on the command deck – said that "we'll stop only when civilisation is safe again". This means never, because in this scenario all the Empire can do is – to paraphrase Marguerite Yourcenar – incessantly pacify a world that can't be subjugated, because it isn't given the space to live. And so it pushes it to death in order to kill. That's why the Emperor let it slip out that it will be an "infinite war".

7.  
A grand alliance?

"They have done a good job" This is how an American friend, a confirmed liberal, summed up the war situation in Afghanistan after the final massacre of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. "They" were and are the team led by George W.

Bush, first and only Emperor of the 21st century.

In fact, some, although not all, of the objectives of the United States have been achieved. Later on I'll try and explain which ones. But the victory against international terrorism certainly hasn't, and this is also because the war that began on the 7th of October 2001 couldn't and wouldn't have ended so quickly, if for no other reason that it would have contradicted the prediction of Vice-Emperor Cheney, who said it would go on for much longer than the present generation. President Bush, in his State of the Union address at the end of January 2002, said very clearly that the war on terror had "just begun". In the last chapter we'll have a look at where they probably want to take this war, and how.

In the meantime, we should try making an assessment of the intelligence and timing of the American response to the 11th of September. It's been said and written countless times that Bush exercised caution, that he didn't just put his head down and charge in, that he gauged his moves carefully and that he looked for the proof. In truth, what emerges from a careful reconstruction of events in the hours immediately after the attacks on New York and Washington is that, right from the start, no other option was considered apart from a military invasion of Afghanistan. 1 "He was anxious, even impatient to strike..." Perhaps this initial emotional reaction can be explained by the fact that it was 7.30 in the morning. But nothing happened afterwards to change it. It was the only idea that came into his head and that of the other Western warrior chief, Tony Blair, whom he telephoned before anybody else. The only function of the 'breathing space' was to give Bush time to organise a response big enough to "inflict pain on the terrorists and demonstrate to them and the rest of the world that there had been a fundamental change in US policy".

Bush says he didn't intend just to fire a "bunch of cruise missiles", like Clinton did in 1998, but that he had no doubt about the need to "strike, strike". In other words, the so-called "moderation" was no other than taking the time necessary to prepare for military action and create the right political climate to back it up, which meant getting the formal backing of NATO, the United Nations and as many members as possible of a "grand coalition". There's nothing to be particularly shocked about here: this is the ABC of politics and propaganda. The important thing is not to try and dress it up as something finer than it is or to mistake this kind of total cynicism for sanity.

In fact, when Paul Wolfowitz, the United States Deputy Secretary of Defence, was reporting on the progress of the action to the NATO summit on the 26th of September the following year, he put intelligence first (finding Osama's network and destroying it), diplomacy second (creating a broad-based consensus) and military action – surgical, of course – third (eliminating anything not dealt with in the first and second stages). As we know, things didn't go quite like this. The military action, by no means surgical, came first and the intelligence last. Terrorism was not eliminated. Indeed, they say "tens of thousands" of terrorists passed through the Al Qaeda camps and "spread throughout the world" after the defeat in Afghanistan. 2 Something they should have predicted but actually only discovered afterwards, just like too many other things they should have known beforehand. As for the Grand Alliance, I shall try and describe it later on in this chapter.

The "good job" done, therefore, as far as the military operation was concerned, was the victory over the Taliban, the new Asian geopolitical situation and the formation of a new provisional government in Kabul, now headed by Washington's man Hamid Karzai.

But the most important objective was instant revenge, and this was largely achieved. The number of Taliban and Arabs annihilated is a mystery, and will remain so, but by adding up the victor's official figures from the battlefield (these being the only figures available, the enemy ones being false, by definition) we can reckon that at least twenty thousand men were killed in the bombing, battles and massacres that accompanied the victory and extermination of prisoners (no prisoners were to be taken in this war, apart from the few flown to Guantanamo bay for interrogation and media effect). But to this there should be added at least four thousand civilian victims. 3 A ratio of eight to one, assuming that the 11th of September victims were about three thousand. The ratio is certainly lower than the Nazi reprisals in the Second World War, but still sufficient to meet the needs of the declaration of war ("Our cause is right. Our cause is necessary) and appease the rage of the American consumer.

As far as civilians are concerned, these – as we know – weren't actually a target but are by definition collateral and the victims, as such, can be neither quantified nor verified and so we'll never know. Also because, by the time somebody starts counting civilian victims, Afghanistan will already have vanished from the front pages and TV news and so won't be worth bothering about.

The second objective achieved was the drastic changes to the United States sphere of influence in the whole of Asia, especially Central Asia. Since the end of the Afghan war the United States can safely claim to have gained direct control over at least three more former Soviet republics lying between the Middle East, the Caspian Sea area and the Chinese border, in addition to the two already under its wing. The dependence of Georgia and Azerbaijan – both led by former members of the Soviet Politburo – was already an established fact before the start of the Afghan war. But now it's more or less officially sealed, and taken for granted in all diplomatic circles. In another era, Georgia and Azerbaijan would have been called two United States colonies, but now they use softer terms.

The new spoils of war to add to these are Islam Karimov's Uzbekistan, Saparmurad Nizajov's Turkmenistan and Askar Akaev's Kyrgyzstan. In the first of these three states, America has set up a permanent military base. At what price we don't know, but money certainly isn't the thing that's lacking. Islam Karimov is not what you could call a champion of democracy, but nor are the Saudi princes and nor is Musharraf. And Washington doesn't bother too much about details such as these. Little is known of Nizajov, partly because Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan's capital is out of bounds for foreigners, especially journalists.

Reliable (Russian) sources tell us, however, that Turkmenbashi (i.e. the father of all Turkmeni), as Nizajov likes to call himself, has already put Mary airport (a strategic base for the Russians in their Afghan war) into American hands, and perhaps also Carhop airport. Nizajov, naturally, has said that he'll be willing to accommodate the terminals for the future oil and gas pipelines for transferring energy from the Caspian area to the Persian Gulf. A project devised in the mid-nineties, closely linked to the birth of the Taliban regime. Saparmurad Nizajov is an oriental satrap, not much different to the other American allies in the region. He's made deals with everybody, personally controls a considerable part of the narcotics trade, with the drugs coming into the formerly Soviet Caspian Sea area from Afghanistan and then being distributed by the Russian, Azeri, Georgian and Chechen mafias towards the North and Western Europe, and longs to free himself from Russian control and play a role in the great Caspian Sea oil rush.

More surprising is the American conquest of a base in Kyrgyzstan, above all because Askar Akaev has always been considered one of the staunchest Russian allies in the area. But pressures and money could have played a decisive role here too. And Akaev, like Karimov, had much to gain from the demise of the Taliban, having to cope with a domestic Islamic opposition that had found sanctuary in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. All infidel allies, for now, but all anxious to join the great dollar party. Ready to be absorbed by the world market, but jealously guarding their tribal customs. But above all – especially Karimov and Nizajov, as well as Aljev and Schevardnadze – they were looking for American protection against a Russia that was breathing down their necks. In conclusion, Bush takes home an advance military base right on China's doorstep. This will be very useful in a few years time.

In just less than three months, the Bush administration has drawn up a kind of Asiatic Yalta, remodelling all the geopolitical relations on the continent in its favour. The new Superwar against international terrorism is thus paying excellent dividends, in this sense. And it all leads us to believe that future stages of the Superwar will also be characterised by similar geopolitical changes in other parts of the globe. This will definitely happen in the Middle East, where Israel, with Washington's support, has started the war for the elimination of the Palestinian state with the re-emergence of the idea of a greater Jewish state. Getting rid of Arafat will be the green light for the plan to end all negotiations. They're now heading for the final showdown, with the Sharon-Bush duo in total agreement. The end of Saddam Hussein in Iraq will lead to the establishment of an American protectorate and the installation of American bases, just as in Saudi Arabia after the 1991 Gulf War.

The remodelling of influences in the United States' favour in equally vast parts of Africa will be features of the expected wars in Somalia and Sudan. All this gives a clear message that the new asymmetrical global war will not limit itself merely to the systematic extermination of the tentacles of Al Qaeda. In Washington they know this won't be enough to eliminate the danger, even if the policing operation is a complete success. The social tension in the world – already increasing spasmodically over the last twenty years – is destined to grow at the same pace as the relaunch (in Keynesian and military terms) of American globalisation.

The task so far, therefore, has been to increase the number of permanent United States bases and garrisons in all areas of the planet where threats could arise to American economic and political interests. 4

There are other aspects to the "good job" we mentioned at the beginning. The Asiatic Greater Yalta implies the existence of a partner-adversary with whom some of the spoils, albeit a small part, are to be shared. This partner-adversary is Russia. All of a sudden, Russia is back in the reckoning, after being relegated to a long, ten-year limbo by its objective weakness (and the absolute subordination of Boris Yelstin to American interests). Paradoxically enough, it was the Emperor himself that called Russia back into the great field of play, out of necessity, and having to pay a price, which, in the long term, may work out to be higher than it actually appears. The presence of Russia is necessary to show the world that there is a Grand Alliance against international terrorism. The very existence of a Grand Alliance is enough to provide apparently irrefutable evidence of the moral legitimacy of the Afghan war. Getting the support of the Moscow administration wasn't easy in terms of effort and commitment, as was shown by the feverish frequency of contacts, journeys to Russia, diplomatic missions and various concessions granted by the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld-Powell team.

Vladimir Putin responded very ably to Washington's multiple embrace. He even beat the Western allies to it by being the first to offer his condolences and solidarity after the 11th of September tragedy. From that time on there appeared to be complete harmony between Moscow and Washington, backed up by the total, spasmodic, obsessive and unanimous efforts of all the Western media (to the point of making you suspect they were really acting under orders).

In truth, what was actually happening was that the United States and Russia were locked in close (and at times very tough) negotiations to redefine relations and redraw the map of Asia in the cruel light of the 11th of September.

The Russian president negotiated with great skill, especially if one considers that the cards in his hand were neither many nor winning. He was more aware than anyone that Russia was in a weak position. Putin played above board, putting the entire question of the differences between Russia and the United States squarely on the table at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, and brilliantly applying De Gaulle's technique of using your weaknesses as a lever to unbalance the strength of your adversaries. In this way they negotiated on a whole series of matters simultaneously and parted with a shake of hands, each one believing (or feigning to believe) that they had gained certain advantages.

Putin obtained the immediate end to all external interference in Chechnya: no more aid to the rebels, up to then abundantly supplied by the Turkish secret services via Georgia and Azerbaijan with the blessing of the CIA, and the ending of periodic Western protests about human rights violations. From then on, for some time, the silence of the West was guaranteed. But Putin even gained something in Europe. The United States had – and still has – the intention of overthrowing the Byelorussian president Aleksandr Lukashenko. The outcome of the negotiations is that, for the time being, the US will desist from transferring the scenario they successfully created in Kosovo and Yugoslavia to Byelorussia. Putin's Russia will slowly and relentlessly proceed towards unification with Byelorussia and other parts of the former Soviet Union (which was only to be expected). Up to recently (and still now, to a certain extent) Washington would have seen this as highly damaging: something to be stopped at all costs, to prevent Aleksandr Lukashenko's "bad example" from being followed by leaders of other former Soviet countries. First in line would be Moldova, disgusted by the experience of neighbouring Romania. And then there is Kazakhstan, Armenia and Ukraine with its tottering president, saved by Putin himself and forced to depend on the Kremlin not only to stay in power but also to stay out of gaol.

Clearly, the informal agreements reached in Crawford can be reconsidered at any time. But getting a truce is in itself a good result for Putin, although it has to be paid back in some way, like everything else in this world. Here the Russian leader has had to accept the loss of three republics and could do virtually nothing about it, after already losing Georgia and Azerbaijan. In exchange, though, he has been given assurances that the Russian influence over Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan will not be violated. Bishkek, however, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, was not mentioned. Here the United States clearly hit below the belt, judging by the furious remarks of the Russian military and the acrimonious comments in the press. But how could Washington's move have been stopped? Moscow has got no capital to lavish and no threats to make because, once embarked in that direction, all it can do is expose its weakness. And so there was another, conspicuous enforced withdrawal from part of Central Asia, implicitly acknowledging America's claim on the area, already earmarked as an "area of vital interest for the United States of America" by Clinton. Moscow may see this withdrawal as temporary, or tactical, but, painful as it is, it represents an acknowledgement of the actual balance of power.

Consequently, Putin's position about the political control of the Afghan situation has remained unchanged after the final defeat of the Taliban. And the longstanding joint Pakistani-Saudi-American venture over the previous five years to create a series of oil and gas pipelines to carry the immense energy resources of the Caspian Sea to Western consumers via Afghanistan certainly hasn't gone unnoticed in Moscow.

This operation, dating back to the beginning of the nineties, was headed by two important oil companies: Unocal Corp. (American owned) and Delta Oil (owned by the Saudi monarch). Between them, they ousted the tiny Argentine company Bidas in dealing directly with the Turkmeni satrap Saparmurad Nizajov (who was to ensure protection of the northern oil and gas pipeline terminal) and the Afghan Mujahedeen, who (in exchange for large sums of money) were to stop fighting amongst themselves and guarantee a relatively peaceful future for Afghanistan to allow the passage of the pipelines towards the South and the Persian Gulf.

This strategic operation was to be of both economic and political significance. On the one hand, it would have allowed the transfer of large quantities of energy to the big Western economies at low cost and, on the other, it would have bypassed Russia, thus depriving it of handsome royalties and a great deal of influence over the whole of the Central Asian area at the same time. This latter aspect was closely linked to the strategic plan (backed by influential Washington circles) of further weakening Russia to the point of total collapse, and seeing it transformed into a "loose federation" and then finally breaking up into three states (European Russia without the Northern Caucasus, Western Siberia and the Far East).

When this plan failed (because of the Afghan factions failing to come to an agreement) it was decided to pacify Afghanistan with a brand new regime, manufactured artificially abroad, based in Pakistan, and drawing on the immense recruitment pool formed by the millions of Afghan refugees in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The Taliban movement was thus born, in 1994-95, helped along with the Saudi financing of the madrase (Koranic schools) and the large-scale involvement of the Pakistani secret services, who provided training, combat units and intelligence for the war against the Mujahedeen. Tens of thousands of Koranic students were thus formed into a new Jihad, trained, armed

and transported from the Pashtunistan refugee camps into Afghanistan.

In less than two years, with weapons and rivers of dollars, Mullah Omar's Taliban had conquered or bought off almost all the Mujahedeen former military commanders, forcing the remainder to take flight and occupying ninety percent of the country. In 1996 they reached Kabul. But Russia wasn't just going to stand back and let this happen. The Russian military and secret services had decided to step into the gap left by President Yelstin. Realising that operation Taliban was basically directed against Russian interests, they started supporting and arming the only Afghan antagonist still capable of standing up to the overwhelming Taliban advance, the Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masood, entrenched in the natural stronghold of the Panshir Valley.

The failure of operation Taliban was brought about by Moscow's flexibility, ready to switch support to its former bitter enemy during the years of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. But now Vladimir Putin had his point to make to George W. Bush. It was a concise, effective proposal: we'll give you the political support necessary to defeat the Taliban, who have now become a danger to you as well, as they were to us when they were working for you. But on condition that we come to an agreement on the future government of Afghanistan. There's another condition: that the future use of the Caspian Sea strategic resources will be managed with Russia and not against Russia. Putin even granted something extra: you want a few bases in Central Asia? Take them. But only for as long as you need them to defeat the Taliban regime. Then get out. Bush is a businessman, and like all self-respecting businessmen, he can make promises and not keep them.

