

The Sentry's Solitude

Fouad Ajami

PAX AMERICANA IN THE ARAB WORLD

FROM ONE END of the Arab world to the other, the drumbeats of anti-Americanism had been steady. But the drummers could hardly have known what was to come. The magnitude of the horror that befell the United States on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, appeared for a moment to embarrass and silence the drummers. The American imperium in the Arab-Muslim world hatched a monster. In a cruel irony, a new administration known for its relative lack of interest in that region was to be pulled into a world that has both beckoned America and bloodied it.

History never repeats itself, but when Secretary of State Colin Powell came forth to assure the nation that an international coalition against terrorism was in the offing, Americans recalled when Powell had risen to fame. "First, we're going to cut it off, then we're going to kill it," he had said of the Iraqi army in 1991. There had been another coalition then, and Pax Americana had set off to the Arab world on a triumphant campaign. But those Islamic domains have since worked their way and their will on the American victory of a decade ago. The political earth has shifted in that world. The decade was about the "blowback" of the war. Primacy begot its nemesis.

America's Arab interlocutors have said that the region's political stability would have held had the United States imposed a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and that the rancid anti-Americanism now evident in the Arab world has been called up by the fury of the

second intifada that erupted in September 2000. But these claims misread the political world. Long before the second intifada, when Yasir Arafat was still making his way from political exile to the embrace of Pax Americana, there was a deadly trail of anti-American terror. Its perpetrators paid no heed to the Palestinian question. What they thought of Arafat and the metamorphosis that made him a pillar of President Clinton's Middle East policy is easy to construe.

The terror was steady, and its geography and targets bespoke resourcefulness and audacity. The first attack, the 1993 truck bombing of the World Trade Center, was inspired by the Egyptian cleric Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman. For the United States, this fiery preacher was a peculiar guest: he had come to *bilad al-Kufr* (the lands of unbelief) to continue his war against the secular regime of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The sheikh had already been implicated in the 1981 murder of Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar al-Sadat. The young assassins had sought religious guidance from him—a writ for tyrannicide. He had provided it but retained a measure of ambiguity, and Egypt let him leave the country. He had no knowledge of English and did not need it; there were disciples and interpreters aplenty around him. An American imperium had incorporated Egypt into its order of things, which gave the sheikh a connection to the distant power.

The preacher could not overturn the entrenched regime in his land. But there was steady traffic between the United States and Egypt, and the armed Islamist insurgency that bedeviled Cairo inspired him. He would be an Ayatollah Khomeini for his followers, destined to return from the West to establish an Islamic state. In the preacher's mind, the world was simple. The dictatorial regime at home would collapse once he snapped its lifeline to America. American culture was of little interest to him. Rather, the United States was a place from which he could hound his country's rulers. Over time, Abdel Rahman's quest was denied. Egypt rode out the Islamist insurgency after a terrible drawn-out fight that pushed the country to the brink. The sheikh ended up in an American prison. But he had lit the fuse. The 1993 attack on the World Trade Center that he launched was a mere dress rehearsal for the calamity of September 11, 2001. Abdel Rahman had shown the way—and the future.

There were new Muslim communities in America and Europe; there was also money and freedom to move about. The geography of

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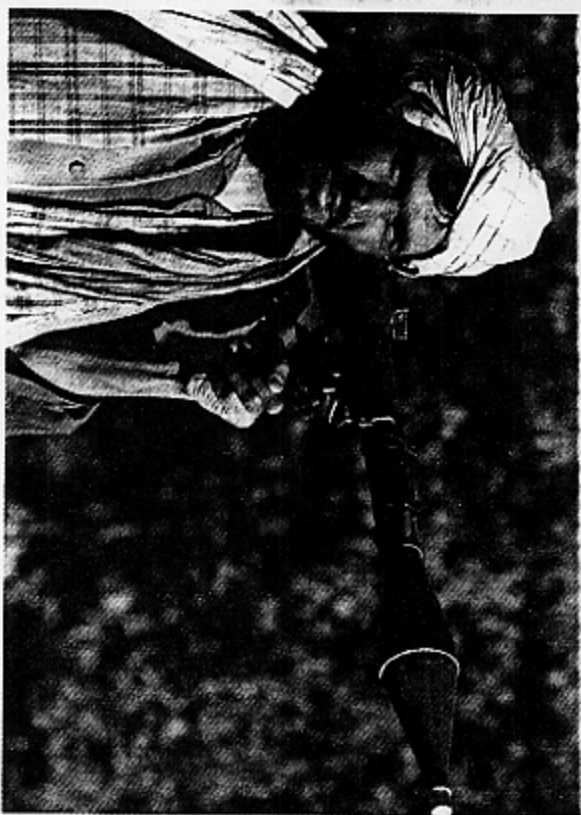
political Islam had been redrawn. When Ayatollah Khomeini took on American power, there had been talk of a pan-Islamic brigade. But the Iranian revolutionaries were ultimately concerned with their own nation-state. And they were lambs compared with the holy warriors to come. Today's warriors have been cut loose from the traditional world. Some of the leaders—the Afghan Arabs—had become restless after the Afghan war. They were insurgents caught in no man's land, on the run from their homelands but never at home in the West. In Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria, tenacious Islamist movements were put down. In Saudi Arabia, a milder Islamist challenge was contained. The counterinsurgencies had been effective, so the extremists turned up in the West. There, liberal norms gave them shelter, and these men would rise to fight another day.

