

*Carl Boggs*

## The Many Faces of Terrorism

by  
Carl Boggs

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### BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY:

*No End To War*  
By Walter Laqueur

*A Long Short War*  
By Christopher Hitchens

*Why We Are At War*  
By Norman Mailer

*What Next*  
Walter Mosley

*Why Do People Hate America?*  
By Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies

*The War Against the Terror Masters*  
By Michael Ledeen

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Public discourse on terrorism in the United States has been shrouded in a maze of self-serving myths and platitudes, all the more so since the horrors of 9/11 brought jihadic violence to American shores. The threat is so emotionally charged as to seemingly overwhelm the kind of critical, in-depth thinking required for productive journalistic reporting or scholarship. Within the post-9/11 milieu already impoverished political debate has descended to even further depths, surpassing even election campaigns, official government propaganda, and corporate media sound-bites when it comes to commentary on terrorism and war. Such commentary, often little better in the realm of academic work, typically reflects a parochial outlook that depicts a world divided between an unquestionably good (democratic, modern, enlightened)

America and its primitive, barbaric challengers who stand for everything that is evil.

We find ourselves immersed in a public sphere deeply influenced by an intensely patriotic civic culture where distinctly American experiences and interests furnish the main, if not *only*, yardstick for judging global realities. As with all such caricatures, the social and historical becomes obscured, virtually ruling out worthwhile political analysis. An epic development lies behind this phenomenon: U.S. imperial power has now achieved such worldwide hegemony that its very categories of thought and action have been thoroughly assimilated by large sectors of the Western intelligentsia, with alternative views predictably marginalized.

The rise and spread of international terrorism is surely more complex and multifaceted than its mainstream interpreters appear willing to concede. A balanced assessment will reveal the emergence of *many* terrorisms, indeed several rival definitions of what now seems endemic to a Hobbesian universe filled with chaos and violence. There is no general consensus or single theory—a point convincingly argued by Walter Lacqueur in perhaps the first sober historical exploration of terrorism to date. If terrorism, international and local, state and substate, right and leftwing, is best understood as the violent pursuit of religious, national, or political aims, then the specific (and *variable*) conditions of its birth and growth must be more solidly grasped. One credible view is to locate specifically anti-U.S. terrorism as a reaction to American global power, as a form of blowback—integral to the deadly cycle of militarism and terrorism. The mainstream view sidesteps even *contemplating* this possibility: “terrorism” is reduced to the tormented deeds of madmen, fanatics, primitive usurpers of “modernity”, guided by nothing so much as motives of hatred and revenge. Or: terrorism simply amounts to what U.S. government officials and defenders say it is—violent actions directed against (presumably innocuous) Western targets.

For critics of U.S. foreign and military policy, however, the conventional mythology barely conceals an imperial juggernaut determined to control the world by every method at its disposal. With the ascendancy of President Bush II and a resurgent U.S. militarism, this facade is increasingly transparent at the very moment when an expanding chorus of cheerleaders for Empire grows louder. The neoconservative hawks presently in command make no secret of their global ambitions, ideally liberated from binding international norms, rules, treaties, and laws. Theirs is indeed a Darwinian universe of

Realpolitik unfettered by any serious limits to the raw, direct exercise of American power.

In such a *real* world, of course, the massive deployment of military force by a single unchallenged power is likely to breed resistance and counterforce, including terrorism. Critics like Chalmers Johnson and Eqbal Ahmad understood this dialectic well *before* the events of 9/11. It is to Lacqueur's credit that he refuses to succumb to the prevailing fashion regarding a peculiarly barbaric Islamic terrorism, turning instead toward a grounded historical account that, as in his earlier book (*The New Terrorism*) sets forth as balanced and informed a picture as could be expected from a writer with such impeccable establishment credentials. Despite a clear sympathy for U.S. global agendas, Lacqueur's work is laden with critical insights questioning the received political wisdom. He stresses what by now should be obvious—there is no “general theory” of terrorism, no consensus about how to define it. He investigates the historical and geopolitical panorama, covering a wide spectrum of terrorist groups, identifying contemporary *Islamic* terrorism as a revolt against broadening U.S. (and Israeli) power in the Middle East. Without addressing the theme of blowback directly, Lacqueur refers to this particular terrorist violence as containing an anti-imperialist logic, tortured and futile as that logic might be. He recognizes that modern warfare as conducted by powerful states obliterates boundaries between military and civilian targets, just as it effectively blurs the lines dividing state and substate violence. He emphasizes that the carnage wrought by local terrorism has been much less deadly than that resulting from conventional state warfare, although this equation could be radically altered once terrorists lay hold of nuclear or biological weapons. Lacqueur goes so far as to judge standard government-organized military action on the same level as terrorism, but never gets around to spelling out its implications for U.S. global behavior.