In the light of subsequent events, it could be said that the agreement reached between Bush and Putin in the Texas ranch was neither clear nor complete. The United States had to hold in balance numerous different variables at the same time and so they too had to be quite flexible, despite their much more powerful position. As well as thinking of its own needs in controlling Afghanistan in the future, it also had to think of the needs of the unstable and unreliable Musharraf, forced into playing a very difficult game on his own domestic front, amidst Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Americanism, in order to comply with Washington's peremptory demand for the provision of bases, logistical aid and intelligence for the operation in Afghanistan. And then Russia had the directly opposed interest of having to comply fully with the demands of the Tajik successors to Masood, given that pacifying both the Tajiks and Islamabad was an impossible task, as Masood's assassination on the 9th of September was attributable as much to the Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence agency as it was to Osama bin Laden. And the Taliban were no other than puppets in the hands of the ISI, Pakistani army chiefs and certain sectors of the Pakistani political elite.

This explains perfectly why, despite Bush's warnings, the Tajiks entered Kabul first and took control of the capital without waiting for the American go-ahead, acting, no doubt, on agreement with Moscow. And it also explains why Russian soldiers were the first to reach Kabul on the 26th of November, apparently for humanitarian and technical reasons, but basically to keep the situation under control. All according to the universal proverb "it's good to trust, but it's better not to", or in the Russian version: "be trustful, but check it first" [doveriaj, no proveriaj].

Anything that happens in and around Kabul over the next few months must be looked at in this light. Putin is unlikely to present Afghanistan to the Americans on a plate. Nor is he likely to let Washington alone decide on the future of Central Asia and the energy reserves. It's true that Moscow is relatively weak and no longer a global power. But it's also true that in the area in question – its back yard – Russia is still very strong, fearfully so, and can influence many things. And so, if the Afghan factions start shooting at each other again, you can be certain that this is because one of the four main external protagonists – Russia, the United States, Pakistan or Iran – hasn't honoured the agreements made. Besides, the litmus paper of Moscow-Washington relations can also be read by the degree of control over the surrounding regimes, such as Tashkent and Ashkhabad. Both can be put in jeopardy quite quickly, without too much difficulty, if the Kremlin finds itself faced with actions not to its liking or, worse still, if Russia finds it has been cheated or its interests affected. Nor would it be sufficient to have United States agents protecting Central Asian dictators, because the Americans' lack of experience wouldn't stand the test of time against the knowledge – of the terrain, people and customs – possessed by the Russians. It's already happened in Georgia and Azerbaijan but they certainly won't let it happen again. Yelstin is no longer there in Moscow to aid and abet Western interests. Instead there's Putin, committed to the cause of capitalism in Russia, but equally committed to the defence of Russian national interests, and any lack of conviction shown on this matter would quickly bring him into conflict with certain sectors of the Russian establishment.

In the light of this, we should consider the other two themes that were definitely central to the November meeting in the Texas ranch. It was evident right from the start that agreement was reached on neither of them. Only on the question of the extension of NATO to the east was there slight convergence. Powell (not Rumsfeld, though) is prepared to give a lot to a Russia that gives a lot in return. For example, Russia coming closer to NATO would allow it to become part of some kind of ad hoc joint body, where it could even be allowed to take part in some of the collective decision-making. Putin showed an interest in this possibility, but is holding back from actually accepting or rejecting it until things become clearer and, quite simply, until Washington decides exactly what it's going to give Russia.

Besides, Putin is perfectly aware that any eastward extension of NATO will be decided on independently of Russia and knows full well that here too his room for manoeuvre is determined by the concrete balance of forces, which is not in his favour. For this reason he isn't going to raise his voice or get worked up or fly into a rage (as Yeltsin used to love doing) because he knows this will just put him in a corner: he's waiting for the right moment to show his strength – if he has any.

On the other hand, the Afghan affair, the start of the infinite war, has shown us that Washington doesn't really have much need for NATO any more. It has decided to go it alone, with the help of Britain. It thinks it can and must do the job by itself, without having to bother about formalities or constraints. For Bush and Rumsfeld, NATO will have an increasingly political and diplomatic role, with the military side reserved exclusively for Washington. Russia could well be admitted into a NATO of this type, a mere political tool, destined sooner or later to take over from the last vestiges of joint cooperation, represented gloomily by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). Putin is fully aware that being admitted would be of mainly symbolic value. But in any event, Russia could claim it to be an enormous success: that of having dismantled the old Western alliance and levelled the score after the ending of the Warsaw Pact.

As mentioned before, the only thing that Putin obtained in Europe was the halting of the American offensive against Lukashenko's Byelorussia, and this was no small achievement. Washington had intended to overthrow the Byelorussian president, but now this plan has had to be postponed to avoid creating problems with Moscow. Minsk would have to wait. The "Belgrade model" of externally financed subversion and threats and promises in exchange for overthrowing the current national leader, used successfully against Slobodan Milosevic, was not to be repeated just yet.

The only complete disagreement was over Starwars. Here, Bush could make no concessions. There could be no departures from the "unilateral" philosophy of Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice, regardless of the state of international terrorism. The Starwars plan is not a mere impulse or the whim of a handful of extremist leaders. It is the direct consequence of the imperial logic: the first corollary, the result of a very straightforward, pragmatic and American line of reasoning. The United States of America really is the only superpower and so doesn't have to negotiate with anybody anymore. At most, when deemed necessary, it can inform others of its sovereign decisions. All that needs to be added here is that the Starwars plan (i.e. the militarisation of space) has now become essential for the global dominion of the planet. It is strategically non-negotiable, because its purpose is to make the gaps between America and China and America and Europe unbridgeable. Furthermore (and this is of equally crucial value for Bush and his team), the one hundred billion dollars needed to create it will also be a useful Keynesian tool for reviving the badly stricken new economy. As the Financial Times wrote just a few days before the Twin Towers tragedy, "in a certain sense, now we've all got to go back to being Keynesians again". Putin didn't make a fuss about it when the United States announced, with the regulation six months notice, that they were preparing to quit the 1972 ABM treaty. The laconic response, in the form of a statement by Putin's Defence Minister, was that they would start fitting ten nuclear warheads on their Topol missiles, instead of just one. The Duma announced that the implementation of the START-2 obligations would be suspended and that in the meantime that Russia had launched its new nuclear submarine "Ghepard", the first of a new generation of armaments capable of holding its own against the very best of American technology. To put it bluntly, in the wake of Afghanistan, amidst regrets and foul play, a new rearmaments race was starting.

At the same time, however, one feels that several other big issues are at stake, with everything to play for and the prospect of Putin and Russia making some surprise moves.

One of these issues, quite strange and difficult to interpret, is related to the surprising fact that petrol was cheaper after the 11th of September, its cost falling to about half the previous year's level. Could this have been because of a glut in supply caused by lower energy consumption in a world market recession? Perhaps. This was the logic applied by the OPEC countries, which control 60% of world exports, when they decided to cut production three times consecutively. But it didn't work, even though it had on previous occasions. And yet the enormous political crisis caused by the 11th of September led to oil panic and energy stockpiling, and this surely should have resulted in price rises. But the effect was exactly the opposite. The price of a barrel of oil dropped. Why? The answer lies with Moscow, the most important oil exporter after Saudi Arabia. Putin had continued to increase exports despite the falling prices, thus reducing the profit per barrel. He broke the prices front, together with other non-OPEC countries. The reasons why he did it are unclear. Perhaps for immediate revenue needs. This hypothesis isn't to be ruled out. But he could also have been asked to do it by the American administration. He would have asked for something in exchange, no doubt, but by doing this he was giving Bush a present much more important than an air corridor for bombing the Taliban.

On reckoning up 5, the effect of Putin's manoeuvre was considerably greater than that of all the tax cuts promised and implemented by Bush. It was like a sigh of relief for Wall Street, which, quite out of the blue and against all forecasts, started to pick up again in November. Every American family made a saving of 172 dollars in heating costs. With the drop in the price of a barrel of oil from 30 to 16.7 dollars in the middle of November, American income rose by fifty billion dollars, because every dollar less in the price of a barrel equals a saving of five billion dollars for the United States. The effect was double-edged, though, and Washington had to apply the brakes quite quickly. Even though the

American economy benefited from an immediate boost, the risk was that the friendly Islamic regimes in the Middle East would be brought to their knees. Most notably Saudi Arabia, where a drastic reduction in revenue could make them vulnerable to social tensions on the domestic front. And also, in the end, the reduction in oil revenue for Arabic countries caused by these mechanisms will also lead to an equivalent reduction in United States profit.

This explains why Bush stopped Putin. Or perhaps it explains why Putin stopped by himself, when he realised that the favour he was doing for Bush was costing him no less than 12 billion dollars in state revenue. The experiment, however, points to a whole series of possibilities. One of these could be to make Washington less dependent on Middle Eastern oil and open up a stable alternative route for oil supplies from Central Asia, which is less turbulent, safer and more controllable. If, for example, Washington decides to resolve the Palestinian problem simply by doing away with the Palestinian National Authority – which seems likely – and if, at the same time, it decides to settle its score with Saddam Hussein by bombing Iraq, then it would be logical to expect a series of dramatic counter-attacks in the entire area. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to presume that this eventuality has already been accounted for. "Real cost of Arab oil too high for Americans" was the headline in the Washington Post at the end of November 2001, intimating that the era in which the "need for imported energy has the United States deeply entangled with decadent regimes of the greater Middle East" is drawing to a close. 6

And if Riyadh is showing signs of irritation in its relations with Washington, this could be because Washington has no doubt been sending some very threatening signals to Riyadh (and Cairo) since the 11th of September. Some of these regimes could crumble, change sides or go into the kind of paroxysms that would endanger the oil supply and cause drastic price rises. And the situation could become so unstable that it could deteriorate into a vast, twofold Middle East war, with Israel fighting its own battle and the United States demolishing its main apparent enemy. In this case, Russia, together with all the Caspian states (except for Iran, another enemy to be dealt with) could become a precious ally in the reorganisation of the world oil market. An ally to be granted special favours. What Putin can gain from all this remains to be seen.

And this all has to be done with an eye to Peking. Because it's all too evident that China is fully aware that it will become the number one enemy in the not too distant future, as soon as the current clash of civilisations against the Islamic world is over. These, at least, seem to be the innermost thoughts of George W. Bush's team, which, not by chance, has already changed Clinton's definition of China from "strategic partner" of the United States to "strategic competitor". When we reach 2017 – the year set by the Pentagon future-reading computers – China will be the only world power capable of matching the current power of the United States. China too is a member of the Grand Alliance, although not a particularly enthusiastic one. It too, like all its neighbours – apart from Pakistan – had a keen interest in eliminating the Taliban. For one thing, Uygur Muslim terrorists from the Xinjiang region were being trained in Al Qaeda camps. And so, any interchanges between Washington and Peking must have involved an exchange of favours: China expressing its public support for the American military response in return for America's silence on the human rights issue and, more especially, on the question of Tibet. After making this agreement, quietly and without any public show, things went no further. At the meeting in Shanghai everybody was wearing long coloured Chinese robes and smiling like great allies, but in the final press release there was not the slightest mention of international terrorism, nor a word of solidarity for the United States. No further steps were taken, no agreements and no cooperation. Peking didn't want to get too intimate. And it feared – with every good reason, as we have seen – that the American military operation would lead an expansion of the United States military presence in Central Asia. The air force base in Bishkek, if it becomes permanent, would be the nearest Asian base that the United States has ever had to the Chinese border, apart from the ones in South Korea.

Jiang Zemin is seated by the river waiting for something to float by, as Mao Tse-Tung taught him. He's waiting for the fateful 2017, looking around him with growing anxiety. It's certainly not by chance that the Premier Zhu Rongji has gone rushing off to New Delhi on the first official visit for over ten years. Above all, it's the American bases in Central Asia that bother Peking, together with the feeling that the neighbouring Putin might be getting just too involved in courteous exchanges – albeit tactical – with the Empire. Peking, however, like Moscow, kept calm and didn't make too much of a scene. It waited for the right moment to show its annoyance, and this came when it discovered the Boeing full of microbugs destined for its Maximum Leader. It could have sent a diplomatic note of protest and kept that little card to play in a later round, but instead it chose to make a scene and dominate the front page headlines for a few days. This was a sign of the storm. You would have expected better from "grand allies".

We've already talked about the Arabic allies. Never before has a grand alliance against terrorism contained so many terrorist allies. The mainstream media, of course, has skated over these details. So much so that the major shareholder of "La Repubblica" – after seeing his newspaper aggressively supporting the war day after day – felt the need to intervene directly, with great aplomb, and express his opinion to the contrary. In so doing he set a new record in the press world, because usually it's the proprietors who decide on a newspaper's political line and the editorial staff that protest, and not the other way round. "La Repubblica", in the name of a strange kind of pluralism, had joined in with the united chorus of belligerence at home and abroad. "[...] Which road will we end up taking – wrote Carlo Benedetti – if we continue travelling with these almost totally untrustworthy countries? Which road will we end up taking if we match



violence with violence? If, to combat cruelty, we ally ourselves with countries that use cruelty on a daily basis in their political life?" 7

All that remains to be said is about Europe. And "all that remains" is particularly apt in this case, as the things to be said deserve no better than to be left until last. Europe, like Italy, has commended and applauded the belligerent action, pleading to be allowed to join in with such pitiful insistence that only the stone heart of Rumsfeld could refuse them. He didn't want anybody. Not even the trusty valet Blair, with all his frenetic flying round the world, could do anything about it. He too was ignored. Italy, without even voting on it, decided to support the war in Afghanistan and sent a contingent that should have been fighting but wasn't even allowed into the combat zone. Then, without consulting parliament again, it changed the scope of the expedition to one of interposition. And Europe as a whole did no better. Probably because there were very few who realised that the Empire is actually a serious thing. Or, if they did, they pretended not to. All this shows that Europe hasn't really got to the heart of the matter, which could explain many things. And the heart of the matter is that Europe is now the only entity that can pose a potential threat to the United States. Not militarily, of course, but economically, and in terms of currency, social structure and culture. And it is for this very reason that the many Trojan horses already in its midst prevent it from taking steps towards becoming a political and military power. The Afghan war, like the Kosovo war before it, served the purpose of further subjugating Europe. And a significant proportion of European leaders behave as if they've accepted the idea that a country's importance is judged by its degree of subjugation or subservience to the United States.

The Empire, on the other hand, makes no secret of its intentions: the domination of the world financial market and absolute political domination, both achieved by means of its powerful military potential. So, where is this Grand Alliance against international terrorism, so talked about at the start of the war to justify its "inevitability" and "legitimacy"? Quite simply, it never was. The purpose of all the propaganda about it was to make tens of millions of people believe that "this is a war of civilisation against barbarism". But instead, we have seen the use of both barbarians and barbarities to win it. The only conclusion we can draw, as was already apparent, is that it wasn't a war of civilisation.

## 8. Propaganda War

The most terrible, worrying thing isn't what happened on the 11th of September. All the definitions of that day, all the descriptions and all the emotions have already been described, written, felt, digested and metabolised. What happened was the biggest spectacle on earth, in all senses of the word. In fact, it has actually been described, analysed and conceptualised as a visual spectacle, as well as being talked about in ethical, philosophical, economical and political terms. And you could even say that on this earth of ours, how could the biggest spectacle be anything but violent, tragic, bloody and monstrous?

It does little good trying to console ourselves with the fact that the dead on that day were no more than in many other tragedies, including recent ones, that have practically become a part of our daily life. Tragedies that have caused many more deaths. Brutal mass murders, even more savage and just as premeditated. As consolation it serves no purpose and brings no relief. Because we've only heard about these other modern-day massacres second-hand, or seen them some time after they happened. Because they almost always involve foreign peoples and faraway countries. Because we know, even though nobody has actually said it, and nor would anyone dare to do so openly, that the lives of those slaughtered individuals are worth less than ours because their production cost is on average much lower than here in the North of the world. And as an inevitable consequence of them being worth less, the feelings and emotions reserved for them are proportionally less. Because now, even feelings are measured in terms of value, or rather production cost, and anyone daring to reject this standard of measurement would have serious difficulties adapting to modern life. They would run the risk of being classed as too passive, too uncompetitive. The media system no longer has any place for truth or subtle distinctions.