The extremists acquired modern means: frequent flyer miles, aviation and computer skills, and ease in Western cities. They hated the United States, Germany, and France but were nonetheless drawn to them. They exalted tradition and faith, but their traditions could no longer give them a world. Islam's explosive demography had spilled into the West. The militant Islamists were on the move. The security services in their home countries were unenthusiastic, showing no tolerance for heroics. Men like Abdel Rahman and Osama bin Ladin offered this breed of unsettled men a theology of holy terror and the means to live the plotter's life. Bin Ladin was possessed of wealth and high birth, the heir of a merchant dynasty. This gave him an aura: a Che Guevara of the Islamic world, bucking the mighty and getting away with it. A seam ran between America and the Islamic world. The new men found their niche, their targets, and their sympathizers across that seam. They were sure of America's culpability for the growing misery in their lands. They were sure that the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt would fall if only they could force the United States to cast its allies adrift.

NOT IN MY BACKYARD

Terror shadowed the American presence in the Middle East throughout the 1990s: two bombings in Saudi Arabia, one in Riyadh in November of 1995, and the other on the Khobar Towers near Dhahran in June of 1996; bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya

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Keeping the faith? Taliban fighter, Afghanistan, 1997

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

in 1998; the daring attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* in Yemen in October 2000. The U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf was under assault.

In this trail of terror, symbol and opportunity were rolled together—the physical damage alongside a political and cultural message. These attacks were meant for a watchful crowd in a media age. Dhahran had been a creature of the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia ever since American oil prospectors turned up in the 1930s and built that city in the American image. But the world had changed. It was in Dhahran, in the 1990s, that the crews monitoring the no-fly zone over Iraq were stationed. The attack against Dhahran was an obvious blow against the alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The realm would not disintegrate; Beirut had not come to Arabia. But the assailants—suspected to be an Iranian operation that enlisted the participation of Saudi Shi'a—had delivered the blow and the message. The foreigner's presence in Arabia was contested. A radical Islamist opposition had emerged, putting forth a fierce, redemptive Islam at odds with the state's conservative religion.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS *November/December 2001* [5]

The ulama (clergy) had done well under the Saud dynasty. They were the dynasty's partners in upholding an order where obedience to the rulers was given religious sanction. No ambitious modernist utopia had been unleashed on them as it had in Gamal Abdel-Nasser's Egypt and Iran under the Pahlavis. Still, the state could not appease the new breed of activists who had stepped forth after the Gulf War to hound the rulers over internal governance and their ties to American power. In place of their rulers' conservative edifice, these new salvationists proposed a radical order free from foreign entanglements. These activists were careful to refrain from calling for the outright destruction of the House of Saud. But sedition

The Saudi state could not appease the new brand of activists after the Gulf War.

was in the air in the mid-1990s, and the elements of the new utopia were easy to discern. The Shi'a minority in the eastern province would be decimated and the Saudi liberals molded on the campuses of California and Texas would be swept aside in a zealous, frenzied campaign. Traffic with the infidels would be brought to an end, and those dreaded satellite dishes bringing the West's cultural "pollution" would be taken down. But for this to pass, the roots of the American presence in Arabia would have to be extirpated—and the Americans driven from the country.