Lacqueur ultimately falls back on the problematic concept of “asymmetric warfare,” according to which substate groups have a privileged status relative to legitimate governments that are confined to the straightjacket of universal laws and ethics. Terrorists attacking state power are said to have greater maneuverability owing to lack of moral restraints on their actions; their violence is generally more random and nihilistic. At the same time, Lacqueur himself repeatedly shows how terrorism differs profoundly relative to time and place: violent attacks on British imperial power during the American revolutionary war and partisan resistance against the Nazis in World War II will be judged quite differently from, say, the Oklahoma City bombing.

Methods cannot be judged apart from historical context and political goals. The “asymmetric” premise evaporates the minute one casts more than a cursory glance at twentieth-century history. Nazi barbarism, widespread targeting of civilian populations in aerial warfare beginning with Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, the Vietnam carnage, indeed the entire legacy of Western colonial subjugation were all the product of systematic governmental planning and operations. The postwar rise of techno-war and diffusion of weapons of mass destruction further demonstrates the concept to be just another comforting, self-serving illusion. One might expect more sophisticated analysis from scholars writing from the vantage-point of one perhaps the most violent state in history, but such is the seductive power of imperial ideology. No expert in the field of international relations, the novelist Walter Mosley has put the matter differently: “We, as a nation, are not innocent. We have killed. We have slaughtered. We have filled mass graves and moved on without a word of apology or sign of lament.”(p.126)

Lacqueur points out that radical Islam, for better or worse, entered into an ideological void left when the enduring political traditions (Communist, fascist, liberal, nationalist) had begun to fade away. Of course religion is one belief system that can readily fill this void, but it furnishes no coherent political strategy that could address economic and global problems or inspire social transformation; it is “anti-imperialist” without posing any viable alternative to Empire. As for Islamic militancy, its assaults on U.S. power have probably done more to reinforce than to undermine that power.

Still, radical Islam appeals to tens of millions of people around the world, and here Lacqueur refuses the common impulse to situate terrorist evolution within confined geographical zones like Palestine, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf. A signal contribution of *No End to War* is the attention it devotes to the worldwide dispersion of jihadism, its serpentine journeys through the European continent, Africa, the Balkans, Central Asia, Russia, the Far East, and the U.S. itself followed closely. In contrast to government and media caricatures, Islamic militancy flourishes in decentralized networks across Germany, England, France, and Spain, where thousands of Muslims pass through radicalized mosques, schools, and cells. Do we need to be reminded that most of the planning behind 9/11 took place in Germany? While nearly all the hijackers were Saudi citizens, they mostly spent their formative years in Europe. All were drawn to militancy by the protracted fighting in Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya, and the Balkans, and were driven to further outrage by the U.S. military presence close to the holy lands

of Saudi Arabia along with the war and sanctions against Iraq. Lacqueur writes many pages on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, suggesting that the occupation, aggravated by years of Israeli political arrogance and rigidity tied to its own brand of fundamentalism, has contributed to the growth not only of Hamas and Hizbollah but Al Qaeda.

Like many writers across the political spectrum, Lacqueur is fixated on what is commonly said to be the debilitating “intelligence failures” leading up to 9/11. No doubt the FBI and CIA, not to mention a few other government agencies, lacked full awareness of the growing threat of international terrorism that should have been obvious (at least to *them*) by the late 1990s. Repeated warnings of imminent large-scale actions were downplayed or ignored. Coordination between agencies was lacking. Rightwing commentators have saddled President Clinton with this by default but, as Lacqueur makes clear, President Bush received abundant warnings of forthcoming Al Qaeda attacks using hijacked planes as late as August 2001. We now know that the audacious maneuvers of 9/11 caught all U.S. leaders totally off guard, in part because the attacks so dramatically upended the familiar pattern of strictly limited, localized terrorist actions.