The fact is that we actually saw that massacre, live, as the Americans say. And that's why we can't get it out of our minds. That's why it has carved an indelible niche in our memory. And whenever we think of it we have to fight back our emotions, fears, anxieties and horror over that immense mass of smoking rubble strewn with organic matter, with bits of people just like you and me. Just as we can never forget or come to terms with those manikins of desperation as they hurled themselves into the void towards certain death. That's the difference: we saw it. And we all saw it together. Giovanni Sartori wrote that we have become homo videns, but that we haven't yet realised all the psychological, sociological and logical consequences of this epochal change. One of the many changes that the information-communication society has forced on us, without giving us time to work out whether and how we can adapt to it. How would the same scene (nor can I, as I write, get away from this theatrical kind of language) have been perceived in the Gothenburg era? Quite by chance, I actually had first-hand experience of a situation like this, seen through 21st century eyes, when I went to the Panshir Valley in Afghanistan towards the end of September 2001.

We had flown in a Russian-made helicopter from Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, directly into the valley. When we

got out of the helicopter a huddle of Afghani youth crowded around us. There were several different nationalities in our group: a few reporters and one or two Northern Alliance Tajik army leaders. The American bombing of Afghanistan hadn't started yet. The war was to begin a few days later on the 7th of October. One of us, I can't remember who, took a newspaper out of his jacket pocket. It was in Tajik, written in Cyrillic characters. None of us could read it. Probably very few of the youngsters would have been able to read it either, even if it had been written in Farsi. But what astounded me was that none of those young Afghans had even seen a picture of the New York Twin Towers in flames, shown on one of the inside pages of the newspaper. Three weeks had gone by since the tragedy, and this was their first picture of it. Their first and only picture. They knew, in a vague kind of way, that something very serious had happened. One of them had heard the news on a little transistor radio, broadcast in Farsi. Some of them had heard about it indirectly, even more sketchily, from other people who had heard it on the radio. But nobody had actually seen anything. They crowded round, trying to get a look at that only newspaper, that only photograph, with expressions of wonder, little laughs and questions. And I realised how far removed their perception of the event was from mine and all the other helicopter passengers', and the whole of the Western world's. When I received the first telephone call in the evening on the satellite phone I carried round in my bag, I realised that it was going to be very hard explaining to people in Italy what was really happening in Afghanistan. The first thing they would ask me would be: tell us about the public opinion reaction in Afghanistan. How could I explain to the readers that public opinion simply doesn't exist in Afghanistan? That the instruments to form it don't exist? The very idea of public opinion, the idea we have in our heads, just can't be applied to a country where the only streetlights are in the big cities and the vast majority of the population have neither lighting nor telephones nor newspapers. And it's been like that for centuries, forever.

And so began my eighth trip to Afghanistan, my second in 2001, in the first war of the 21st century: the Superwar, the asymmetrical war, the global war, the war on international terrorism. And it dawns on me that the most terrible thing is really the 12th of September, when everybody realises that the world has changed but no one seems able to explain how and why. And no one seems able to say who wanted it changed, or why they did it, or how it was possible. We began to understand – or rather just to guess – that from this moment in time an inevitable sequence of events was going to take shape and form, but we hadn't yet grasped that the actual meaning and consequences of these events were to remain unknown.

And I can already see the disbelief in people's eyes as they read these lines. What's so odd about it? Surely the sequence is very clear: there's been a serious terrorist attack and the man behind it has been identified. His name is Osama bin Laden and he's hiding somewhere in Afghanistan, a country governed by a bunch of criminals, just like him, who call themselves Taliban. When the United States, the country that was attacked in cold blood, asked the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden they refused. It's only right that the United States go seek him out in his lair. The Taliban and bin Laden have got armies in Afghanistan, a country that has been the assembly point and training ground for terrorist troops for some time now, troops that pose a threat to lots of countries all over the world. And so it's perfectly legitimate for the United States to go to war with Afghanistan. The war has two interrelated aims: to overthrow the Taliban government of Afghanistan (which, by the way, is recognised by only three countries: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and to capture or, even better, kill the Taliban leader Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden. It all seems so simple, clear and extraordinarily coherent.

This was the version of the facts and sequence of events seized on immediately, right from the 12th of September, by almost all the observers, pundits, political analysts and journalists of the Western world, in solidarity with almost all the politicians in almost the whole of the Western world

We have already said in these pages how some of these apparent "likelihoods" are probably just not true; some are only partly true and others are very likely to be mixed with falsehoods. But the version used here has a single main defect: it lacks the history. It doesn't explain why things happened. As if the people using it suffer from total or partial amnesia. And someone still has to explain why the world media system (including the Italian subsystem, an integral part of it) has generally been incapable of offering its readers and viewers anything other than the official version or anything more substantial than just "likelihoods". Perhaps it's because the media actually saw what happened on the 11th of September and got so emotionally involved that they completely lost all intelligibility and independence of judgement. Quite a paradox. What comes to mind is that historic image of Yelstin clambering up on to the tank on that famous day of the coup in August 1991. It's a stupendous scene, specially prepared for the world press. Not a single Soviet citizen anywhere near the tank to hear his speech. His courageous climb on to the tank actually occurred after lengthy negotiations between his saintly bodyguard, Aleksandr Korzhakov, and the tank commander. Neither of them was in any danger at all. This was clear from the outset. After the negotiations, the tank commander, not happy at all about being at the centre of an historical event, reluctantly removed the breechblock from the machine-gun, locked up the tank and left them to it. Scores of photographers and camera crews, specially summonsed, broadcast images of the heroic Yelstin to the world, and he remains forever in our hearts as the man who overthrew the communist tyrants, laughing in the face of danger. The trick worked so well that for years afterwards presidents and heads of state – especially Clinton – congratulated Yelstin warmly every time they met him for his stance on the tank.

I stress again that events are events, facts are facts and symbols are symbols. News doesn't make facts, it simply reports them. Often, when I read newspapers or, more especially, when I watch the Italian TV news, it makes me think of those

places “where the news is draped over events like interesting veils over uninteresting things”.<sup>1</sup> I don’t know how things were in past decades. Karl Kraus’s words about the First World War come to mind, when he talks of “the degradation and corruption of all the noblest values of a breed. Something quite unprecedented in world history, above all because the unique progress in the development of journalistic techniques in this period has made it possible to deceive by placing an appearance in front of a monstrosity”.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, lots of things have happened in the media world in recent times and many of the old points of reference have changed. Rather than theorising, though, I shall keep to the prevalently empirical aspects of the problem, but not before noting one thing: for some time now, the people deciding on what viewers and readers should know and, above all, what they shouldn’t know, have been TV news directors and newspaper editors. As for wars, I realise, of course, that certain technical and organisational aspects have to be taken into consideration. Many debates about war coverage end up in a blind alley, getting bogged down in the futile argument over whether or not journalists should be allowed to see things from close quarters. The fact is that war is a terribly serious and dangerous business and there must necessarily be secrets. For obvious safety reasons, letting everybody know what you’re going to do and where you’re going to send your troops, aeroplanes and ships is simply not possible. Nor can you have people getting in the way in aeroplanes and helicopters, filming the action as it happens. If an action is serious, it’s no place for the press. And if it’s not serious then there’s no point in going. War is a dirty business. And it’s nothing less than naïve to think that they’re going to take you on a guided tour of the dirty things while they happen. If you’re capable of going alone, then go, at your own risk, but don’t expect a general to take you by the hand and lead you to the killing. And don’t expect a friendly pat on the back from them if you manage to broadcast something they didn’t want you to see or talk about. And so the issue doesn’t really exist: the answer lies in the facts.

In the Afghan war more journalists have been killed (seven) than American soldiers in combat (two). At least, this was how it was until the “victory” occurred. Then things started to get worse and the American bases started to get more numerous. The journalists tried to see what was going on and they were killed. They were doing their job bravely and brought honour to their profession. The soldiers too were doing their job, but modern technological warfare is a cowardly thing, because it lets you kill without the risk of being killed in return. This is why journalists get killed easier than professional soldiers in these dirty wars.

These technical questions, though, are secondary. The real question is this: do readers and viewers actually understand what’s happening as a result of what we do as journalists? Are they or are they not well informed on the dynamics and motives behind this war? Are they well informed enough to be able to say to the people who represent them whether a thing is right or wrong? Can they exercise their democratic rights in such a way as to actually affect the course of events? And so on. These are the yardsticks by which we decide whether or not the job is being done properly. And on the basis of what I’ve seen, heard and read my answer is most definitely no. The information provided by media system has been neither good (in terms of accuracy and thoroughness) nor complete. On the contrary, this war, like the previous one in Yugoslavia, has emphasised the media’s total vulnerability to the designs of the wielders of national and international political power. I revert to one irrefutable and extremely telling example. All the most important Italian newspapers, together with all the news programmes, both state-owned and private, ran the same story about Afghan women taking off their burqas and Afghan men shaving off their beards as soon as they were “liberated” by the Northern Alliance. They repeated it time after time, for days on end, blazoned out in front-page headlines and main news openers.

It would be enlightening to publish the list of highly reputable editors who dedicated themselves to the task of reporting, describing and glorifying these two extraordinary acts of liberation. It would be equally enlightening to list the size of the photos of the women with bared faces or the men at the barbers, the length and prominence of the headlines, etc. What is certain, absolutely irrefutable, is that for days on end these were the two most important news items. And it wasn’t just the Italian media. The whole of the Western press – American, English, French, Spanish, etc. – did more or less the same thing. We were in good company. Unfortunately, though, both the first and second items of news were outrageously and totally false, as can now be seen quite easily. It doesn’t matter when you will read these lines, dear reader, because I have no doubt whatsoever that the burqa will still be around when both this book and its author are long forgotten about. And the same goes for Afghan men’s beards. The burqa wasn’t invented by the Taliban. Unfortunately, it had already been there for a long time, long before King Zahir Shah, the Soviets and the Mujahedeen. The Taliban made the laws against Afghan women much harsher and more awful, but the burqa was already the rule in country and mountain areas (i.e. for 95% of the Afghan population) long before their time. And not even liberating the women will be enough to rid them of it: what’s needed is for the men too to be rid of their prejudices, their anti-women phobia, their history and their culture. Like it or not. The same goes for beards. Because in Afghanistan the beard is a very important distinguishing mark: so essential is it as a cultural sign that Afghans would be lost without it in their own country. It wasn’t the Taliban who introduced the beard. Again, it was them that introduced absurd, coercive laws, forcing all adult males to have long, untrimmed beards. But the beard is an Afghan constant that doesn’t depend on the Taliban. An Uzbek can distinguish a Tajik from a Pashtun or a Hazara by the kind of beard he has, and the same goes for all the others. Because the beard is a sign of social status, region, tribe, age and prestige. Because it’s by the beard that you can recognise and be recognised quickly, and this can often be a matter of life or death.

And so everybody – front line reporters, correspondents, editorial staff, editors and newspaper owners – has to be asked

the same question: didn't they know the news was false? Can so many talented writers and highly qualified intellectuals all really make the same mistake at the same time?

If we reject this highly unlikely hypothesis then we have to assume that they knew. And that they insisted on using this false news for reasons of – what can we call it? – political opportunism. It was needed. It was needed, for example, to make the great reading-viewing public think that the freeing of Kabul actually brought freedom. And that that freedom had been achieved because of the war and the bombing. The war, therefore was right because it brought freedom. Wasn't this how they justified it right from the start? And that's what we mean by manipulating information.

What more is there to be said? That this is the road to the end of untainted information, the amply demonstrated proof that the media, by blindly supporting whatever choices are made in politics, are not doing their duty, which is to be a critical voice in society. To make matters worse, the message they convey is poisonous and violent, born from a subculture of lies. It tells us that Afghan people can only be free if they behave like us, that what's good for us is good for them and that we go to their land as conquerors and dominators, not liberators. Which is the real reason why we – us Westerners – started all those wars they had to fight in over the last twenty-three years. But didn't we just bury Bolshevism and all its claims of getting the baby born in just three months? Do we want to start all over again, this time in the equally violent garb of neo-liberalism? Have we not yet understood that “the present, when violently rent from the past, bodes misfortune”? And that there is a need to help Afghanistan, like every other culture and civilisation different to ours, to “take account of its ancient history, the result of its primitive character”. And that this, from now on, should be “the thankless task, useful rather than dazzling, of the men called to govern this country”. 3

Layer upon layer of lies, in an endless, shameless tangle. If we go back in time, just a little way, we can recall that it wasn't the Soviets before the Taliban. The Soviets left in 1989, when Gorbachev decided to pull out. But many journalists writing on the war have created a whole lot of confusion about this: they didn't know the dates and they didn't even bother to look at the map. It should be remembered – and very few of them did – that from 1992 to 1996 Afghanistan was in the hands of the Mujahedeen, and it was they who massacred each other and various sectors of the population, setting one ethnic group against another, with tens of thousands of dead and two million refugees. The same Mujahedeen that had been hailed for years by the Western press – when they were fighting against the Soviet invader – as heroic resistance fighters and intrepid martyrs of liberty. When they got to power, though, they behaved like a bunch of cutthroats obsessed with money and power: irreducible fanatics, who almost immediately turned against the very West that had armed, trained and nurtured them. But the Western press said nothing of these things. After the departure of the Soviets a veil of silence fell over Afghanistan. Talking about it was bad taste. And now, after the bomb-spangled triumph of the United States, it would be even more embarrassing to tell readers and viewers that the liberators, carried to victory by the US Air Force, are the very same cutthroats who, in their madness and fury, paved the way for the Taliban to enter Kabul as peacekeepers, believe it or not, acclaimed by the exhausted crowds.

But this wasn't just a momentary lapse, the exception that confirms the rule of what is basically sound information. The images and photos used for months on end on news programmes and front pages were often false as well, as were the sound of the artillery and bazookas and the bursts of Kalashnikov fire. In the first month of the war, which we generally had to view from afar, I went to the front line, near the big Bagram air base in the Shomali Plain. And several times I came across TV crews and photographers asking Tajik Mujahedeen to fire a few shots, just to have something to film whilst waiting for the real fighting, the real bombing. On the other side of the front line there wasn't a single movement or gunshot. The Taliban were there, hiding, cowering like savages in a stone jungle, waiting for the avalanche of technological firepower that was going to bury them. The Mujahedeen fired away happily, with zeal. And the Western journalists went around taking their photographs, glad to be able to assuage their editors' gunpowder craving with a few war images. “Spontaneous” images, where the subjects were asked to pose, raise their fists and look fierce.

So, yet again, the crucial demand shouldn't be “let us see the war at close range”, but rather “leave us to do our job”, which means filming and documenting what is really happening and not what we would like to see or what our editors in New York or Rome would like to see. Because the truth is that nobody really cares if the images are false. And if there weren't those images the commentators' voices would be grafted on to other films from other wars, from other times and other places (as they are every evening, unbeknown to the viewers). How many times do they come up with sequences of nighttime or daytime military exercises, accompanied by warlike commentaries, using them as if they were scenes from a real war? Worrying about dressing up the thing exactly how they want it back home, regardless of the actual facts. And back home, if no real facts were forthcoming, they would just invent them themselves, so as not to fall behind their rivals. And writers are asked to “spice up” what they write, to “keep up the interest” in the war, otherwise the readers would get bored.

There were even journalists who invented nonexistent military advances, taking over the front page, at least for a day, sure of not getting a telling-off from their bosses even if it was all denied the next day. What matters is getting a good front-page spread, not the truth or accurate information or, worse still, boring details.