The new unrest, avowedly religious, stemmed from the austerity that came to Saudi Arabia after Desert Storm. If the rulers could not subsidize as generously as they had in the past, the foreigner and his schemes and overcharges must be to blame. The dissidents were not cultists but men of their society, half-learned in Western sources and trends, picking foreign sources to illustrate the subjugation that America held in store for Arabia. Pamphletting had come into the realm, and rebellion proved contagious. A dissident steps out of the shadows, then respectable critics, then others come forth. Xenophobic men were now agitating against the "crusaders" who had come to stay. "This has been a bigger calamity than I had expected, bigger than any threat the Arabian Peninsula had faced since God Almighty created it," wrote the religious scholar Safar al-Hawali, a master practitioner of the paranoid style in politics. The Americans, he warned, had come to dominate Arabia and unleash on it the West's dreaded morals.

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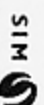
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"There can be no doubt that these attacks are deliberate acts of terrorism, carefully planned and coordinated ... and as such I condemn them utterly"

— Secretary-General Kofi Annan (9/11/01)

"Expresses its condolences and solidarity with the people and Government of the United States"

— UN General Assembly Resolution 56/1 (9/12/01)

"Calls on all States to work together ... and stresses that those responsible for aiding, supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these acts will be held accountable"

— UN Security Council Resolution 1368 (9/12/01)

"Expresses its readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorists attacks"

— UN Security Council Resolution 1368 (9/12/01)



Within 24 hours of the terrorist attacks on America, the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council, under the leadership of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, condemned these barbaric acts and voted to support actions to bring to justice those responsible and those who harbored them.

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Saudi Arabia had been free of the anticolonial complex seen in states such as Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. But the simplicity of that Arabian-American encounter now belonged to the past. A *fatwa* (Islamic decree) of the senior religious jurist in the realm, Sheikh Abdelaziz ibn Baz, gave away the hazards of the U.S. presence in Arabia. Ibn Baz declared the Khobar bombing a "transgression against the teachings of Islam." The damage to lives and property befell many people, "Muslims and others alike," he wrote. These "non-Muslims" had been granted a pledge of safety. The sheikh found enough scripture and tradition to see a cruel end for those who pulled off the "criminal act." There was a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "He who killed an ally will never know the smell of paradise." And there was God's word in the Koran: "Those that make war against Allah and his apostle and spread disorder in the land shall be put to death or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides; or be banished from the country; They shall be held to shame in this world and sternly punished in the next." The sheikh permitted himself a drapery of decency. There was no need to specify the identity of the victims or acknowledge that the Americans were in the land. There had remained in the jurist some scruples and restraints of the faith.

In ibn Baz's world, faith was about order and a dread of anarchy. But in the shadows, a different version of the faith was being sharpened as a weapon of war. Two years later, bin Ladin issued an incendiary *fatwa* of his own—a call for murder and holy warfare that was interpreted in these pages by the historian Bernard Lewis. Never mind that by the faith's strictures and practice, bin Ladin had no standing to issue religious decrees. He had grabbed the faith and called on Muslims to kill "Americans and their allies ... in any country in which it is possible to do so." A sacred realm apart, Arabia had been overrun by Americans, bin Ladin said. "For more than seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people, threatening its neighbors, and using its peninsula as a spearhead to fight the neighboring Islamic peoples." Xenophobia of a murderous kind had been dressed up in religious garb.

INTO THE SHADOWS

THE ATTACK on the *Cole* on October 12, 2000, was a case apart. Two men in a skiff crippled the *Cole* as it docked in Aden to refuel. Witnesses say that the assailants, who perished with their victims, were standing erect at the time of the blast, as if in some kind of salute. The United States controlled the sea lanes of that world, but the nemesis that stalked it on those shores lay beyond America's reach. "The attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* ... demonstrated a seam in the fabric of efforts to protect our forces, namely transit forces," a military commission said. But the official language could not describe or name the furies at play.

The attack on the *Cole* illuminated the U.S. security dilemma in the Persian Gulf. For the U.S. Navy, Yemen had not been a particularly easy or friendly setting. It had taken a ride with Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. In 1994, a brutal war had been fought in Yemen between north and south, along lines of ideology and tribalism. The troubles of Yemen were bottomless. The government was barely in control of its territory and coastline. Aden was a place of drifters and smugglers. Moreover, the suspected paymaster of anti-American terror, bin Ladin, had ancestral roots in Hadramawt, the southeastern part of Yemen, and he had many sympathizers there.