Explaining this epic failure is yet another matter. Lacqueur refers to several factors: lack of skilled FBI and CIA agents who could penetrate radical Islamic networks, an intelligence obsession with *states* as the locus of major threats, a tendency to view terrorists as mere thugs, psychopaths, and criminals, and simple incompetence. The deeper problem, as Lacqueur himself appears to recognize but then forgets at the moment of analysis, is far more revealing—and embarrassing. Terrorism as a distinctly Islamic challenge was downplayed by the entire political establishment—not just intelligence agencies—because the U.S. in the early 1980s entered into a fateful partnership with Islamic fundamentalism to aid the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union and Communism. The Afghan wars of the 1980s and early 1990s, largely instigated by the U.S. to bring the Soviets their “own Vietnam”, was a crucial turning point insofar as “radical Islam and the terrorist movement received their main impetus from the war in Afghanistan.” (p.19) Bin Laden and Al Qaeda were largely creatures of America’s own jihad. Not only the FBI and CIA, but more tellingly the NSA (as James Bamford shows in *Body of Secrets*), were completely unprepared for anything on the scale of 9/11, although the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 should have been warning enough. The elites remained caught up in Cold War thinking, the bulk of resources going to investigate (mostly non-

existing) threats from Russia and China. Meanwhile, both the Clinton and Bush administrations were sidetracked by the costly (and counterproductive) war on drugs. So 9/11 not only illuminated a catastrophic flaw in the intelligence apparatus but a more telling *political* blindness across the entire power structure. It was a disaster borne of outmoded priorities combined with remarkable hubris and ideological rigidity.

The situation in the Balkans deserves special mention here. Paralleling the strong investigative work of Diana Johnstone (in *Fool's Crusade*), Lacqueur shows how U.S.-organized and funded Islamic radicalism played a vital role in Bosnia and Kosovo as the U.S. and its NATO allies moved against Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs. Many Afghan veterans fought in the Balkans throughout the 1990s, fully encouraged by the U.S., and in Chechnya. He shows that mujahideen groups fighting in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya had little interest in the ideological rationalizations of Western elites: democracy, multiculturalism, a secular state. Well after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, it was possible to speak of the "Talibanization" of Bosnia and Kosovo as these regions came under the influence of roughly the same fundamentalist groups that comprise Al Qaeda. Though mostly ignored by Western media and politicians, the Balkans even today remain something of a base for Islamic jihad. As with the mujahideen in Afghanistan, former military partners in the Balkans no longer obediently follow the dictates of U.S. Empire.

If terrorism can hit vulnerable targets and traumatize entire nations as it grabs worldwide media attention, when viewed as a strictly political method it has been an abject failure, according to Lacqueur. Random, secretly-organized violent attacks not only provoke authoritarian state response, but when carried out in isolation from broader popular struggles run counter to the requirements of mass mobilization and social change. Terrorism naturally operates best in underground conditions, insulating its partisans from the everyday rhythms of social and political life. Its modus operandi, geared to a destabilizing "strategy of tension", ultimately favors repression and order, so that ". . . while many of the guerrilla movements emerged victorious, few if any of the terrorist groups did." (p.142) So long as insurgent terrorist groups are understood to be completely localized, self-contained, cut off from national politics, this generalization seems valid enough. It would surely apply to such well-known leftist groups as the Red Brigades, Baader-Meinhoff, and Weather Underground. The problem is that Lacqueur ignores his own caveat—that any useful analysis of terrorism must take into account historical

context. Terrorist actions have indeed frequently converged with popular struggles, including a long series of guerrilla insurgencies, mass movements, and nationalist revolutions. The strict contrasting of terrorism with more efficacious modes of political action cannot be sustained by historical evidence—one need only look at the American, Russian, Irish, and Algerian revolutions, for example, or the European-wide partisan resistance against the Nazis. As Lacqueur himself concedes, many established modern states (including Algeria, Israel and South Africa) were forged in a milieu of widespread terrorist operations—scarcely a measure of political failure. The political futility of *Islamic* terrorism may simply be a function of its own *particular* isolation.

MEANWHILE, AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE HAS BEEN PECULIARLY inoculated against such debates: after all, if terrorism is nothing but an evil scourge, the work of unspeakable monsters, there is nothing much to discuss. As Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies show in *Why do People Hate America?*, U.S. public opinion is extremely provincial, marked by lack of curiosity regarding how people from other countries live, think, and act. Despite unprecedented affluence, mobility, and access to information, despite huge enrollments at colleges and universities, Americans at the start of the twenty-first century turn out to be remarkably culture-bound. Surveys reveal a frightening ignorance of global issues. Thus it is easy to see how, with the end of the Cold War, the label “terrorist” could be so routinely and unthinkingly affixed to individuals, groups, and states simply deemed hostile to U.S. interests or policies. While Sardar and Davies seem to prefer the top-down propaganda model, in reality such attitudes have deeply resonated across American society—among politicians, on the streets, among literati and academics—throughout much of U.S. history.