And so a new generation of special correspondents and reporters has been formed, sent off to the war without a single

idea or ethical standard in their head. But one of the few criteria they do get firmly rammed into them before they go is to get a scoop at all costs. “Instant journalism” –Ryszard Kapuściński calls it – that has “transformed journalism into a business and profoundly changed the notion of responsibility”.<sup>4</sup> These lines are dedicated especially to those newspaper editors who start off by announcing their fine intentions in stirring editorials, solemnly promising to put themselves entirely at their readers’ service and ending up at the service of nobody but themselves and their bosses in the newspaper world, to whom they must be loyal. And this is why – and I refer here to the Italian media in particular, the most superficial of all – they then go on to fill newspapers and news programmes with pulp news, “infotainment” and page after page of gossip about celebrities, so trivial that the only ones to read it are the celebrities themselves, and the newspaper editors of course. Because they’re all part of the same world, exchanging favours, setting each other little traps in order to bargain for more favours, spreading the news or plugging the leaks. These things don’t interest the readers. In fact, the readers skip it all and go looking for something else, which they often don’t find either. We don’t know what they’re looking for. They’re certainly not stupid. In fact, exactly the opposite is true: “The media denigrate the people so much that they think they’re stupider than the media”.<sup>5</sup>

When will it dawn on us that the world has disappeared from the news? That there is a huge imbalance between the idiotic things they fill it with (which undoubtedly have a determining affect on public intellectual and moral standards) and the serious things, the things that matter, the things that set the cultural tenor of an entire people. When will our TV news producers and newspaper editors (both public and private, because private airwaves are still public property even though they’ve been licensed out) start giving us decent news again so we can understand what’s going on?

The current media system does not give us a true picture of the world, either at home or abroad. They’ll send a correspondent all the way to Mexico to tell readers and viewers about a “Mexican in a sombrero” or tell a correspondent in Belgrade to give us all the details of a column of Kosovan refugees being harassed by Serbian militiamen. And if anybody refuses on professional or ethical grounds they’ll be called back home. These things have really happened and they’re not the exception, they’re the rule. Just like at a European conference in Lisbon a few years ago when all the Italian newspapers sent scores of reporters to cover not the things being talked about at the meeting but a quarrel between two leading members of the Italian delegation. In the evening, at dinner, my poor fellow reporters – young, frustrated and humiliated – (I had been sent from Moscow to report only on foreign policy aspects, fortunately) had a kind of collective outburst about the way they were always being called on to produce scandals, even to the point of causing them, if there wasn’t enough material for the soap opera of Italian politics, and to spy on every move made by politicians to satisfy the demand for sensational headlines about squabbles between cronies that didn’t even happen.

We could adapt a freely interpreted version of Karl Kraus’<sup>6</sup> dialogue for the occasion:

- Optimist: one thing, though: we mustn’t generalise.
- Criticiser: you mean I mustn’t take every journalist as a villain? I’m not getting at any one person in particular, but the institution as a whole, because rather than seeing it as a point in its favour that it doesn’t corrupt an honest person, I see it as a point against it that it transforms a weak-willed person into a villain.

Fellow journalists reading these lines will be able to add numerous examples of their own of this malpractice, all justified by the need to sell more papers or based on the theory that the number of viewers and readers drops drastically when you start talking about foreign affairs. If this was true, we would see a rise in newspaper sales linked to a fall in information content. But it isn’t true, and as for the foreign affairs audience, this is just a pretext, because lots of people really want news about the rest of the world (quality news, not just gossip about princes and princesses). The Auditel affair is a very serious matter and should be put under very strict public scrutiny. But none of those bodies whose job it is to protect minors and families against aggressive advertising and defend public morality (telecommunications authorities, Parliament, consumers’ associations, trade unions, religious and lay organisations, etc.) seem to be concerned about it. They’re all blind and deaf to the biggest problem of our times: the democratic control of information and communication.

Clearly, information is also a commodity. But reducing it to nothing more than this means being partly responsible for the erosion of a country’s social fabric and traditions. Because it can’t have escaped the attention of the public opinion-formers (never before has this expression been so apt) that a reduction in the level of information in a society is directly equivalent to a reduction in its level of democracy. We are under a deadly synergy spell and we don’t know it. A spell cast by a handful of global communications gurus who “coordinate” (euphemism) everything they produce in order to sell more effectively, as explained excellently by Naomi Klein<sup>7</sup>. All products – TV, film, information, magazines, newspapers, megastores, multi-screen cinemas, T-shirts, sunglasses, cigarette lighters, soap operas, sales outlets, videoclips, advertising, etc. – have to back each other up. Anything non-synergic is out, because it neither contributes to nor generates brand loyalty. And this also applies to real news.

But if we look at each cultural product by itself – and here lies the trick, the illusionist’s spell we’re under – it gives an impression of freedom, intelligence and pluralism. And often, in individual terms, it isn’t just an impression: it’s true. But it’s the context that determines the final effect, not the individual cultural item or piece of information. And this is the line of argument that’s usually used against the critique I’m putting forward here: things aren’t as bad as all that, they say, or so straightforward<sup>8</sup>. The information process may be flawed, but there is also a great pluralism, so you can choose and get balanced information.

All the major organs of information agreed that the war against Afghanistan was just and inevitable. Then, within this common, absolutely unanimous line, they allowed a certain degree of pluralism and certain differences of opinion. This, of course, was to be expected. Fortunately, we haven't quite reached the Orwell stage yet. What did this pluralism amount to? The odd article here and there, a few outsider comments, more or less marginal, a few contributions to the debate, sometimes quite authoritative, at variance with what is commonly accepted as being politically correct. This is what happened in the Kosovo war and then again, in more or less the same way, in the Afghan war. But the background noise and background music weren't affected in the slightest way. What dictates the background music is the choice of main TV news items and newspaper headlines, the general tone and setting of the reports, the leading articles and the general flow of information. The background music has never ceased, not for a single moment. And nobody with a shred of intellectual honesty in them can deny that it's the background music that determines the way the vast majority of the public sees things. And if this were not so, why else would the powerful want to keep information and communication systems under such tight control? It is they, with their implacable controlling action, who demonstrate that the above assumption is true, rather than any "sensible experience" in the field.

This deafening, all-pervasive background music cuts out all pluralism at its very roots. That's how the trick works. And it raises a central question about the responsibility of journalists as a profession. The critical function of a journalist is to make it possible for millions of viewers and readers to form their own judgement. Good information is hard to come by, certainly, but what is lacking above all is the will to subject the powers-that-be to constant, probing criticism, no matter what. This, after all, is the ABC of journalism. But it seems as though many newspapers and journalists have forgotten it. And now, as democracy is getting more and more restricted, both in Italy and elsewhere, you can see the legions of servants all queuing up to bow and scrape to their masters. But good servants don't just materialise: they need to be trained. And so, over the last ten years, these new conscripts to journalism have been taught how to be servile by their democratic predecessors. This brings to mind the abject situation in Russia after the fall of communism, when the Russian "democrats", with the destiny of democracy and freedom of information in their hands, immediately handed it all over to the oligarchies.

Getting news on a war is difficult. The information is in the hands of those actually fighting the war. How can we be sure this information isn't tampered with?

In the Kosovo war, it was Mr. Jamie Shea who called the tune on what the whole world should know. Everything depended on his briefings, even the weather. But anyone wanting to, anyone with the slightest critical instinct, could have asked him embarrassing questions that he probably wouldn't have been able to answer. And yet those questions were asked only very rarely. Why? Because the media bosses had decided, beforehand, that that war was going to go well, that it was "humanitarian". Awkward questions wouldn't have been politically correct and were therefore avoided. And if they were asked they were neither published nor broadcast. There were a few praiseworthy exceptions. But the background music was always the same.

Now let's move on three years, to the Afghan war. In his briefings, Defence Secretary Rumsfeld systematically dismissed all figures on civilian deaths and, especially, on Taliban military deaths, as "propaganda". Nobody ever asked Rumsfeld, though, to give his own estimate of the numbers of civilian and military dead. Nobody ever said: "do you really mean to say you haven't even made an estimate? Do you really mean to say that, with all your control systems, aerial surveillance and agents behind enemy lines, you can't even come up with a figure?" There is no official American figure and there never has been. Few noted this, and very few tried to remedy it by investigating: it would have been politically incorrect.

The initial bombardment, they said, was to disable the enemy Taliban radar and silence its anti-aircraft defences. But the author of this book, in February 2001, just eight months before the war began, landed at Kabul airport in a UNO aeroplane. The biggest airport in Afghanistan, the only one with an international runway, had a radar that worked sporadically and badly. Radio contact between aeroplanes and airport was so precarious that landing was possible only because of the excellent atmospheric conditions. So, we can well imagine what state the defences were in at the other airports. Afterwards, when the bombing had started, it became evident that the Taliban air defences were few, old and could only fire up to two or three thousand metres. But I remember the descriptions of the awesome military power of the Taliban, quoting directly from the Department of State's bulletins, absolutely unquestioningly, as if they were pure gold. Then it came out that the Pentagon had set up the Office for Strategic Influence (OSI), or rather the "Office for Information and Disinformation". Some people were shocked and indignant about this. In their blissful innocence, they thought disinformation was a thing of the KGB only, and here it was, the daily bread and butter of the OSI. They told us a pack of lies and us journalists simply passed it on directly to the public.

According to some opinion polls Americans don't trust their own media. Immediately after the 11th of September, when President Bush's public credibility was at the astronomical level of 87%, the media's credibility rating was only 43%. The exact implications of these two figures aren't quite clear to me, but I would like to see the results of a poll like this applied to Italy.

Let's go back again to the Kosovo war. Starting with the breakdown in the Rambouillet negotiations after the Racjak massacre. Forty-five ethnic Albanians dead. Who was responsible for it? Serbia, without a doubt, said Western sources. Mutilated, with bullet holes in their foreheads. An ultimatum was sent to Milesovic, alias Satan or Hitler, depending on your point of view. Milesovic didn't comply. NATO began its attack on Yugoslavia. This was the sequence of events that was accepted lock, stock and barrel by the world media system. Then we were told, in a statement by the then Italian Foreign Minister, that the ultimatum had been formulated in such a way as to be unacceptable to the Serbs, in order to make them appear responsible for starting the war. 9 But there were already suspicions of skulduggery before this, because the massacre was discovered after the zone had fallen into the hands of the KLA. What proof was there that it was the work of the Serbs? What proof was there that the mass grave hadn't been dug there and then, with corpses collected from different battlegrounds where there had been fighting the previous days? Perhaps with a few token pistol shots in the foreheads of those poor, dead people? A few hours after the discovery, with truly spectacular timing, the then Public Prosecutor of the international war crimes court of The Hague, Ann Harbor, a Canadian, was already on the Yugoslav border denouncing the crime. With her was Christiane Amanpour, the most famous reporter in the world, the heroine of all wars, the voice of truth, spokesperson for the sixth member of the UN Security Council, the CNN. How could anyone doubt it?

There were, of course, very good reasons to doubt it, but nobody from the more influential media said anything. Politically unacceptable. And yet it would have been enough to recall the famous Tonkin Gulf incident, when – according to the version of the United States, immediately accepted by the whole of the West – North Vietnamese gunboats attacked American ships. This is what started the Vietnam War. But then, a few years later in 1971, with the publication of the Pentagon papers, it emerged that the incident never actually occurred. Another example is the so-called surgical bombing, with experts on every talk show on every channel for months on end holding forth about the hairsbreadth precision of these technological marvels, and reeling out an endless string of other startling details, banalities, idiocies, and geographical howlers (a typical example being the reports on the existence of the Pamir Valley [sic], where Osama bin Laden was supposed to be hiding). Inexorable bringers of justice justifying savage acts of violence through smiling lips. At least in Kosovo it was against the background of endless columns of refugees, shown day after day, month after month, on all channels. It was more difficult in Afghanistan, though, also because the humanitarian aspect wasn't to be emphasised. When the bombings were happening you could see – and it was sometimes even said, not without a certain note of admiration – that the B-52s weren't particularly subtle and that each one of their bombs ploughed a furrow ten kilometres long and a thousand metres wide when it was dropped. The experts on Italian TV left this detail out. And the journalists, generally speaking, were too young to remember the Hanoi and Haiphong bombings. Perhaps it would be useful for newspapers to prepare their correspondents for the next war, using the book from which the following quote was taken as a text book: "One would have thought that the extensive experience in this area would have finally made the people ordering and carrying out aerial massacres understand that, when you aim for a munitions dump, you often hit a bedroom and, when you aim for a munitions factory you hit a girls' school. This repeated experience should have taught them that this is the result of their attacks, which they then commemorate by proudly claiming to have hit a target with their bombs". 10

These words are still valid, despite being written a long time ago. And so, with these same techniques and this same approach, just like in Kosovo, the emotions of immense worldwide audiences were being fed artificially and bombarded incessantly with news that was false, and even if it was sometimes true, it wasn't the whole truth: real news but with no historical context, real images but falsified by showing only a part of the picture. Cleverly contrived blends, specially woven together to comply with TV audience market laws. Too many journalists (apart from a few laudable exceptions) too ready to dance to their paymasters' tunes, all desperately searching for the most clamorous effects, the most intense colours and the hardest-hitting images, all striving to play on the passions and reactions of their bewildered viewers by upping the pressure and turning the slightest whimper into a mighty roar.

But wait. Another counter-argument: journalists are highly individualist. You can't lump them all together. Each one is different. And so on. I know that, though. I know very well that "communication producers are not a compact, unified unit working harmoniously towards the same goal". I know very well that each newspaper, radio station and TV company has its own internal dialectic, where human beings with different cultural, political and ideological orientations interact. I know too that the same message can have different effects in different contexts. And it's certainly true that "there are no such things as messages that hit the lobotomised masses like magic bullets, with atomised, isolated people absorbing them and acting on them [...] to the letter, in perfect accordance with the blueprints of communications expert." And I have no doubt that "messages travel in non-neutral environments, often competing noisily with other messages, and are received in particular social, cultural and psychological contexts where they are processed, interpreted and adapted". 11 All this, although true, is "ever less so". It was valid at the dawn of journalism, when culture had not yet become a commodity. The difficulty in understanding the workings of the Western world's media system stems from the fact that it appears to be a myriad of independent systems that distribute information. Any current analysis must take into account the structural changes it has undergone in the last twenty years. The media have become a planetary question, a constituent part of globalisation. An enormous increase in volume, together with amazingly rapid technological developments have produced forms of interaction between different types of media and

an expansion of their sphere of activity. All these changes have resulted in an extremely complex network of influences on the world's population.

None of this existed twenty years ago. We are in the middle of a process of colossal mergers that are putting all communication systems – software-hardware, entertainment, advertising, information, culture, etc. – in the hands of a tiny group of global operators that control over eighty percent of the information currently flowing around our planet.

I think the whole question needs looking at in a new light, something that nobody has yet done. But one thing is certain: this entirely new situation is bound to affect our future, the future of democracy, the future of peace and war and our future survival in a radical way.

In the light of these fairly obvious remarks, comments like the ones made by Gad Lerner are amazing, if not ridiculous, when he notes astutely that “man is made up of spirit, flesh and a thousand other variables” and concludes that “it is wrong to consider journalistic information as a set of predictable sequences”.<sup>12</sup> That may be so, but certain forces, people and organisations are trying to make it as predictable as possible. And they're succeeding. The world is a really contradictory place, certainly, but sooner or later something always comes to the surface. In the case of information and misinformation, unfortunately, it's always much later, when the result is already a foregone conclusion. For example, there's the “memo” circulated by CNN chairman Walter Isaacson to all the network's foreign correspondents before sending them into action. “The more we receive good reportage of Afghanistan under the Taliban, the more we have to redouble our efforts not to run news that puts them in a favourable light, or sees things from their perspective. We've got to talk about the Taliban using human shields or the Taliban protecting terrorists responsible for the death of five thousand innocent people.” “You've got to be sure that the people understand it, as they see civilians suffering down there, in the context of a terrorist attack that caused enormous suffering in the United States.”