It would have been prudent to look at Yemen and Aden with a jaundiced eye. But by early 1999, American ships had begun calling there. U.S. officials had no brilliant options south of the Suez Canal, they would later concede. The ports of call in Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea were places where the "threat conditions" were high, perhaps worse than in Yemen. The United States had a privileged position in Saudi Arabia, but there had been trouble there as well for U.S. forces: the terrorist attacks in 1995 and 1996, which took 24 American lives. American commanders and planners knew the hazards of Yemen, but the U.S. Navy had taken a chance on the country. Terrorists moved through Yemen at will, but American military planners could not find ideal refueling conditions in a region of great volatility. This was the imperial predicament put in stark, cruel terms.

John Burns of *The New York Times* sent a dispatch of unusual clarity from Aden about the *Cole* and the response on the ground to the terrible deed. In Yemen, the reporter saw "a halting, half-expressed sense of

astonishment, sometimes of satisfaction and even pleasure, that a mighty power, the United States, should have its Navy humbled by two Arab men in a motorized skiff." Such was imperial presence, the Pax Americana in Arab and Muslim lands.

There were men in the shadows pulling off spectacular deeds. But they fed off a free-floating anti-Americanism that blows at will and knows no bounds, among Islamists and secularists alike. For the crowds in Karachi, Cairo, and Amman, the great power could never get it right. A world lacking the tools and the political space for free inquiry fell back on anti-Americanism. "I talk to my daughter-in-law so my neighbor can hear me," goes an Arabic maxim. In the fury with which the intellectual and political class rallied against the United States and Israel, the agitated were speaking to and of their own rulers. Sly and cunning men, the rulers knew and understood the game. There would be no open embrace of America, and no public defense of it. They would stay a step ahead of the crowd and give the public the safety valve it needed. The more pro-American the regime, the more anti-American the political class and the political tumult. The United States could grant generous aid to the Egyptian state, but there would be no dampening of the anti-American fury of the Egyptian political class. Its leading state-backed dailies crackled with the wildest theories of U.S.-Israeli conspiracies against their country.

On September 11, 2001, there was an unmistakable sense of glee and little sorrow among upper-class Egyptians for the distant power—only satisfaction that America had gotten its comeuppance. After nearly three decades of American solicitude of Egypt, after the steady traffic between the two lands, there were no genuine friends for America to be found in a curiously hostile, disgruntled land.

Egyptians have long been dissatisfied with their country's economic and military performance, a pain born of the gap between Egypt's exalted idea of itself and the poverty and foreign dependence that have marked its modern history. The rage against Israel and the United States stems from that history of lament and frustration. So much of Egypt's life lies beyond the scrutiny and the reach of its newspapers and pundits—the ruler's ways, the authoritarian state, the matter of succession to Mubarak, the joint military exercises with U.S. and Egyptian forces, and so on. The animus toward America

and Israel gives away the frustration of a polity raging against the hard, disillusioning limits of its political life.

In the same vein, Jordan's enlightened, fragile monarchy was bound to the United States by the strategic ties that a skilled King Hussein had nurtured for decades. But a mood of anger and seething radicalism had settled on Jordan. The country was increasingly poorer, and the fault line between Palestinians and East Bankers was a steady source of mutual suspicion. If the rulers made peace with Israel, "civil society" and the professional syndicates would spurn it. Even though the late king had deep ties with the distant imperial power, the country would remain unreconciled to this pro-American stance. Jordan would be richer, it was loudly proclaimed, if only the sanctions on Iraq had been lifted, if only the place had been left to gravitate into Iraq's economic orbit. Jordan's new king, Abdullah II, could roll out the red carpet for Powell when the general turned up in Jordan recently on a visit that had the distinct sense of a victory lap by a soldier revisiting his early triumph. But the throngs were there with placards, and banners were aloft branding the visitor a "war criminal." This kind of fury a distant power can never overcome. Policy can never speak to wrath. Step into the thicket (as Bill Clinton did in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) and the foreign power is damned for its reach. Step back, as George W. Bush did in the first months of his presidency, and Pax Americana is charged with abdication and indifference.