The endlessly-asked question “Why do they hate us?” reveals a good deal about the political culture. While “they” now usually refers to Arabs and Muslims, the “us” part of the formulation assumes a wounded innocence, a sense of victimization in a nation surrounded by terrible enemies. If the focus shifts to the concrete policies and actions of an aggressive superpower, then the questions might be phrased differently: why do Americans hate Arabs? Why does the U.S. so frequently intervene, economically, politically, and militarily, in the life of other countries? Why does the U.S. support Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory even as it proclaims an evenhandedness? Why did the U.S. and its allies impose such brutal sanctions on Iraq? Why

has the U.S. so often violated international laws and treaties established to regulate global conflict?

“Hatred” in fact turns out to be the predictable response of people who see themselves as victims of American power. That some might channel their feelings toward violence should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the many faces of global conflict. For people harmed by U.S. military actions, “terrorism” will be understood as a just reaction to what is experienced as an even more devastating kind of violence, *state* terrorism. For most Americans it is more convenient to frame others’ violent actions as undistilled evil, bereft of human rationality or motive. As with President Bush’s “axis of evil”, such thinking rules out historical reflection and critical thought essential to open debate without which any genuine democratic process is inconceivable. Sardar and Davies observe that the well-worn fixation on evil serves as a cover for willful ignorance, xenophobia, and, in the end, military action against the designated malignancy.

U.S. citizens tend to see their government as an exemplary purveyor of freedom and democracy even as it routinely props up authoritarian regimes around the world. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the majority of Americans remain convinced their leaders are fully committed to peace and human rights. They believe the U.S. is an enforcer of international law and the U.N. Charter, although it is a flagrant violator of those norms. Sardar and Davies rightly call attention to the legitimating functions of “flag patriotism,” an ideology that endows U.S. imperial behavior with a patina of self-righteous exceptionalism. Super-patriotism might be compared to the mindset of fiercely-loyal sports fans who cheer the home team regardless of its past record. Taken to chauvinistic extremes, this is an ideology that readily lends itself to objectification and dehumanization of other cultures, thereby establishing them as perfect targets for military assault.

Venturing into the realm of U.S. foreign policy, Norman Mailer takes up exactly this concern, starting with the events of 9/11 and the “mass identity crisis” they provoked. In loose but emotionally-charged prose, he writes of how the attacks and their aftershocks have brought new levels of anxiety, fear, and paranoia to American public life. Dismissing the purported newfound sense of national unity, Mailer finds instead an “odious self-serving patriotism” (p.15) infecting an American politics already diminished by the cult of violence, fetishism of technology, election frauds, and growing corporate colonization. He sees an ideological emptiness feeding into a

renewed crisis of governance for the political class, a development that 9/11 brought to the surface while at the same time providing new opportunities for “resolving” that crisis. One way out of the conundrum has been to extend U.S. global power, to celebrate the virtues of Empire, hoping thereby to refashion something of a domestic consensus. Mailer believes that an ersatz patriotism wedded to a revitalized militarism represents a desperate remedy for a nation that long ago had grown ideologically and culturally dissolute.

Corporate globalization, the war on terrorism, the doctrine of preemptive strikes, aggressive moves in the Middle East, a bloated military-industrial complex—all this is the product of an imperial agenda having precious little to do with the requirements of national security. If the war on terrorism constitutes the ideal formula for strengthening elite power, a more robust patriotism serves as the cornerstone of its mass legitimating ideology. After 9/11, Mailer writes, “we were plunged into a fever of patriotism. If our long-term comfortable and complacent sense that America was just the greatest country ever had been brought into doubt, the instinctive reflex was to reaffirm ourselves. We had to overcome the identity crisis—hell, overpower it, wave a flag.” (p.12) True enough, though Mailer glosses over the fact that such imperial sentiments were hardly new and had already been given a rather aggressive formulation by neocon “defense intellectuals” anxious to redirect U.S. foreign policy. And these sentiments became increasingly palatable to a public bombarded with the daily rantings of a jingoistic corporate media.