It's clear that the “good reportage” referred to is that of the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network, whose correspondents' office was later bombed by American aircraft “by mistake”. But Walter Isaacson, as explicit as he was, was surpassed by a second classified memo signed by Rick Davis, an operational manager in charge of CNN's internal standards. Davis takes things even further by telling reporters what kind of language they have to use in their live reports whenever they talk about civilian victims or bombing with “collateral effects”. Davis is very specific and proposes three variants, three ways of obtaining the desired result, which is to obscure the fact and replace it with a comment. First variant: “We've got to keep it firmly in mind, after seeing reports of areas under Taliban control, that those military actions [i.e. bombing causing collateral damage] are the response to a terrorist attack that killed five thousand innocent people in the United States.” Second variant: “We've got to keep it firmly in mind, after seeing that kind of report, that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan continues to harbour terrorists who praised the 11th of September attacks, which caused five thousand innocent victims in the United States.” Third variant: “The Pentagon has stressed repeatedly that it is trying to minimise the civilian victims in Afghanistan, even though the Taliban regime in Afghanistan continues to harbour terrorists who praised the 11th of September attacks, which caused thousands of innocent victims in the United States.” The memo then got to the Washington Post, which published it. Davis ended fussily: “Even though it's starting to sound like a chorus, it's important to underline this point each time”.<sup>13</sup> The censorship rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were kids' stuff, compared to this.

Lucia Annunziata simply shrugged this off in a debate we both took part in, saying that “there's always been propaganda. It's a typical part of any war”. Right. But who says the propaganda we're subject to is any better than theirs? And if it is, how can they say it was right to bomb the state television centre in Belgrade, killing sixteen journalists? The justification was the same: summary execution. And – as Raniero la Valle reminded us in that same debate – it was also a specific, demonstrable crime, a violation of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention, 8th of June 1977, Article 79.<sup>14</sup> It would never enter anybody's head here in the West to bomb the CNN. And how much credibility can we give to the CNN's Christiane Amanpour, knowing that her husband is James Rubin, Department of State spokesman, linkman with the Kosovo Liberation Army? Amanpour was one of the bellicose voices in the Kosovo war.

It's true that war propaganda always works. But a journalist has to ask his or herself whether it's right to go along with it – and become accomplice to it – or reject it. But this is really a futile and abstract argument. What you really have to decide is not which side you're on, either the “fatherland” or the enemy, but whether you want your job turned into a tool for manipulating people. For example, it's very important to know whether the American bombing of the Al-Amariya air raid shelter on the outskirts of Baghdad in 1991, causing the death of hundreds of civilians, mostly women and children, has to be hushed up or exposed. Here, it wasn't just the silence of the Western media that was to blame. Everybody immediately accepted the Pentagon's theory that it wasn't an air raid shelter but an Iraqi army command post, deliberately filled with civilians used as human shields to bring shame to Washington for the massacre. Subsequent independent investigations proved, though, that it wasn't and couldn't have been an army command post. It was a bombing error. But how many readers and viewers in America, Europe and the whole world know about that massacre? And how can something be called journalism if it forgets the laws of wartime propaganda each time and credulously and naively swallows everything that the war commanders serve up lavishly as the truth?



It even happened in “La Repubblica”, in an unsigned editorial; the paper’s official line. It was commenting on Osama bin Laden’s “confession” video. “Unlike the horrors of the past, here we can actually see the evil as it is planned and perpetrated. It is right for citizens to see and know this document.” But in actual fact the “citizens” had never seen it, just like they never saw the ones to follow. It was a political decision not to broadcast those words and images: the video was censored because it may have contained coded messages. Even if we assume the reasons were good, how can this bring us to such peremptory conclusions, without actually seeing it, without taking the propaganda situation into account? In fact, the only things the poor “citizens” saw were the words, out of context and without knowing much else about it. And instead of explaining the background and the underlying mechanisms (or at least mentioning the fact that the information might be distorted), they announced it pompously on the front page as if it were absolute truth. “If what we have seen is true, then Western democracies have not been mistaken in identifying bin Laden as the aggressor.” This is the cautionary note, the only one in the whole article, put in a way that no one notices it. And, immediately after it the *excusatio non petita*: there now, you can see, we weren’t wrong to support the bombing. We haven’t deceived ourselves. It was right. Because, the article goes on, “the war started before the manoeuvres in the Tora Bora Mountains and will still be going on when they end. 15

This is exactly what war propaganda is. And they make no mystery of it. Everybody says more or less the same thing, that the hardest part of a war is “winning over public opinion”. So the rule is never to ask for too many explanations, never try to make rational distinctions and never criticise the propaganda or even the excesses. If you do you’ll be classed as a fifth columnist, a friend of the enemy, an enemy of civilisation and an enemy of the West. This will be the logic of the new wars in the Empire’s Superwar, a logic no less violent and destructive than that of the bombing. The world media system has become a fleet of B-52s, armed only with paper, images and bytes, but doing more actual damage than real bombers. Unfortunately – and we have to accept this as a premise to organising any kind of return to normality – none (or very few) of the newspaper, television, radio or magazine editors have been doing their jobs properly, in terms of running a cultural activity. If they had been, ethical categories, such as respect for the truth, responsibility to the public and so on, would have come into play. But no, they work for profit (either for themselves or for those who pay them) and social control (by distorting the facts). Taken in this context, the obscenities they produce in both war and peace are mostly deliberately planned effects and, to a lesser extent, process rejects. But we weren’t even taken into consideration.

## 9. Superwar

“Our nation is at war, our economy is in recession and the civilised world faces unprecedented dangers.”<sup>1</sup> These are the words of George W. Bush. They could be a summary of the situation at the end of January 2002, written on the command deck. In this book I have always been very careful about what comes or leaks from the command deck. Clearly, whatever they say up there needs to be interpreted, because they are often blinded by ideology and their analyses aren’t always all that astute. But the threats have to be taken seriously. And in those few lines there is a great deal of truth and anguish.

“I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer.” Bush went on to the thunderous, bipartisan applause of Congress, as his poll ratings rocketed and an immense wave of consensus surged up all over the country. Never has a president of the United States reached such a level of popularity after just one year in office. What they now know is that tens of thousands of fighters, originally trained and armed by the United States itself in the ten years from 1979 to 1989 “are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning”. They think and say that this terrorist army started to be formed in 1996, although this is evidently untrue and just misleading. The manhunt has begun and will go on to become one of the key characteristics of the new century. They say the action will take place everywhere and that all necessary means will be used, without constraints, rules or laws, to rid the world of all those not already killed in the asymmetrical wars or liquidated in CIA and FBI undercover operations, both inside and outside the United States of America.

The way the Afghan campaign has been conducted fits in perfectly with the long-term goals proposed by the command deck since the 11th of September. “New organising principles and priorities for international relations for years or decades to come” have been defined. 2 Crises of this nature can “reshape world politics if the big opportunities are seized”. 3 Thus it becomes clear why prisoners in Afghan prisons are bombed, because right from the start it was decided to exterminate as many of them as possible. It is the large-scale application of the death penalty, based on the principle that criminals are irredeemable and the punishment must be total if it is to be a deterrent. The logic of the United States legal ethos has been extended to Afghan soil. But there is also a pragmatic goal, pursued with resolute determination by Rumsfeld, which leaves nothing to chance and has got nothing to do with irrational acts of rage: the more we kill the less we’ve got to keep in prison or track down all over the world.

Also to be considered are the “new priorities in international relations”. Bush uses the word “security” in his speech nineteen times, but never mentions Europe once. We don’t matter. We won’t be one of the leading actors and we won’t

even be given a speaking part. We will simply be given orders, when and if deemed necessary by the command deck. Meanwhile, however, a new phrase has been coined, soon to become the mantra of our times and the logo of our era: the Axis of Evil. Three priorities have been singled out amongst the long list of next objectives: Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Palestine isn't even mentioned, quite simply because the task of getting rid of that problem has been delegated to Israel.

The specific model tested out in Afghanistan – that of getting “auxiliary forces”, i.e. resident armies (Askaris that can be convinced, bribed or threatened into action) to do the fighting – is being applied elsewhere. It was introduced in the Yemen when the Afghan war was still going on. The Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh was called to Washington at the end of November. They told him he had two choices: either put himself and his country in line for a future attack or proceed with eliminating the terrorist dens on his territory. Ali Abdullah Saleh went into action and had his army attack the Al Jala tribe. Just a little war, with just three villages destroyed, just a few score dead and no need to worry about whether they were civilians, soldiers or terrorists. The main thing is that they only had to use a small number of CIA agents, probably working from a safe distance, with the operation being monitored by satellite and followed on the screens at general headquarters in Florida. The second operation in the asymmetrical war, in the Philippines, was talked about earlier on. 4

In each of these cases, and the ones to follow, it has to be made clear that the Americans don't intend to be held back in any way “in the name of superficial multilateralism or saving the skin of another Pakistani dictator or even of a Saudi Royal Family”. 5 So you can understand why they're getting a bit uneasy in Riyadh. And it's also very clear that Washington is prepared to take big, quite unprecedented risks. As we saw in Pakistan. The victory in the Afghan war sparked off a serious regional crisis, putting India and Pakistan at loggerheads. Nobody can say yet how it's going to finish, but the crisis is on and could even involve a risk of nuclear war. A calculated risk? This too is difficult to know, but the prospect of forty million dead on each side, provided they're Asians, won't be too much of a cause for concern on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Nor will it be on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, our side, where columnists and political commentator seem to be blissfully unaware of the whole thing, and all we see in the papers and on TV are a few bleak, mountainous images of Himalayan valleys, peopled by thin Indian and Pakistani soldiers, facing each other in modern camouflaged combat suits made in Singapore. There's no point in being equivocal or sentimental about it: “The US campaign was not conceived as a humanitarian mission to ease Afghan suffering, in the manner of Kosovo or East Timor [...] ...the US national interests at stake must remain clear and dominant.” All the politics and diplomatic zigzagging in the world “cannot be allowed to circumscribe the US military hunt for bin Laden terrorists, whether on Afghan soil, next door in the tribal lands of Pakistan or elsewhere”.6

A veritable chorus. All but unanimous in the American press, in the editorials and analysis columns. And as Afghanistan creeps back to the inside pages of the Italian newspapers (if mentioned at all), with small, anonymous headlines and stories such as whether Hamid Karzai will be modelling in next season's fashion shows, the Empire, our great protector and patron, is busy planning the next stages. Because “Afghanistan is just the first battle in a long war”. 7 This is somebody very close to the command deck speaking, and we should take careful note of what he says. He is giving an authentic, tough, no-frills interpretation of Bush's speech. What he's telling us, very directly, is that Afghanistan was basically “a confrontation with the weakest, remotest centres of terrorism”. And he informs us that we won't have to wait long before seeing another stage of the war, in grand style, with real bombers and real missiles, not just some rag-tag army flushing out a few Al Qaeda hideouts. Because the attack “has to start when the memory (of the previous one) is still fresh in everybody's mind and the American forces are still deployed”.

So now they're telling us that Afghanistan is one of “the weakest” centres of terrorism. If this is so, why did they start from there? And, if it was so weak, why all those superlatives in the Western press about the greatness of the victory? But the nitty-gritty of Henry Kissinger and the Washington administrations' line of reasoning is even tougher. It's not about terrorism. The Axis of Evil is significant in another way and it has to be defeated for another set of reasons, quite different to so-called international terrorism. Because “the point isn't whether or not Baghdad was involved in the terrorist attack on the United States. The confrontation is purely geopolitical. Iraq is implacably hostile to the USA and some neighbouring countries.” It's a waste of time trying to find proof of Saddam Hussein's involvement in the 11th of September attacks. If they find something, all the better. The media system is already on the alert and will be very keen on gathering, amplifying and making “evident” and “irrefutable” any “proof” that happens to leak out anonymously from the Pentagon, CIA or Department of State. But, in any event, demolishing Iraq is the Empire's prime objective, because Iraq constitutes an obstacle to its dominion. “If its armed forces remain intact – Kissinger continues and explains – they could be used one day for terrorist purposes or regional-international risings.”

Exactly the same argument applies to Iran. They are both Islamic countries. Either of them could become an important point of reference, even if not an actual world-scale adversary, in any moves to block the supply of energy resources. North Korea is seen differently, not so much in geopolitical terms but more related to the need to dominate, to establish absolute supremacy in every corner of the globe.

The Axis of Evil is clearly a colossal diversion. It has to be destroyed, of course, for reasons of security and the defence

of the Empire's homeland: the 11th of September proved that the Empire, having set off along its chosen road to the Superwar, is no longer invulnerable.

But the real point is about a new world order, with an agenda dictated entirely, absolutely by the Empire. The real objectives of this war are much more vast and far-reaching. There are three of them: China, Europe and Russia. They are preparing the ground for the confrontation with these real potential adversaries, so that all three can be subjugated, re-dimensioned or weakened to the point of being unable to fight back.

We've already talked about China. At the present moment it is the only country in the world apart from the United States that can decide independently on matters that affect the whole globe. For this reason, China is extraordinarily dangerous from the strategic point of view and must be kept at a strict distance in terms of military potential. This danger is further increased by the fact that it is next door to Russia and has a capital potential that could become an alternative pole of attraction for Russia if ever relations between Moscow and Washington were to deteriorate unexpectedly. It can be seen that the current United States administration is taking a harder line against Peking, reversing Clinton's previous trend towards the establishment of a partnership. This would seem to be a rejection of the Brzezinski approach, in which Washington was to use Peking as the other side of the vice (the first being Europe) against Russia, in order to destroy what remained of the former Soviet empire. But, to tell the truth, this type of American strategy would require a farsightedness and sense of timing that is beyond the capabilities the current leaders in Washington. Besides, we mustn't forget that the time available for this strategy has been cut short drastically by the recession, which could hit the whole of the Western world and make it much less sure of its supremacy than it is now. China, on the other hand, despite all forecasts of its sinking into a sea of uncontrollable internal contradictions in the near future, continues to grow without showing signs of excessive weakness. And so China is well on the road to becoming the Empire's strategic adversary. Yet another reason for putting the maximum number of obstacles and difficulties in its path. The entry of Peking into the WTO is just the delayed effect of an outmoded United States policy line.

Europe is the other still potentially dangerous partner, although much has been already been done to keep it on the leash and subordinate it to US interests. Europe was a decisive factor during the Cold War. Now it isn't. In the whole of the stage after the Second World War it had sense – a very precise and important sense – to talk about “the West”. Over the last ten years, though, the term has lost much of its meaning. The West's swansong was the war in Yugoslavia, waged under the banner of a revamped NATO with a new set of tasks, specially assigned for an intermediate stage. This intermediate stage fizzled out with the 11th of September and was superseded by the birth of the Empire and the United States' conviction that it could go it alone. Here too, though, a distinct non-linear wavering could be seen, giving the impression of a struggle between different lines within the inner power circles of the United States, which in any event would have had to take certain historical ties and customs into account: it won't be easy getting Europe to adapt to its newly allocated role of complete subordination.

Europe, however, is still dangerous for a number of reasons, all strategically significant. The first of these is economic. Notwithstanding the neo-liberal offensive that has been going on for the last ten years, conducted by the Federal Reserve and United States' financial circles, with the backing of successive Washington administrations and the tools of the International Monetary Fund, under the aegis of the “Washington Consensus”, Europe has retained at least a part of its identity, and has not swallowed the American prescription in its entirety. In the telling words of William Pfaff, “economic Europe, trading Europe, single-market Europe, single-currency Europe, industrially cooperating Europe, protectionist and subsidising Europe, cultural exception Europe, social protections Europe, health-care Europe, antitrust Europe, and anti-‘dumping’ Europe and, to a certain measure, anti-globalisation and anti-American Europe, are doing very nicely”.<sup>8</sup> These things are very visible and highly disapproved of on the other side of the Ocean. Over time, wicked thoughts may arise, as the appetites and susceptibilities on both sides are very high. And there continue to be great differences in culture and traditions, which further complicates matters.