THE SIEGE

The power secured during Desert Storm was destined not to last. The United States could not indefinitely quarantine Iraq. It was idle to think that the broad coalition cobbled together during an unusually perilous moment in 1990-91 would stand as a permanent arrangement. The demographic and economic weight of Iraq and Iran meant that those countries were bound to reassert themselves. The United States had done well in the Persian Gulf by Iraq's brazen revisionism and the Iranian Revolution's assault on its neighboring states. It had been able to negotiate the terms of the U.S. presence—the positioning of equipment in the oil states, the establishment of a tripwire in Kuwait, the acceptance of an American troop presence on the Arabian



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Peninsula—at a time when both Iran and Iraq were on a rampage. Hence the popular concerns that had hindered the American presence in the Persian Gulf were brushed aside in the 1990s. But this lucky run was bound to come to an end. Iraq steadily chipped away at the sanctions, which over time were seen as nothing but an Anglo-American siege of a brutalized Iraqi population.

The campaign against Saddam Hussein had been waged during a unique moment in Arab politics. Some Muslim jurists in Saudi Arabia and Egypt even ruled that Saddam had run afoul of Islam's strictures, and that an alliance with foreign powers to check his aggression and tyranny was permissible under Islamic law. A part of the Arabian Peninsula that had hitherto wanted America "over the horizon" was eager to have American protection against a "brother" who had shredded all the pieties of pan-Arab solidarity. But the Iraqi dictator hunkered down, outlasting the foreign power's terrible campaign. He was from the neighborhood and knew its rules. He worked his way into the local order of things.

The Iraqi ruler knew well the distress that settled on the region after Pax Americana's swift war. All around Iraq, the region was poorer: oil prices had slumped, and the war had been expensive for the oil states that financed it. Oil states suspected they were being overbilled for military services and for weapons that they could not afford. The war's murky outcome fed the belief that the thing had been rigged all along, that Saddam Hussein had been lured into Kuwait by an American green light—and then kept in power and let off the hook—so that Pax Americana would have the pretext for stationing its forces in the region. The Iraqi ruler then set out to show the hollowness of the hegemony of a disinterested American imperium.

A crisis in 1996 laid bare the realities for the new imperium. Saddam Hussein brazenly sent his squads of assassins into the "safe haven" that the United States had marked out for the Kurds in northern Iraq after Desert Storm. He sacked that region and executed hundreds who had cast their fate with American power. America was alone this time around. The two volleys of Tomahawk missiles fired against Iraqi air-defense installations had to be launched from U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf and B-52 bombers that flew in from Guam. No one was fooled by the American response; no one believed that the foreign

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power would stay. U.S. officials wrote off that episode as an internal Kurdish fight, the doings of a fratricidal people. A subsequent air campaign—"fire and forget," skeptics dubbed it—gave the illusion of resolve and containment. But Clinton did not have his heart in that fight. He had put his finger to the wind and divined the mood in the land: there was no public tolerance for a major campaign against Saddam Hussein.

By the time the Bush administration stepped in, its leaders would find a checkered landscape. There was their old nemesis in Baghdad, wounded but not killed. There was a decade of Clintonianism that had invested its energy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but had paid the Persian Gulf scant attention. There was a pattern of half-hearted responses to terrorist attacks, pinpricks that fooled no one.

HAVING IT HIS WAY

It was into this witch's brew that Arafat launched the second intifada last year. In a rare alignment, there had come Arafat's way a U.S. president keen to do his best and an Israeli soldier-statesman eager to grant the Palestinian leader all the Israeli body politic could yield—and then some. Arafat turned away from what was offered and headed straight back into his people's familiar history: the maximalism, the inability to read what can and cannot be had in a world of nations. He would wait for the "Arab street" to rise up in rebellion and force Pax Americana to redeem his claims. He would again let play on his people the old dream that they could have it all, from the river to the sea. He must know better, he must know the scales of power, it is reasonable to presume. But there still lurks in the Palestinian and Arab imagination a view, depicted by the Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui, that "on a certain day, everything would be obliterated and instantaneously reconstructed and the new inhabitants would leave, as if by magic, the land they had despoiled." Arafat knew the power of this redemptive idea. He must have reasoned that it is safer to ride that idea, and that there will always be another day and another offer.

For all the fury of this second intifada, a supreme irony hangs over Palestinian history. In the early 1990s, the Palestinians had nothing to lose. Pariahs in the Arab councils of power, they made their best

historical decision—the peace of Oslo—only when they broke with the maximalism of their political tradition. It was then that they crossed from Arab politics into internal Israeli politics and, courtesy of Israel, into the orbit of Pax Americana. Their recent return into inter-Arab politics was the resumption of an old, failed history.