A self-defined “left-conservative,” Mailer argues the system is so ideologically frail that warfare has become a safety-valve for deep contradictions ranging from economic stagnation to resource needs to ongoing electoral worries of politicians. War and preparation for war revive the national psyche, offering sense of empowerment along with the allure of high-tech entertainment. And terrorism, even more than Communism before it, furnishes the perfect target insofar as it conjures images of unspeakably criminal villains carrying out evil designs against innocent civilians, whereas Communism, though Godless and evil, was always a more distinctly *political* threat that could be fought by more ordinary measures. The obligation of patriotic citizens to stand up, fight back, and help vanquish the evildoers fits the domestic even more than the global needs of the system. Thus: “Flag conservatives truly believe America is not only fit to run the world but that it must. Without a commitment to Empire the country will go down the drain.” (p.53) If Mailer proves to be

right, the future implications of such desperate imperial maneuvers might be too horrifying to contemplate.

If U.S. ruling elites are indeed facing a crisis of legitimacy—and if patriotic mobilization rushes to fill the ideological vacuum—the fate of democratic politics will be increasingly tenuous. The Bush-Rumsfeld-Ashcroft attack on civil liberties after 9/11 is but one manifestation of a shriveling public sphere. For many years it was apparent that liberal-capitalism had lost its legitimating force, unable to provide either historical analysis or future vision. Mailer is not altogether lucid about such issues, but he does indulge his “left” sensibilities when arguing what indeed should be commonplace: as corporations accrue more leverage, elites are left with few interests beyond the accumulation of wealth and power. The (militarized) war on terrorism suits their needs perfectly, offering as it does an ideological rationale for authoritarian rule and global expansion. Democracy winds up largely irrelevant to this scheme of things, aside from whatever residual legitimating value it might possess. As he puts it, “In a country where values are collapsing, patriotism becomes the handmaiden of totalitarianism. The country becomes the religion.” (p.108) It is worth noting that the “conservative” Mailer scarcely makes an appearance in this brief but superbly-argued text.

Mosley, author of such best-selling novels as *Devil in a Blue Dress*, writes of terrorism, war, and post-9/11 traumas from the vantage-point of African-American history. After witnessing the attacks from his New York apartment, he immediately set out to find answers to the question “who are our enemies and why do they hate us so much?” His response, inspired by lengthy conversations with his father, distilled segments of the black experience, crystallizing a range of perspectives “dismissed by public opinion and excluded from serious avenues of public discourse”—despite the presence of influential blacks (Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice) in Bush’s foreign-policy establishment. (p.24)

In Mosley’s view, the nature of political violence, including terrorism, cannot be grasped without a view of the larger picture that takes into account a world in which war, poverty, disease, and feelings of powerlessness ravage more than half of humanity. Blacks in the U.S. have long endured these same conditions, having been more the victims than benefactors of the American rise to global hegemony. To the degree people’s understanding of violence is conditioned by their daily existence, then proclaimed ideals of American

democracy and global humanitarianism will fail to resonate where circumstances reveal just the opposite—a power structure that does the bidding of predatory corporate interests, supports corrupt regimes, is obsessed with military force, and pursues world domination. Peaceful, harmonious social relations are incompatible with so much material hardship and authoritarian rule, which guarantees that war and terrorism will be endemic, indeed interwoven, features of international politics. We know, or ought to know, that a world dominated by seemingly boundless American wealth and power will generate intense animosities, which are much less the product of ancient Muslim texts, innate Arab traits, or “clash of civilizations” than of conditions produced by a heartless, violent superpower

Mosley locates mainstream views of terrorism within the “white male corporate” culture (p.57), where the primacy of U.S. economic and geopolitical contradicts the mythology of democratic good deeds. Situating terrorist violence as a reaction to state-organized military violence, Mosley writes: “. . . even if the perpetrators of terrorism against the U.S. are evil and insane, we must ask the question: have we had any part in creating that evil, that insanity?” (p.61) The answer is that U.S. policies and actions have contributed to terrorism in at least four distinct ways—enforcing an exploitative corporate globalization, a long history of military interventions and covert operations, aiding Islamic fundamentalism during the 1980s and later, installing and supporting dictatorial regimes wherever it served American interests. Most of this continues into the present, with Democrats and Republicans more or less equally culpable. One obvious question emerges here: in what way can national sentiments of wounded innocence and victimization be justified in the midst of such imperial realities? While the answer is surely complicated, Mosley is convinced that few American blacks will be seduced by illusions of democratic or humanitarian benevolence, the result of their historical consciousness “about being colonized, body and soul.” (p.80)