It's not just the American Edward Luttwak who thinks that “allowing turbocapitalism to advance unhindered means disintegrating societies into a tiny elite of winners, a great mass of losers at different levels of affluence and poverty and a category of rebels committing crimes”.<sup>9</sup> And concludes that “the American experience stands out on the horizon as an example and, at the same time, as a sinister warning”<sup>10</sup> This sinister warning is visible from this side of the Ocean too. And so the problem to be faced and resolved by the Empire is, first of all, to keep Europe disarmed, using all necessary means to stop it nurturing any ambitions whatsoever of future military power. This also means keeping it strictly to heel in terms of political ambitions. Wars are useful for this too. And the Superwar will be useful for this. Every battle in the Superwar will be used to subdue, break down and humiliate Europe. With the Afghan war this couldn't have been more obvious. And it wasn't just because of the haste and presumptuousness of cowboy Rumsfeld. It is and will be a constant factor.

The question of Russia is more difficult, as it is not yet clear which strategy to adopt. Up till now it's been middle-of-the-road, with an eye to both sides. If China doesn't adapt to the role assigned it by Brzezinski (i.e. one side of the vice that squeezes Russia) the line will be to weaken, subdue and neutralise Russia with other means: either by fuelling

separatism and internal and external subversion and forcing back into a feverish, desperate arms race that it neither wants nor can afford, or by corrupting it, buying it off. The latter option has already been tried to a certain extent with Yelstin, but wouldn't be so easy with Putin. Here, time is on the Empire's side. Russia is slowly losing all of its Far East and most of Siberia to China, which is quite simply using its immense demographic power to occupy the areas vacated by the retreating Russians, completely unopposed. In ten years' time, unless something happens to change this trend (which at the moment appears very unlikely), it could lead to a dispute between China and Russia, something which neither side wants. In any event, what is strategically essential to the Empire is that no mutually favourable exchange arises between Europe and Russia. Because Europe has got something Russia hasn't: capital. And because Russia has got something that Europe hasn't: strategic nuclear missiles. And because they're both Europe. The same thing for Russia and China: the former has got something the latter hasn't: strategic missiles and technology, and the latter has capital. And they're both Asia.

And so the Superwar can be seen for what it really is: the decisive antidote against any potential adversaries uniting to oppose the Empire. Neither now nor in the long term. Before it might not even have been necessary, when American globalisation was so triumphant. Now. Though, it's essential, because globalisation is on the wane. The United Nations, before it disappears, will be given the role of ratifying the Empire's decisions. Europe will be given the role of appreciative audience and, when appropriate, vassal.

The United States already has an extremely faithful ally in Europe. Tony Blair's Great Britain does more than everything possible to give the impression that it gets taken into consideration in the Empire's decision making – all in vain. Now Bush has got another ally. Silvio Berlusconi's Italy. Berlusconi realised immediately that the Europe described earlier was much too restrictive for him. That kind of Europe is no place for realising the plans he has in mind, i.e. transforming Italy into a plebiscitary presidential republic, with the judiciary in the hands of the executive and the president elected directly by a mass of adoring electors, already metabolized (and lobotomised) by a round-the-clock version of Big Brother. The United States was a much better partner and friend to have. There too, the president is emperor, and can appoint his proconsuls. He is also a distant emperor and this too is much better than having impotent, interfering republics looking on suspiciously from nearby, wanting to poke their noses into your affairs. With two "European" countries like Italy and Great Britain going against the current, Europe, already a lame duck, certainly won't be able to fly very far. Russia has been assigned the task of demonstrating its good intentions to the UN Security Council and completely renouncing its world role, together any claim it may have to take part in the lucrative arms and sophisticated technology trade with its former partners. No tasks are to be assigned to China because we know already that it won't accept them. The fact that it has become 60% capitalist has not made it succumb to the designs of the Empire. Japan, on the other hand, died an early death in international politics.

The Superwar, then, isn't really a clash of civilisations or a war between East and West or a fight to the bitter end between Christianity and Islam. Nor is it a battle between Good and Evil. It isn't any of the things it's been made out to be, to motivate the masses. The Emperor, speaking from his Charleston "Citadel" at the beginning of December in the first year of the Superwar, announced that the world is now "divided by a moral and ideological line". On one side of it there is us, but especially America, the beacon of world civilisation. And on the other there are "bands of murderers, supported by outlaw states".<sup>11</sup> It's the "with us or against us" syndrome, which doesn't leave much room for manoeuvre, because, really, who would ever define themselves as being on the side of a bunch of murderers, fighting against civilisation? Even a hawk like Hoagland acknowledges this, in his typical vicious way, when talking about that "line that connects energy-wasting habits and the gas-guzzlers that now clog US highways to the fifteen young Saudi Arabians who helped massacre some four thousand Americans." A line that is "both tenuous and clear", because "there may have been more immediate triggering events on the terrorists' minds as they plotted to inflict maximum pain on a nation that had opened its doors to them; there are no pure one-to-one causes and effects in life. But it is abundantly clear that the need for imported energy has kept the United States deeply entangled with decadent regimes...".<sup>12</sup>

As sometimes happens when the power of reason wakes from its slumber, this line of argument, expressed by a conservative Republican who would be classed as extreme right-wing in Italy, coincides exactly with that of a liberal thinker who is seen in Europe as being on the left: "There can be no possible justification for crimes like the 11th September, but we can see the United States as an innocent victim only if we take the easy road and completely ignore the previous actions of it and its allies"<sup>13</sup>

We are at the start of an absolutely unprecedented struggle – probably the biggest head-on clash that humanity has ever seen – between the new elite of the newly born global super society and the rest of the world. It is, in a very broad sense, a social struggle. But it isn't social in the classical sense of the word; it isn't a "class" struggle between rich capitalists and poor proletariat, or whatever term you care to use to describe the modern-day proletariat age. This scheme is too dated to be a useful interpretative tool. And nor is it a "rich-against-poor" social struggle. It's something more important than this, and different: a class struggle doesn't lead to the end of one of the contestants. In this sense it's comparable to atomic war, which – as used to be argued to encourage coexistence between different social systems – was unacceptable because it ruled out the victory of either contestant and implied mutual destruction. It's more like a struggle for survival. It's as if the two elastic bands mentioned earlier have been stretched way beyond all limits. As regards the first band, the one on the gap between rich and poor, the rich are getting constantly richer in smaller

numbers and the poor are getting more and more numerous and increasingly angry because they can now see the wealth of the rich and compare their own state, characterised by poverty and illness, to that of the magnificent few. This also puts an end to that sterile debate about whether globalisation distributes wealth to the poor as well. A false claim, also because wealth and poverty are never absolute factors. You can be relatively poor in terms of income but see this relative poverty as unfair and total because it doesn't correspond to your levels of culture, understanding, qualifications and rights.

This first elastic band, which we could call "social", characterises the traditional struggles of the 20th century. But the other one, the one stretching between humanity and nature, is also very near to breaking point. This one we can call "unsustainable growth". The sustainability limits of capitalist industrial development, in its American spasmodic globalisation version, are literally just a few inches above our heads. In this context, winning has no meaning. Unless you're imagining a terrifying blank sheet and thinking of ridding the planet of a huge slice of the swarms of people living on it. The Superwar – whether or not they're aware of this on the command deck – is a war of extermination of millions, indeed billions, of people. Science fiction? If so, why write things like "the nations of the world have got to make a 'hard choice': either join us in our crusade or 'face the certain prospect of death and destruction'"?

I wouldn't want to "put off the thing that some day or other we'll have to ask ourselves, if we're lucky enough to have the time". 15

I would like to express another thought, of a political as well as personal nature. I didn't write this book to spread hope. I'll leave that kind of thing to dishonest politicians and unscrupulous salesmen. I am convinced that at a time like the present, which is undoubtedly of an epochal character as it marks the transition from one form of civilisation, or social organisation, to another (which I have called the global super-society, using Aleksandr Zinoviev's term), the most important thing is to understand what's happening. I think this has always been the case, at all times of great change. But now it's harder. Because this transition is at a much more complex level. Because the forms of social control are much more pervasive than in other eras. And because the ideology is so powerful and difficult to analyse amidst its clouds of artificial fog.

No theory explains what is happening. And yet, if we are to avoid an imminent disaster – and if they carry on the way they're going on the command deck disaster is certain – a theory must be constructed. Personally, I am sure the catastrophe can be avoided and that "another world is possible". In this book I have tried to say very roughly what we need to do to start building that "possible world", or at least to prevent the worst from happening and change course decisively. In so doing I have reverted several times to the ideas expressed in another book written just a few days before the 11th of September. There, I spoke of a world that had "reached the end of the line" and expressed my hope in the "wisdom and self-restraint" of the United States leadership.

In that book, I deliberately toned down my language so as not appear too pessimistic. Then the 11th of September came. The tasks are still the same, but anyone can see that colossal efforts and an immense intellectual and moral force will be needed to change the course of events.

What emerges unequivocally from the 11th of September and its aftermath is that the members of the power elite, rather than putting their efforts into the peaceful governance of the challenges facing the world, have chosen war. As I have tried to demonstrate, they are not sure to win this war, but they have the means and the will to destroy not only the "others" but also that part of the West, that "other West", that we believed and still believe in: a West based on civilisation, rights, culture and freedom. If this is the picture, and I believe it is, then our common hope, the hope of all ordinary men and women, whichever part of the world they live in, is that we can organise ourselves to make the war that has already begun difficult, unsustainable and impossible. Because it is not written at the end of any great book that Reason will inevitably prevail. Nor is it written anywhere that this civilisation of ours will live forever, come what may.

10.

## Conclusions

The picture that emerges from the previous chapters is definitely worrying. Even though objections can undoubtedly be raised about certain particular aspects, certain details and the style or form, I think it is hard to deny that the main content broadly corresponds to the way things are and that the forecasts are, at the very least, possible, if not probable. Let's say that it's a realistic picture.

But is there a realistic way out of it all? Is there any chance of avoiding the Superwar and its consequences? Can the Empire be pointed away from where it is heading? In the scores of meetings I attended – public, private, large and small – in the few months after the 11th of September tragedy and after the start of the Afghan war, these are the questions I was asked repeatedly. My answer has been that there are always more possibilities than we think and that accurate forecasts are extremely difficult to make. History is full of miscalculations, unfulfilled prophecies, plans gone wrong and results never achieved, even though they appeared virtually certain to the majority of observers.

Now, just a few months after the turning point of the 11th of September, there are already lots of signs that the Superwar could come up against many political obstacles. Starting with the reaction in the United States. Objections, criticisms and protests are growing against this strategy of war with no limits in time or space. Even Clinton, the former president of the United States, felt the need to intervene at the New York World Forum at the start of February, with a sharp, direct criticism of government strategy. There is a growing level of protest amongst human rights groups and different sectors of the United States intelligentsia, which affect and are affected by international humanitarian organisations. There are also hopes, albeit faint, of a relative economic recovery in the short term, which may reduce internal tensions and suggest a less dramatic course of action to the president of the United States.

Above all, though, there are the reactions of the other main characters on the international scene. The Empire is not yet consolidated. It is still taking its first steps and hasn't yet got to the stage of abolishing states and establishing its general dominion. China and Russia, as mentioned earlier, won't be able to accept such a warlike course of action without reacting. It's true that the United States has extremely powerful ways of applying pressure and that, with Afghanistan, they acquired a greater knowledge of their own strength, the effectiveness of their methods and the inability of the rest of the world to go against their decisions. Even Washington's success in ending the crisis between Pakistan and India, who were slipping towards a military conflict with possible nuclear implications, encouraged the American administration to pursue its own ends, with the conviction that decisive action can crush undesirable developments even in difficult, distant situations.

But China's silence cannot be interpreted as either assent or acquiescence. Peking's furious protest at the Jang Zemin Boeing, packed with microbugs, is just a small hint of the storms to come. International observers would be mistaken if they took Peking's moderation as a sign of acceptance of the new state of affairs. Peking works on a different time scale to Bush. It doesn't have short-term election dates or ratings to contend with.

Putin, on the other hand, is having to make his choices against the backdrop of increasing American unilateralism on the question of disarmament. Moscow can see perfectly well that Bush is starting on an arms programme that includes the arming of space, the retaining of nuclear warheads that were to be decommissioned and the resumption of nuclear testing. Choices such as these have a high strategic content and are difficult to offer in exchange for merchandise of equal value. Something which, it must be said, Bush doesn't even seem particularly interested in offering. So, unless Washington has infallible ways of putting pressure on Putin, the Kremlin's resistance is expected to grow. And the situation in Central Asia is not yet seen as irreversible by Moscow. The two Asian powers (the ascendant China and the weakened but not yet fully tamed Russia) can exert a combined counter pressure that not even the newly formed Empire can ignore. And then, to put all the cards on the table, there is Europe, too. After five months of European silence, Bush's State of the Union address on the 29th of January heralded a sudden rush of European protests. Bush's naming of the Axis of Evil as Iraq, Iran and North Korea was the classic straw that broke the camel's back. Influential figures in the European Union like the Spanish Foreign Minister responded by arguing that the UE will develop its own joint schemes with Teheran, whereas the French and German foreign ministers openly criticised both the "simplistic" approach to international terrorism problems and the "blind acceptance of Ariel Sharon's policy of repression". Even Blair showed signs of dissatisfaction. The danger is starting to be felt in Europe and, even if late in the day, they're starting to erect their lines of defence against the American approach which, from the European point of view, creates more problems than it claims to resolve.

These are significant signs, which also reflect worries about controlling European public opinion over the spread of the asymmetrical war and its extension to Iraq, the first visible object in Washington's sights.

After the initial emotions of the 11th of September, which in fact opened the door to any type of reprisal, there started to be a change of mood. A growing number of people started speaking out about more balanced and realistic ways of combating terrorism and tackling its deep-seated causes. They are asking for different aid strategies for poor countries and policy changes in rich countries. In this context, the Port Alegre movement is starting to exert a considerable influence on the debate on globalisation and its consequences.

All this will surely have an effect on the way things develop and on Washington's policies. Nobody, obviously, is able to gauge its significance or foresee its influence. The variables are many. And we mustn't forget the Enron scandal. This clamorous crash could even drag the Washington administration down with it, many of whom were elected (starting from President George W. Bush and Vice President Cheney) thanks to the generous contributions of the corporation and who are heavily suspected of complicity (or acquiescence) in the fraudulent operations of its management.

But – in my opinion – it would be wrong to hope for providential changes in the direction already embarked on. The Axis of Evil is not a mere slip of the tongue or a verbal excess. It would be quite worrying, given the current state of the planet, to think of the President of the United States writing his State of the Union address in the grip of uncontrollable emotions. And so – I repeat yet again – we have to take what he says and what he does seriously. The administration's

2003 budget proposals are fully immersed in the language of war. An increase of more than 48 billion dollars (+13.7%) in defence expenditure, bringing military expenditure to the dizzy height of 378.6 billion dollars, 17% of the budget. It's the biggest increase in military expenditure since way back in 1982, when the United States was anxiously coping with the strategic parity achieved by the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War.

Can anything intervene to stop this machine, as it gains momentum every day? It is possible, but more and more difficult. As well as the positive variants, which we legitimately put our hopes in, we also have to assess the negative ones.

We know that there are powerful forces with an interest in precipitating the situation. There may be more terrorist attacks, of different and just as ambiguous origins.

A number of deep currents are moving in Western public opinion, flowing parallel to anxieties about the war, but without actually opposing it. The people, poorly informed or misled by the media system, worried about the economic crisis, uncertain about the future and frightened of terrorism, may be led into demanding heightened security, law and order, repressive legislation and the curtailment of freedom and rights, and may be encouraged to put their hope in the firm hand of dictators or immarcescible Imperial Prefects, unanimously elected in overwhelming plebiscites.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Postscript

Since writing the final words to the first edition of this book at the beginning of 2002, there has been another war, against Iraq. And it has been yet another "victory", apart from the fact that it's still going on as I add these few lines to the English edition.

