

From Sept 11 to Saddam's fall

Sept. 11 was not born out of nothing but rather out of chaos. The regional and international chaos following the destruction of the fragile balances in the Middle East. While delivering Kuwait from the brutal fraternal embrace of the Iraqi "Big Brother", "Desert Storm" — when it calmed down — not only left all the thorny questions raised by the invasion of Kuwait without answers, but even heightened the tensions to an unprecedented level. If Kuwait was liberated,

23 million Iraqis were trapped between Saddam's unyielding anvil, and the hammer of the UN sanctions.

Elsewhere in the picture, the two most important accords between Arabs and Israelis — after Sadat/Begin/Carter's Camp David peace — reached an unsaid because unacknowledged deadlock. Neither Jordan nor the Palestinian Authority succeeded in selling their peace with Israel to the other Arabs. How would they? Peace actually resembled something else. President Clinton, who probably was attracted by the perspective of entering American and world history as the man who achieved peace between Arabs and Israelis, did not hide his bitterness after the negotiations failed. He will not outdo Carter's achievement and win a Nobel Prize. He will pass into history as the Don Juan of the White House, which is no small achievement.

When his successor came to the White House, almost everything in the Middle East was to be re-settled. The Israelis and the Palestinians resumed their interminable war. The Iraqis were suffering a thousand pains under the embargo. The Syrians were still recalcitrant. The Lebanese found another reason to continue the struggle in Shabaa. Jordanians and the Egyptians were bed with their peace accords: On

the one hand they could not deny them, and on the other their hearts were bleeding because Israel had not changed. And all those people along with their Arab and Muslim brethren, from the mountains of Afghanistan eastward, to the confines of the Great African Sahara westward, were living "the time of the assassins", to use Henry Miller's expression.

In effect, never before that time had Islamic radicalism attained such an authority in those surroundings. The new Assassins were not the direct descendants of Hassan Al-Sabbah's medieval sect, although they use similar techniques of terror against their enemies. They are not doped with Hashish as their Ismaelite predecessors, but rather with modern brainwashing techniques, that have been used — and even gained fame — by the CIA. The Manchurian candidate of the Cold War has become a remote memory, although his "fathers" have unwittingly begotten the new robots of the suicide-bombing mania. This is proof that even in the terrorism business, there is a lot of work and a lot of progress. Since Sept. 11, everything has changed.

Friends and allies are no longer the friends and allies we know. It has become necessary thus to ask the right questions: Who are our allies and friends in this world? Ask the Americans. Out of the blue, they woke up in a hostile environment, like someone who after being shipwrecked finds himself alone on a little island in the ocean. And the questions followed: Why do they hate us? Are we then so alone? Whenever they look around them, the Americans saw little sympathy, a lot of hypocrisy and hate and envy. While they thought of themselves as the nicest people on earth, they were dismayed by the fact that this earth did

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not give them back a genuine reflection of that belief. So, what's wrong?

The new president found it easier to resort to the good old Manichean concepts of good and evil. Henceforth, we are the good people, and they are the evil. And like in the cartoons, the good hero would have to fight evil and prevail. That is the strategy of today's superpower. Once the strategy was adopted, the new administration had to find the enemy. It was not hard. If Saddam was self-designated, Osama Bin Laden would take the rest of the burden. However, to strike Saddam first would have been nonsense. Cleansing the Afghan caves and destroying the Taliban and Al-Qaeda's bases, the Bush administration was all the while preparing the true, the delicious, and the most succulent meal. It was not the stony Afghanistan that concerned America, but the wealthy Iraq. And it was not the shadowy Bin Laden who represented the real weight in the international balance, but the ruthless Saddam Hussein.

After all, even if there is not the least connection between Al-Qaeda and Saddam, and even if Sept. 11 has nothing to do with the embargo imposed on Iraq, what could the Americans take from Bin Laden? His life? It is worthless now. His \$300 million? They are but a drop in the ocean! Compared to the real fortunes of wealthy Americans, what is Bin Laden? Afghanistan?

That's easy, but it never belonged to Bin Laden. He was just a refugee there. Yet if Bin Laden seemed worthless, Saddam appealed almost naturally to the American vendetta. Why a vendetta? Because Sept. 11 happened, and behind Sept. 11, there was a dark conspiracy where anybody in the Arab-Islamic world could be involved at

some level or another. Maybe this sounds a little paranoid, but that is the way the CIA and the folk from the Secret Service think. After all, what is Al-Qaeda if not the international Islamic terrorist network? Somehow like international communism during the Cold War, but with a different ideology.

Saddam appealed to American anger not only because he was the model of "evil" according to President Bush (so numerous other models continue to live unharmed, though), but most of all because something valuable could be snatched from him, and if achieved, such a project could be as rewarding to the USA as it was devastating to its enemies. It is obvious that the reward is Iraq itself. Snatched from the hands of Saddam, Iraq would help America settle the old accounts with its enemies on the one hand, and open the way to the new regional order so desired by Washington and Israel on the other.

This is not to say that Saddam Hussein was an obstacle to America's plans in the Middle East. Anybody with a little presence of mind knows that Saddam actually helped Bush — father and son. He helped the father enter in force in the Gulf when he invaded Kuwait. Remember that ambassador April Glaspie did not object to Saddam's plans, so he thought the Americans were encouraging him oil. It goes without saying that the previous American assistance to Saddam during the war against Iran made him believe that Washington would comply with his wishes if he invaded Kuwait, in order to pay back the billions he owed to almost everybody. Such foolishness.

Besides, Saddam was ready to sell Iraq to the Bush administration if he was allowed to stay in power. The collective graves the world is discovering

in Iraq would have been nothing compared to the dark future the dictator was preparing for his people. Today the question is not whether Bush was right to attack Iraq or not, but rather whether Saddam was right to cling to power.

As to Saddam's pretension to lead the "resistance" against the American occupation, this is merely a joke. A bad joke indeed. And his "letters" to the Americans or to the Iraqis relayed by Al-Jazeera, sound like the same low brand of humor. We know that the dictator is — like many of his kind — a man without humor. Yet who among the rational Iraqis could take him seriously? Saddam a resistance fighter? Sure, that was in the fifties of the last century. We are in 2003. And the majority of the Iraqi people cannot be so foolish, so masochistic, and so stupid as to wish the return of a tyrant.

There is a link between all these events, if we read them thoroughly. Neither is America a model of goodness nor the rest of the world all evil and conspiring against it. From the period preceding Sept. 11, we can probably discover a lot of indirect reasons for hatred. After Sept. 11, the Americans should wonder whether their policy helped to make the world a better place or not.

Some of the questions they raised are still unanswered. For the true answers are not to be found in the books and the press, but rather on the field — in all those regions of the world that have been plagued by sicknesses, and that are still waiting for the good to come, for their peoples have experienced nothing in their lives but evil.

To be faithful to their creed, the Americans are not expected to play the good Samaritans, but just to follow the Ariadne thread, in order to understand and make themselves understood.