It follows that African-Americans are better positioned to grasp the large chasm separating U.S. hegemonic discourses from what people outside the “white male corporate culture” are prepared to believe. The same power structure that dominates the global scene has historically colonized, in different ways, most of black America, so that African-Americans are psychologically freer to challenge the ideological rationalizations of Empire. Blacks might therefore be expected to turn this subversive legacy into vocal resistance leading, at opportune moments, to political action: “protest should

be our language and our creed.” For all this, however, Mosley finds entirely too much silence today among African-Americans on international problems that, of course, have simultaneous domestic repercussions. The relatively small role played by blacks in both the anti-globalization and (recent) peace movements might seem to call into question this latent capacity for resistance and protest when it comes to global issues.

Hoping for an epic shift in attitudes, Mosley urges revival of the “subtle compassion of Black America,” a rekindling of grassroots movements against corporate and imperial power—though the political or strategic mechanisms of such a revival remain unspecified. The is vast, considering that African-Americans have traditionally embodied the highest ideals of American culture, in contrast to the elites’ penchant for a militarized foreign ventures. Thus: “while the American government was selling arms to the world, we were delivering jazz. While U.S. presidents waged war on foreign ideals, African-Americans spoke of peace.” (p.139)

Distance from the critical, reflective discourses of Mailer and Mosley to the harsh Realpolitik of foreign-policy neocons is probably best measured in light years. Neocons have won extraordinary political influence owing to their affiliation with the American Enterprise Institute and academic havens like the Hoover Institute and Center for Strategic and International Studies and, more recently, the hawkish Project for a New American Century (PNAC), where Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, William Kristol, Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and kindred ideologues laid out plans for a more combative U.S. imperial strategy beginning in 1997. A lesser-known but relatively established fixture in this milieu is Michael Ledeen, onetime specialist in Italian history who worked from time to time at the Pentagon, State Department, and National Security Council as well as the AEI. In the 1980s Ledeen was a behind-the-scenes facilitator of the illegal Iran-Contra conspiracy, for which he remains fully unapologetic. His extreme rightwing views, spelled out in *The War against the Terror Masters* and earlier works, had little currency in policy circles until the ascent of Bush II, when the neocons finally gained a foothold in official foreign policy circles, even before 9/11. Ledeen has been described as a theoretical inspiration behind the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, and remains a vehement partisan of further such interventions elsewhere in the Middle East. He was quoted as saying, in April 2003: “The time for diplomacy is at an end; it is time for a free Iran, free Syria, and free Lebanon.” Ledeen helped set up the Center for

Democracy in Iran (CDI), an action group dedicated to “regime change” in Iran.

Reading Ledeen’s pedestrian book takes one into a depressing excursion through the provincial, belligerent, militaristic neocon mindset, long considered too wacky for even the more conservative side of Republican politics. Framed in simple Manicheistic terms, where “we” (U.S. global interests) must confront a frightening universe of evil “thems”, the text construes terrorism as a barbaric assault on Western democratic values waged by scheming, puppeteering “terror masters” in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Asia. That the U.S. must face such terrible enemies has nothing to do with its behavior as global hegemon—for Ledeen’s America is a nation that has the most exemplary past and present—but instead results from a generalized “fear” of the great emancipatory ideals it upholds.

In contrast to Lacqueur’s sober historical account, Ledeen follows a more strictly ideological path littered with far-fetched claims—central being that the key task of U.S. foreign policy is to enlighten and democratize a chaotic world populated by ruthless tyrants and other assorted villains. Ledeen’s depiction of U.S. history is akin to the kind of propaganda served up by Fox TV News and Radio Free Europe. Thus: “We tend to our own affairs, and we have done it so successfully that we are the first people in history to believe peace is the normal condition of mankind.” (p.xvi) Or: “We generally have to be dragged into war.” (p.xvi) And: “The other reason we are never ready for war is our radical egalitarianism. .” (p.xvii) America, Ledeen states, is a country dedicated to “live and let live.” The entire text of *Terror Masters* abounds with such wondrous generalizations. The main question here is whether Ledeen, at one point an academic historian, can be so wistfully ignorant of the past (distant *and* recent) or is just cynically putting out these romanticized images of U.S. global behavior for particularly gullible audiences. It is easy enough to dismiss such contentions outright, except that the “gullible audiences” reportedly include leading officials in the Bush administration and even Bush himself.