In the meantime, many books have been published about the 11th of September, the strategy of the Neocons, their "Project for the new American century" and the causes behind them coming to power with a coup d'état (which has been defined, somewhat benevolently, as "electoral", but which was really just a straightforward coup, no adjectives required).

Many things are slightly clearer now than they were at the beginning of 2002. One of these is that the Iraq war had been decided on long before the 11th of September and another is that George Bush and Tony Blair have been telling outright lies, repeatedly, deliberately and blatantly, to the American and British public and the rest of world. Consequently, all the suspicions about these two leaders and their apparent motivations have been justified. And are becoming ever more so. But, as the whole thing seems to have taken such a drastic turn since that fateful 11th of September, it would seem logical that any attempted reconstruction of the subsequent events should start from that date. And this approach is further vindicated by the fact that Osama bin Laden hasn't been caught yet. Nor has Mullah Omar fallen into the trap. These two mysteries are part of a general mystery that no one – apart from its creators – is likely to solve in the next hundred years.

Many things have emerged about that tragedy and the incredible events that made it possible. And many more scraps of truth will undoubtedly come to light in the decades to come. But it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to come to a final conclusion. As we know from other major acts of "state" terrorism, the truth can never be reconstructed fully. And this in itself, if we think about it, proves indirectly that this huge event can be classed as "state terrorism".

The problem is understanding which "state" or states were involved, how they got to that point and, above all, why. Al Qaida has been defined as a terror holding. Of the many definitions used, this seems to me to be the most interesting. Because it describes the composite nature of the phenomenon very well. And at the same time it tells us that the only way we'll get to understand anything is by finding out who the main shareholders in that holding are.

One thing is now certain, though, and has been quite evident since the first few months of 2002: the 11th of September was something much more complex than the absurdly oversimplified "true" version of events packaged and peddled all over the world.

Only grand conspiracies can produce such almost "perfect" crimes. Because, whilst being anything but flawless (due to the high percentage of idiots amongst plotters, as in any other category of human beings), they have the advantage of being backed up by a vast chain of complicity. Only grand conspiracies have this characteristic. What lies behind small, low-level acts of terrorism, born from the simple fanaticism of desperate little people with no large-scale backing, is always discovered.

It's never just a question of certain people giving orders and certain others carrying them out, the former being very few and the latter more numerous, although still easily "countable". Both are surrounded by a great ring of "accomplices" (set up well in advance) whose job it is to obstruct, divert, lay false trails, confuse things, disrupt research, lose or destroy documents, neutralise or kill awkward witnesses and so on, in an endless series of cases which – as can be seen frequently in newspaper reports, official documents, memoirs and the accounts of unsuspecting and bewildered "extras" – have been clearly and abundantly documented.

All that we have on those giving the orders – and this should come as no surprise, given the precedents – are shadowy, half-glimpsed images. As for those carrying them out, even though public opinion is convinced that it knows virtually everything about them, very little is actually known. And what little information we do have has been systematically

arranged beforehand, packaged in such a strange way so as to make it impossible to draw unequivocal conclusions. All the rest is so contaminated, contradictory and contrived as to make reconstructing the truth a titanic task. Assuming anybody can or wants to risk taking it on.

Glimpses can be seen every now and again of a cold, calculating presence, which has left many clues, intentionally, but which make subsequent investigations difficult, like an indecipherable riddle. It's enough to note that the identity of many of the nineteen presumed hijackers – revealed to the entire world within two to three days of the attack (how strange, though, that they knew nothing before and then all of a sudden, immediately afterwards, they knew everything) – is far from certain: not only are many of them still alive and not only is their behaviour very odd and contradictory, but some of them are even “double” or “triple”, like the so-called “twentieth” hijacker, of whom at least three different versions are in circulation, with one of them actually in custody awaiting trial, now as I write.

No less remarkable is the revelation that practically all nineteen of them were at one time under surveillance. It is known with certainty that some of them were linked to previous terrorist acts, either attempted or actually carried out. But this didn't stop them from entering and leaving the United States, some with multiple visas, others under direct FBI supervision. In some well-known cases, if they were found out, there was always somebody ready to step in, quite blatantly, to ensure that they could get on with what they were doing undisturbed.

On several occasions, dutiful American citizens actually reported their suspicions to the authorities, thus pointing the investigations in the right direction, but somebody intervened to stop them. Tracks were covered. Dossiers were forgotten about in filing cabinets. Painstakingly compiled documents were destroyed.

And still now, more than two years later, not a single inquiry has been launched into the acts of open connivance with those who were, perhaps (although it's not certain), to become terrorists or who perhaps (but nor is this certain) were destined not to die on board the aeroplanes but to be fake copies of the real terrorists, in order to distract the attention of anybody getting in their way, either accidentally or on purpose. The mystery of the two Mohammed Attas (the Mohammed Atta moving around in the United States under FBI surveillance and the Mohammed Atta in Germany, under surveillance by German intelligence, who then told the CIA) who seemed to want the whole world to know about his plan to get hold of an aeroplane for spraying chemical weapons, is one of the most amazing examples of these apparent decoys.

Was it really Al Qaeda organising these false trails, so far in advance? And why did they so want to attract attention to themselves, to the credit cards bearing “real” names, to the clearly visible bank account numbers? All unanswered questions, partly because the answers haven't even been looked for. And then, of the nineteen presumed “hijackers” entering the United States at different times, it turns out that the transcripts of the border control interviews (the State Department says that twelve of them were “interviewed” by US immigration control), including that of the world famous Mohammed Atta, have been destroyed and can longer be traced, whereas thirteen of them were never even interviewed.

In the same way, in two whole years, not an inch of progress has been made towards tracing the organisers of the wave of financial speculation prior to the attack. It may be true (although hard to believe) that the FBI, CIA, NSA, etc. didn't even examine data made available to them by a software application specially designed to give advance warning of large-scale speculation likely to cause major stock market upsets, even though the software had been up and running for some time. But what is really incredible is that the inquiry was actually called off, even though all experts agree that tracing the dealers behind the massive put options onslaught against the two airlines and the insurance company connected to the World Trade Centre would be far from impossible.

And, on the same subject, it was or should have been known to all concerned that the World Trade Centre was one of the main possible targets, having already been subject to a major terrorist attack in the past. There were even specific warnings about civilian airliners crashing into the towers. Those very towers. But whenever the subject came up it was glaringly evident that somebody was trying to divert people's attention away from it.

You could go on almost forever with a whole string of questions, each more incredible and worrying than the one before. And all of them leading to just one possible conclusion. Even though it's impossible to know what the real story is, we can safely say that what they've been telling us so far doesn't stand up to the slightest scrutiny. We can say it now, just as we could say it right at the beginning of 2002.

It was evident even then that there was a vast array of go-betweens and accomplices, some better informed than others. A veritable network of complicity, involving Christian and Moslem Falanges, billionaires, US government offices, bankers, statesmen, etc. Much more, and much more important, than a fanatic hiding in a cave in Afghanistan and nineteen or twenty suicide bombers choosing to die.

So, the account is false. The people who invented and reported it lied. And on these solid, absolutely demonstrable grounds, discussed and verified in this book and several other reputable studies, we can base our next question: why did they lie? Why are Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Condoleeza Rice, Richard Armitage and all the present US administration lying? What have they got to hide? Is it just inefficiency, an inability to forecast things?

Here too, the answer is definitely, categorically: no.

This question, it seems, is starting to be asked (albeit in a very circumspect way) by a part of the US establishment, despite the fact that the campaign of intimidation to shut the mouths of anyone daring to query anything has been, and still is, extremely virulent. In an unsigned editorial in the New York Times on the 30th of October 2003, Thomas Kean, the Republican Chairman of the special commission of inquiry set up to find out what George Bush knew before the 11th of September, when talking about the “recalcitrant Administration” (his own words), is quoted as saying: “the approach of the Presidential elections makes the Administration's attempted way out even more suspicious. The



missing records and the refusal to face up to the truth will do no other than nurture conspiracy theories and jeopardize America's possibility of foreseeing future threats". Stripped of their diplomatic finery, these words, pronounced by one of the most authoritative voices of the US establishment, mean that the current US President is a source of danger to the national security of the United States of America.

They mean that we are as yet on the verge of the abyss, still just talking in terms of inefficiency, but that if we go any further we will be forced to plunge into the whirlpool of conspiracy theories. But the many, far too many episodes coming to light tell us that it isn't just a question of inefficiency. If it were, this wouldn't explain why not a single top US security official has been sacked. Even if it was just a series of mistakes, slip-ups, blunders and negligence, it still caused 3000 American deaths, and in this case neither the director of the CIA, nor the director of the FBI, nor the deputy chief of the armed forces should still be in their jobs. And yet some of them have actually been rewarded, promoted, upgraded, thanked and commended. For what?

The theory that they were just inefficient blunderers has to be ruled out, evidently. And so, by default, we have to conclude that they must have been "efficient" and that they were actually "doing what they had to do". And perhaps what they had to do, unfortunately, was not stop an operation about which they had abundant information over a number of years.

In the words of CIA chief George Tenet, in a Congressional hearing, no more than "three or four" people had a detailed knowledge of the inner mechanisms of the plot. And, according to the banal official vulgata that the world media have been repeating, parrot-fashion, to this very day, the number of hijackers was nineteen. But it is very clear that these "nineteen" wouldn't have got much done at all had they not been helped by hundreds of people.

Of these hundreds of people – and this is one of the most important points to remember – many weren't even Moslems or from Arabic or mainly Islamic countries. They were United States citizens, probably Christians and, what is more, at least some of them were convinced they were acting in the interests of their country and doing their duty.

Only afterwards, after it had all happened, did some of these people, usually the more intelligent ones, realise the nature of game they had been inadvertently caught up in. It's enough to recount what happened to FBI agents Robert Wright and John Vincent. Up until 1998, these two agents had been following up information on a terrorist cell in Chicago in connection with the attacks on American embassies in Africa earlier that year. Their line of inquiry led them to Saudi magnate and financier Yassin al-Qadi, already known to intelligence agencies as an Al Qaeda financial backer. They informed their FBI superiors, who responded by obstructing the investigation over the next three years and then finally calling it off. Robert Wright persisted and the case became known to the public. As a result he faces disciplinary action and will be taking legal action against the FBI to defend himself. After the 11th of September he wept as he asked forgiveness of the victims' families in a press conference in which he repeated his accusations against the FBI chiefs. Who are – as are all the heads of all the organisations involved – still in their jobs.

A similar case, which came to light just a few days after the 11th of September, already mentioned in this book and in other publications, regards another FBI agent, John O'Neill. Working at a high level on investigations linked to terrorism and Al Qaeda, amongst other things, O'Neill was assigned to investigating the attack on the "USS Cole" in 1998 in the port of Aden. He set off for the Yemen with a squad of 200 investigators, only to come up against Barbara Bodine in the US embassy who, first of all, forced him to cut his team down to fifty and then had the case suspended. O'Neill didn't keep quiet either. In the summer of 2001 he voiced his suspicions and was consequently put under inquiry. He left the FBI in August to take on the ill-fated assignment of head of security at the World Trade Centre. He died on the 34th floor of the North Tower.

These incidents confirm all our worst suspicions about the top echelons of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States of America. The above cases are just two examples of the mysterious series of cover-ups, red herrings and safe-conducts surrounding the investigation into the future hijackers (almost all of whom were already well known to the FBI, and many to the CIA as well) before the 11th of September.

The technique of activating a myriad of unsuspecting agents in a shroud of professional secrecy is used by intelligence agencies all over the world. It always involves a certain number of people carrying out their orders in perfectly good faith, totally unaware of the fact that they are part of a chain of operations – a kind of occult assembly line – which has a very different purpose from anything that can be gleaned from even the most detailed analysis of their actual link in the chain.

In this chain, though, there are also a number of links that have been assigned the specific task of blocking certain investigations, in other words, people who are knowingly and actively working to cover things up and divert attention elsewhere.

There's another point here that shouldn't be forgotten, if we are to avoid ending up down the blind alley of over-simplification and drawing the wrong conclusions. You can never say categorically: "they did it themselves". You can never say categorically: "it was the CIA, or the FBI, or MOSSAD, or the Pakistani ISI or the Saudi Arabian secret services". No intelligence agency will ever leave its visiting card when it goes into action. The dense undergrowth of relationships that lies between all these agencies makes interaction between individuals of different ideological, religious and national origin very commonplace. The main thing that binds them together is always money.

It's enough to see a few good American films, such as "Three Days of the Condor", to realise that there's nothing new in this kind of thing: it's always been going on. What determines the scale of the undercover operations required to change the course of events (or, in this specific case, the course of history) is the importance of the political problems arising at international level.

A careful, objective analysis of the facts leads you to something that is anything but simple: a highly complex tangle of

relationships involving rogue groups, individuals, agent provocateurs and “retired” agents (i.e. self-employed and not on the books of any agency), all of whom play their own particular part and then disappear. Many of these characters have double or triple roles, acting as go-betweens and links between the different “teams”. But they are only ever assigned certain specific pieces of the operation and simply follow the orders of their boss or superior (often more than one) who, in turn, knows only one part of the plan, never all of it.

And so, operations on this scale need to be prepared a long time in advance. They are parts of big, complex, strategies and never spur-of-the-moment decisions. And they are almost always multiple, with a certain number of interchangeable objectives but all aiming for the same result, running simultaneously, in parallel, until the command deck picks one out. Many of the pawns in the game are working on several different projects simultaneously and are given final operational orders only a few hours before putting them into effect. According to one of the tapes attributed to Osama bin Laden, the hijackers didn’t even know each other until they actually stepped into the aeroplanes. That was why the ones on flight 93 – according to the accounts – put red ribbon on their foreheads: so that they could recognise each other.

Doesn’t this remind you of the “Red Brigade” group that kidnapped Aldo Moro, killing his five bodyguards in Via Fani? They were wearing a kind of uniform too: something that would have been very risky had there been a chase, because it would have made them more easily identifiable. But they did it so that they could recognise each other during the assault and not shoot each other. This proves that it wasn’t just “revolutionaries” that took part in the operation but also experts of another kind, probably marksmen, who were very unlikely to be “revolutionaries” because the other ones didn’t know them. Here too, the organiser that put all these different pieces of the jigsaw together is yet to be discovered. And 28 years have gone by. And here it was basically just a question of keeping the communists out of the government in Italy, that remote outpost of the USA.

Imagine, then, how long it will take for the real facts about the 11th of September to come to the surface. Because the stakes being played for here were, and are, world domination. And nor is this mere supposition. It’s written, in black and white, in a document called “Project for the New American Century” that bears the signature of almost all the members of the current American administration. And it was written in the mid-nineties, a long time before the 11th of September 2001.

What they wrote, these new warlords, at a time when the global triumph of the United States could no longer be called into question, was that “the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalysing event, like a new Pearl Harbour”. What were they gazing into, these Neocons, when they wrote these awesome lines? Which crystal ball was it that could show the destiny of the world? And why on earth did the undisputed winners of the great Cold War feel the need to talk about further “revolutionary changes”? It’s never been known for a chess player to get up suddenly after winning a game and kick the chessboard over. Unless, perhaps, he or she was losing the whole set.

And how can we explain the most impressive electoral fraud in the history of the United States, which has been called an “electoral coup d’état” and which Michael Moore, in no uncertain terms, defines as a swindle, organised well beforehand, which, by cancelling out the voting rights of tens of thousands of black electors in Florida, took the loser to power? And this was a year before the 11th of September, the same year as the Enron and WorldCom crashes, right in the middle of the Wall Street disaster.

These terrifying questions haven’t been raised with the benefit of hindsight: they were already fully formulated in the numerous accounts and reconstructions in various organs of the United States press.

The sources, in fact, are by no means hypothetical and can all be defined as “official”. They are almost always direct government sources or, failing this, news published (and not denied) in organs of the press so authoritative as to be considered (often rightly) as sources of power themselves. Or (more rarely) from media sources which, whilst being critical of and independent from the dominant power, are so prestigious as to be above all accusations of partiality or preconception. What I mean is that no single reputable journalist could now shrug the whole thing off as mere “opinions”.