Better the fire of an insurrection than the risks of reconciling his people to a peace he had not prepared them for: this was Arafat's way. This is why he spurned the offer at Camp David in the summer of 2000. "Yasir Arafat rode home on a white horse" from Camp David, said one of his aides, Nabil Shaath. He had shown that he "still cared about Jerusalem and the refugees." He had stood up, so Shaath said, to the combined pressure of the Americans and the Israelis. A creature of his time and his world, Arafat had come into his own amid the recriminations that followed the Arab defeat in 1948. Palestine had become an Arab shame, and the hunt for demons and sacrificial lambs would shape Arab politics for many years.

A temporizer and a trimmer, Arafat did not have it in him to tell the 1948 refugees in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan that they were no more likely to find political satisfaction than were the Jews of Alexandria, Fez, Baghdad, and Beirut who were banished from Arab lands following Israel's statehood. He lit the fuse of this second intifada in the hope that others would put out the flame. He had become a player in Israeli politics, and there came to him this peculiar satisfaction that he could topple Israeli prime ministers, wait them out, and force an outside diplomatic intervention that would tip the scales in his favor. He could not give his people a decent public order and employ and train the young, but he could launch a war in the streets that would break Israel's economic momentum and rob it of the normalcy brought by the peace of Oslo.

Arafat had waited for rain, but on September 11, 2001, there had come the floods. "This is a new kind of war, a new kind of battlefield, and the United States will need the help of Arab and Muslim countries," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat announced. The Palestinian issue, he added, was "certainly one of the reasons" for the attacks against the United States. An American-led brigade against terrorism was being assembled. America was set to embark on another expedition into Arab-Muslim domains, and Arafat fell back on the old consolation

that Arab assets would be traded on his people's behalf. A dowry would have to be offered to the Arab participants in this brigade: a U.S.-imposed settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A cover would be needed for Arab regimes nervous about riding with the foreigner's posse, and it stood to reason that Arafat would claim that he could provide that kind of cover.

The terror that hit America sprang from entirely different sources. The plotters had been in American flight schools long before the "suicide martyrs" and the "children of the stones" had answered Arafat's call for an intifada. But the Palestinian leader and his lieutenants eagerly claimed that the fire raging in their midst had inspired the anti-American terror. A decade earlier, the Palestinians had hailed Saddam Hussein's bid for primacy in the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, they had been given a claim on the peace—a role at the Madrid Conference of October 1991 and a solicitous U.S. policy. American diplomacy had arrived in the nick of time; the first intifada had burned out and degenerated into a hunt for demons and "collaborators." A similar fate lies in wait for the second intifada. It is reasonable to assume that Arafat expects rescue of a similar kind from the new American drive into Arab and Muslim lands.

No veto over national policies there will be given to Arafat. The states will cut their own deals. In the best of worlds, Pax Americana is doomed to a measure of solitude in the Middle East. This time around, the American predicament is particularly acute. Deep down, the Arab regimes feel that the threat of political Islam to their own turfs has been checked, and that no good can come out of an explicit public alliance with an American campaign in their midst. Foreign powers come and go, and there is very little protection they can provide against the wrath of an angry crowd. It is a peculiarity of the Arab-Islamic political culture that a ruler's authoritarianism is more permissible than his identification with Western powers—think of the fates of Sadat and of the Pahlavis of Iran.

Ride with the foreigners at your own risk, the region's history has taught. Syria's dictator, Hafiz al-Assad, died a natural death at a ripe

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Above: Reza Khan with Sharas Pahlavi and Ali Reza Pahlavi, Johanneburg, 1944. Courtesy of the IICHS.

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The Sentry's Solitude

old age, and his life could be seen as a kind of success. He never set foot on American soil and had stayed within his world. In contrast, the flamboyant Sadat courted foreign countries and came to a solitary, cruel end; his land barely grieved for him. A foreign power that stands sentry in that world cannot spare its local allies the retribution of those who brand them "collaborators" and betrayers of the faith. A coalition is in the offing, America has come calling, urging the region's rulers to "choose sides." What these rulers truly dread has come to pass: they might have to make fateful choices under the gaze of populations in the throes of a malignant anti-Americanism. The ways of that world being what they are, the United States will get more cooperation from the ministers of interior and the secret services than it will from the foreign ministers and the diplomatic interlocutors. There will be allies in the shadows, but in broad daylight the rulers will mostly keep their distance. Pakistan's ruler, Pervez Musharraf, has made a brave choice. The rulers all around must be reading a good deal of their worries into his attempt to stay the course and keep his country intact.