There are, of course, many things yet to be investigated. Various intelligence agency departments in a handful of countries, including the United States, still undoubtedly have lots more information on the subject. But – and this is the point – they don’t make it available and they never will, neither to the general public, nor to experts, journalists and academics.

But the veil of secrecy over so many aspects of the case can’t hide the evidence of the existence of an intricate series of cover-up operations, specially devised to stop the truth about what happened from getting out. Osama bin Laden didn’t do all this. Not alone. He couldn’t have. Even General Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, admitted to this in the summer of 2002.

So why did they do it?

What comes to mind is the dialogue between President Truman and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. Truman asked anxiously how it would be possible to arm the United States to the teeth, to face up to the Soviet threat, when American public opinion was against it, and Acheson replied: “There’s only one way, Mr. President: terrorise the Americans”. This is an episode that Gore Vidal refers to often in his prophetic writings, before the 11th of September, as if previewing the Project for the New American Century. And there’s a passage in his novel “The Golden Age” (this too written long before the 11th of September), where this idea crops up again, with terrifying simplicity. It’s a dialogue between two of the characters in the novel, in the months immediately before the United States entered the war against Japan. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in power.

One of the characters is the President's closest adviser, the other the proprietor of an important newspaper, and they both really existed. And their dialogue too, as Gore Vidal clearly intimates, is not just the figment of an artistic imagination.

"...No sons of yours will..."

"...ever fight in a foreign war, unless attacked."

Caroline blinked: "This is all very daring".

"Fate decides what must be done. I'm convinced of that. Anyway, there's no going to war unless all your people are united behind you. Well, they are nowhere near united enough even though we keep losing ship after ship to the Nazis and no one blinks an eye. So we must take one great blow and then..." He stopped.

"Then what?"

"Then we go for it. All of it. And get it."

"What is it?"

"The world. What else is there for us to have?"

\*\*\*\*\*

-----  
1.  
The command deck  
-----

1. Abbreviated to WTO
2. Probably much more drastic than it appeared and more than the current Kremlin leadership are prepared to admit. In fact, it is strongly suspected (with evidence) that the thousands of warheads still in Russian hands are no longer usable, not even as second-hand deterrents. This is partly because of their obsolescence, partly because of the lack of an independent Russian detection and tracking system for potential enemy forces and partly because over the last few years United States intelligence has managed to reveal quite a few secrets about the Russian war machine, including its strategic ballistic missile potential.
3. G. Riotta, New York. Undici Settembre. Diario di una Guerra, Einaudi, Torino 2001.
4. "International Herald Tribune", 31st December 2001 – 1st February 2002
5. A. Zinoviev, On the way to the Super-Society, Tsentrpoligraf, Moskva 2000
6. Here I am greatly indebted to Robert Hunter Wade, Professor of Political Economy at the London School of Economics and author of a commendable article in the "International Herald Tribune" on the 3rd of January 2002.
7. See the series of four articles from the "New York Times", published under the common heading Behind the Global Economy in the "International Herald Tribune", 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th of February 1999.
8. C. Krauthammer, Why America is doing so well, "International Herald Tribune", 5th of January 1999.
9. "Corriere della Sera", 9th November 1999.
10. Charles Wyplosz, Professor of Economics at the Graduate Institute for International Studies in Geneva, talking about International Monetary Fund policies in the "International Herald Tribune", 25th August 1998, describes how they keep "repeating the same basic mistakes" in Asia, Russia and South America.
11. Ibid.
12. C. Wyplosz in the "International Herald Tribune", 7th May 1999.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

-----  
2.  
The end of history  
-----

1. D. Ignatius in the "International Herald Tribune", 11th April 2000.
2. FAO conference, Rome, 1996.
3. E. Luttwak, Turbo capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy, Orion, (1999).
4. Ibid.
5. U. Beck, Sociologist at the University of Munich, from "La Stampa", 13th November 2001.
6. "International Herald Tribune", 16th October 2000.
7. O. Arias, President of Costa Rica from 1986 to 1990, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1987, from the "International Herald Tribune", 22nd June 2000.
8. "International Herald Tribune", 14th November 2001.
9. Ibid.
10. E. Luttwak, Turbo capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy.
11. L. Brown, The State of the World 2000, WW Norton & Company, New York-London 2000, p.9

12. "Financial Times", 18th February 2002
13. E. Luttwak, Turbo capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy
14. Ibid.
15. "La Repubblica", 14th August 2001.

-----  
 3.  
 What kind of war is this?  
 -----

1. Mikhail Gorbachev in "La Stampa", 3rd November 2001
2. The reconstruction of the raid is taken entirely from a book by Paul Rogers, Losing Control. Global Security in the Twenty-first Century, Pluto Press, 2000. This and all the following quotes on this episode are taken from here.
3. Ibid.
4. Wag the Dog and The Second Civil War are good examples of this.
5. G. Chiesa, Roulette russa, Guerini e Associati, Milan 1999, chapters 9 ("La guerra umanitaria") and 14 ("Bastone globale").
6. See [www.zmag.org/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm](http://www.zmag.org/GlobalWatch/chomskymit.htm). Znet. An Evening with Noam Chomsky. The New War Against Terror, 8th October 2000.
7. Ibid. From the transcript of a lecture by Chomsky, unabridged.
8. "La Stampa", 17th January 2002
9. U. Beck, in "La Stampa", cit.
10. "New York Times", 12th March 2002.
11. There was no reference to attacks with chemical and biological weapons in the 1978 Trilateral Statement, in which the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain made no pledge not to respond with nuclear weapons in the event of an attack by a non-nuclear country.
12. S. McNamara and Thomas Graham Jr. in the "International Herald Tribune", 14th March 2002.
13. "New York Times", 12th March 2002.
14. "La Repubblica", 2nd November 2001.

-----  
 4.  
 Where storms gather  
 -----

1. Quotations taken from "La Stampa", reporting on an article in "Le Monde" by Sylvain Cypel.
2. Robert Baer, head of CIA anti-terrorism operations until 1998, claims that there's no proof that Mohammed Atta actually died on one of the aeroplanes and argues that "the investigation is yet to begin". "Panorama, 7th February 2002.
3. J. Hoagland, "International Herald Tribune", 9th November 2001.
4. Press conference held by George W. Bush, Colin Powell and US Finance Minister O'Neill, reported in the "International Herald Tribune", 8th November 2001.
5. Immediately received favourably by the House of Representatives but less so by the Senate, which gave its approval for the investigation to go ahead. "New York Times", 22nd October 1991.
6. See G. Chiesa, Roulette russa, cit., chapter 15, pages 177 ss.
7. See article by Paolo Fusi in "Avvenimenti", 30th November 2001, number zero.
8. Mohamed Youssaf & Mark Adkin, The Bear Trap, Jang Publishers, Lahore, 1992, p. 29.
9. M.A. Weaver, Blowback, from "The Atlantic Online", May 1996.
10. Imprisoned in Egypt for the fatwa on Anwar Sadat, cohort of the Egyptian Muhammed Shawqui Islambouli, the brother of Colonel Khalid Islambouli, Sadat's assassin. For over two years about 3000 of Omar Abdul-Rahman's volunteers fought alongside the Moslem government in Bosnia. Condemned to life imprisonment in the United States in 1993 for the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in the same year.
11. Cairo University graduate, Wahabite, professor at the University of Kabul, strongly linked to Saudi fundamentalist circles.
12. "International Herald Tribune", 28th December 2001.
13. T. Friedman, "International Herald Tribune", 13th December 2001.
14. "International Herald Tribune", 28th December 2001.
15. "La Stampa", 14th December 2001, reporting on an article in the "Washington Post".
16. S. Avineri, professor of Politics at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, "International Herald Tribune", 14th November 2001.
17. "International Herald Tribune", 13th November 2001. Quote taken from a "Washington Post" editorial.
18. Ibid.

19. "International Herald Tribune", 26th November 2001.
20. Ibid.
21. "International Herald Tribune", 28th January 2002.
22. I. Andric, *Bosnian Chronicle* (Little, Brown & Company: August 1993)

-----  
 5.  
 Osama bin Laden did it. Who else could it have been?  
 -----

1. "Panorama, 7th February 2002.
2. J. Miller, J. Gerth, D. Van Natta, "International Herald Tribune", 31st December-1st January 2002.
3. "International Herald Tribune", 7th February 2002.
4. "International Herald Tribune", 3rd January 2002.
5. "International Herald Tribune", 7th February 2002.
6. Partial transcription of the video of Osama bin Laden, "La Stampa", 14th December 2001.
7. Miles Copeland worked together with general William Donovan in the Second World War (army security). He was a leading director of the CIA under Alan Dulles. He acted as special assistant to Kermit Kim Roosevelt in the coup that overthrew Mossadeq in 1953, in Iran. He was adviser to several African and Middle Eastern heads of state (Nasser in Egypt, Nkrumah in Ghana, and Chamoun in the Lebanon). See G. Chiesa, *Operazione Teheran*, Laterza, Bari, 1980, p. 129.
8. "La Repubblica", 23rd April 1980.
9. Ibid.
10. Put options and call options are futures, whereby a buyer can either sell or buy certain shares within a set time at a previously set price (strike price).
11. D. Radlauer, *Black Tuesday: The World's Largest Insider Trading Scam?* Radlauer is an electronic banking and cash management and works at the New York Future Exchange, <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articlelet.cfm?articleid=386>
12. Interview published in "Le Nouvel Observateur", Paris, 15-21 January 1998.

-----  
 6.  
 Penal Empire  
 -----

1. Letter to the "International Herald Tribune" (18th November 2001) from Paul Frank, from Thollon, France.
2. E. Luttwak, *Turbo capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy*, Orion, (1999).
3. Ivi, p.75.
4. D. Zolo, "il Manifesto", 16th November 2001.
5. Antonio Cassese, "La Repubblica", 21st November 2001.
6. W. Safire, "New York Times", 16th November 2001.
7. R Cohen, "Washington Post", 16th November 2001.
8. "New York Times", 3rd January 2002.
9. The scores of public meetings and debates that I've taken part in all over Italy have confirmed it to me time and time again that the vast majority of people didn't know anything about this question: at most, a few had just heard it mentioned. And these were people much better informed than average and interested enough to come to a meeting instead of just staying at home in front of the TV. As for the Italian newspapers, the almost total silence was broken by the voices of Boris Biancheri in an editorial in "La Stampa", albeit in somewhat moderate and circumspect tones, and Antonio Cassese in a very cutting critique in "La Repubblica" (although without deeming it appropriate to dedicate one of his editorials to the subject, limiting coverage to the excellent, sarcastic reports from Vittorio Zucconi in the United States). Nothing more of any importance.
10. "La Stampa", 7th December 2001.
11. The Geneva Convention states that all people who are members of regular armed forces or other combatants fulfilling a series of conditions, such as that of carrying arms openly, being recognizable at a distance, conducting their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war, are to be considered as lawful combatants.
12. "Washington Post", 12th March 2002.
13. "New York Times", 23rd January 2002.
14. C. Levendosky, "New York Times", 17th January 2002. Levendosky is editor of the "Casper Star-Tribune" editorial page.
15. Ten years late, on the 21st of October 1994.
16. Gore Vidal, *The End of Liberty. Towards a New Totalitarianism?* cit., p. 107.
17. "In this angry autumn even a liberal can find himself thinking about torture". N.B. This and the following quotations from would-be torturers are taken from P. Mastrolilli, in "La Stampa", 7th November 2001.

18. "People start asking themselves how certain kinds of information can be obtained [from prisoners]..."
19. "Under certain circumstances torture could be the lesser evil."
20. "There's no doubt that torture works as a means of getting information out of terrorists and their accomplices"
21. Gore Vidal, *The End of Liberty. Towards a New Totalitarianism?* cit., p. 107.
22. "International Herald Tribune", 30th January 2002.
23. W. Pfaff, "International Herald Tribune", 4th January 2002.
24. "La Repubblica", 26th June 1999.
25. See A. Friedman, "International Herald Tribune", 31st January 2002.
26. S. Rodotà, "La Repubblica", 12 th January 2002.

-----  
 7.  
 A grand alliance  
 -----

1. See B. Woodward, D. Balz, "International Herald Tribune", 29th January, 2002.
2. From George W. Bush's State of the Union address, "International Herald Tribune", 1st February 2002.
3. According to Marc W. Herold, from the University of New Hampshire, Durham ("il Manifesto", 23rd December 2001): "On the 23rd of November, as the sun set, at least 3006 Afghan civilians died under United States bombing". I have taken all the figures published in the international press and on the Internet and come to the conclusion that the civilian deaths by the end of 2001 could have been more than 4000.
4. See the possible lines of development of the Superwar in chapter 12 for more details.
5. See F. Rampini, "La Repubblica", 20 th November 2001.
6. J. Hoagland, "International Herald Tribune", 26th November 2001.
7. C. De Benedetti, "La Repubblica", 24th November 2001.

-----  
 8.  
 Propaganda war  
 -----

1. J. Roth, *The silent prophet*.
2. K. Kraus, *The last days of mankind: a tragedy in five acts* F. Ungar Pub. Co., (1974).
3. Custine, *Letters from Russia*.
4. R. Kapuściński, "La Repubblica", 1st September 2000.
5. G. Vidal, "La Stampa", 19th August 1988.
6. K. Kraus, *The last days of mankind: a tragedy in five acts* F. Ungar Pub. Co., (1974).
7. N. Klein, *No Logo*, Harper Collins, 2000.
8. Then there are the high priests of false information, who complain vociferously about attempted censorship the moment anybody touches on these questions. For them, whose political and personal fortunes are tied up with the current state of affairs, no criticism of any type can be acceptable. But we can talk about these swindlers on another occasion.
9. L. Dini, *Fra Casa Bianca e Botteghe Oscure*, interview by M. Molinari, Guerini e Associati, Milan, 2001, pp. 64-65.
10. K. Kraus, *The last days of mankind: a tragedy in five acts* F. Ungar Pub. Co., (1974).
11. Taken from an e-mail received from a Communications Science undergraduate in Bologna.
12. From the summary of one of the conferences in the residential seminar "Information: truth and freedom" held at the University of Nazareth, Rome (8th-11th November 2001). The summary is by Emanuele Castelli, taken from the University Bulletin.
13. These quotations are taken from a paper by Patrick Martin (6th November 2001) entitled *CNN Tells Reporters: No Propaganda, except American*. Thanks to Lanfranco Caminiti for pointing it out and e-mailing it to me.
14. "Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians within the meaning of Article 50, paragraph 1." Raniero La Valle comments: "So, killing journalists in a war is specifically prohibited: it may seem an obvious thing to prohibit, but perhaps it's been put in writing because it is known that the temptation to kill them is strong".
15. "La Repubblica", 14th December 2001.

-----  
 9.  
 Superwar

- 
1. From George W. Bush's State of the Union address, "International Herald Tribune", cit.
  2. J. Hoagland, "International Herald Tribune", 9th November 2001.
  3. Ibid. my italics.
  4. See Chapter 5.
  5. J. Hoagland, "International Herald Tribune", 19th November 2001.
  6. Ibid.
  7. H. Kissinger, "La Stampa", 13th January 2002.
  8. W. Pfaff, "International Herald Tribune", 5-6th January 2002.
  9. E. Luttwak, Turbo capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy, Orion, (1999).
  10. Ivi, p. 113.
  11. "New York Times", 12th December 2001.
  12. J. Hoagland, "Washington Post", 26th November 2001.
  13. N. Chomsky 9-11.
  14. R. W. Apple, "New York Times", 14th September 2001, Taken from N. Chomsky 9-11.
  15. B. Hrabal, I served the King of England Pan-Macmillan.
  16. G. Chiesa, G8-Genova, Einaudi, Turin 2001.