A broad coalition may give America the comfort that it is not alone in the Muslim world. A strike against Afghanistan is the easiest of things—far away from the troubles in the Persian Gulf and Egypt, from the head of the trail in Arab lands. The Taliban are the Khmer Rouge of this era and thus easy to deal with. The frustrations to come lie in the more ambiguous and impenetrable realms of the Arab world. Those were not Afghans who flew into those towers of glass and steel and crashed into the Pentagon. They were from the Arab world, where anti-Americanism is fierce, where terror works with the hidden winks that men and women make at the perpetrators of the grimmest of deeds.

BRAVE OLD WORLD

"WHEN THOSE PLANES flew into those buildings, the luck of America ran out," Leon Wieseltier recently wrote in *The New Republic*. The 1990s were a lucky decade, a fool's paradise. But we had not arrived at the end of history, not by a long shot. Markets had not annulled historical passions, and a high-tech world's electronic age had not yet

dawned. So in thwarted, resentful societies there was satisfaction on September 11 that the American bull run and the triumphalism that had awed the world had been battered, that there was soot and ruin in New York's streets. We know better now. Pax Americana is there to stay in the oil lands and in Israeli-Palestinian matters. No large-scale retreat from those zones of American primacy can be contemplated. American hegemony is sure to hold—and so, too, the resistance to it, the uneasy mix in those lands of the need for the foreigner's order, and the urge to lash out against it, to use it and rail against it all the same.

There is now the distinct thunder of war. The first war of the twenty-first century is to be fought not so far from where the last inconclusive war of the twentieth century was waged against Iraq. The war will not be easy for America in those lands. The setting will test it in ways it has not been tested before. There will be regimes asking for indulgence for their own terrible fights against Islamists and for logistical support. There will be rulers offering the bait of secrets that their security services have accumulated through means at odds with American norms. Conversely, friends and sympathizers of terror will pass themselves off as constitutionalists and men and women of the "civil society." They will find shelter behind pluralist norms while aiding and abetting the forces of terror. There will be chameleons good at posing as America's friends but never turning up when needed. There will be one way of speaking to Americans, and another of letting one's population know that words are merely a pretense. There will step forth informers, hushers of every shade, offering to guide the foreign power through the minefields and alleyways. America, which once held the world at a distance, will have to be willing to stick around eastern lands. It is both heart-breaking and ironic that so quintessentially American a figure as George W. Bush—a man who grew up in Midland, Texas, far removed from the complications of foreign places—must be the one to take his country on a journey into so alien, so difficult, a world. ☉

Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires

Milton Bearden

THE GREAT GAME

MICHNI POINT, Pakistan's last outpost at the western end of the barren, winding Khyber Pass, stands sentinel over Torgham Gate, the deceptively orderly border crossing into Afghanistan. Frontier Scouts in gray *shalwar kameezes* (traditional tunics and loose pants) and black berets patrol the lonely station commanded by a major of the legendary Khyber Rifles, the militia force that has been guarding the border with Afghanistan since the nineteenth century, first for British India and then for Pakistan. This spot, perhaps more than any other, has witnessed the traverse of the world's great armies on campaigns of conquest to and from South and Central Asia. All eventually ran into trouble in their encounters with the unruly Afghan tribals.

Alexander the Great sent his supply trains through the Khyber, then skirted northward with his army to the Konar Valley on his campaign in 327 B.C. There he ran into fierce resistance and, struck by an Afghan archer's arrow, barely made it to the Indus River with his life. Genghis Khan and the great Mughal emperors began passing through the Khyber a millennium later and ultimately established the greatest of empires—but only after reaching painful accommodations with the Afghans. From Michni Point, a trained eye can still see the ruins of the Mughal signal towers used to relay complex torch-light messages 1,500 miles from Calcutta to Bukhara in less than an hour.

MILTON BEARDEN served as CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989, where he was responsible for that agency's covert action program in support of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet-supported government.