Warming to his main obsession, Ledeen refers to a “bloodthirsty Islam” and a fanatical desire of Muslim terrorists to destroy the West as quickly as possible, with Iran backstage as the “mother of modern Islamic terror” (p.10). He believes Americans are justifiably perplexed over why “they” are so hated, never pausing to consider that resentment might be directed at U.S. *leaders* and their policies rather than at the entire American population. For

Ledeen, however, the great superpower is simply minding its own business, adhering to a “live and let-live” ethic. Thus: “. . . unsophisticated in the ways of other people and nations, Americans have only believed in the basic goodness of mankind . . . Our radical egalitarianism, enshrined in our most cherished documents, leads us to treat all people the same way, and to grant foreign cultures the same respect and standing as our own.” (p.82) After being urged to read Howard Zinn’s *Peoples’ History of the United States*, Ledeen should be asked to explain the legacy of American “goodness” and “radical egalitarianism” to Native Americans, Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, Panamanians, Iraqis, and a few other targets of American benevolence. Ledeen’s reflective answer as to why “we” in our democratic good will are so widely despised: the world is full of “frustrated, fanatical, and nasty people.” (p.83) As for “radical egalitarianism,” Ledeen prefers to ignore the fact that the U.S. has the deepest gulf between rich and poor of an industrialized country, the average CEO earning at least 210 times the income of the average worker, while U.S.-enforced corporate globalization helps reproduce more poverty, inequality, and misery daily.

A favorite Ledeen Trojan horse is failure of the CIA and intelligence community to supply politicians with crucial information to fight global terrorism, to recognize the deadly threat of Al Qaeda until after 9/11. He shares this concern with Lacqueur, but carries it much further. He cites lack of competent CIA and FBI agents, weak coordination, a paucity of skills needed to infiltrate the networks, and “bureaucratic limits” that stifled aggressive investigative work. Beneath all this was a collapse of political will. The main culprit, not surprisingly, turns out to be President Clinton: “This dramatic escalation of the terror war was staged on Clinton’s watch. He was responsible for fighting and defeating it, which he failed to do.” (p.85) For Ledeen this was more than a blunder—it was a crime far more serious than what merited impeachment.

This account is preposterous at many levels. Ledeen never explains why international terrorism was on the upswing in the 1990s when the two supposed great “terror masters”—the USSR and Khomeini’s Iran—had passed from the scene. More to the point, Ledeen forgets that Clinton did sponsor far-reaching anti-terrorist legislation in 1995 in response to both the WTC and Oklahoma City bombings, meant in part to crack down on *domestic* terrorism—a threat Ledeen inexplicably ignores. Clinton also stepped up intelligence efforts, launched military attacks on Al Qaeda in Sudan and

Afghanistan in 1998, and initiated a search for bin Laden. Moreover, Bush, as we have seen, was no more prepared for a 9/11-type catastrophe than was Clinton, ignoring FBI warnings of imminent large-scale attacks as late as summer 2001. As for the “intelligence community,” Ledeen overlooks the well-documented U.S./CIA role in organizing and funding Islamic anti-Communist groups during the 1980s and 1990s, as mentioned above. The threat of global terrorism was invisible for so long because its leaders had worked as U.S. partners serving American geopolitical interests—until the Soviets were driven out of Afghanistan, at which point the U.S. abandoned both the country and the mujahideen.

Further, as a Washington insider Ledeen must have known that the CIA was always far more an organization devoted to international covert action and intrigue than to intelligence-gathering as such, as former operatives like Ralph McGeehee (*Deadly Deceits*) have been telling the public for years. Most “intelligence” amassed in the Middle East and elsewhere was regularly tailored to fit existing U.S. agendas and policies—not the other way around. (In actuality the main intelligence-gathering vehicle was always the worldwide electronic surveillance network of the NSA, which Ledeen strangely neglects to mention.) This perverse dynamic surfaced again with Bush’s cynical efforts to shape intelligence “data” leading up to the invasion of Iraq.

In the years before 9/11 Ledeen was already pushing the idea of a “counter-jihad” against Al Qaeda and kindred networks as well as their powerful “terror masters” in Teheran, Baghdad, and Damascus. Baghdad, of course, turned out to be first on the hit list – for reasons having nothing to do with the war on terrorism, as even Bush himself was ultimately forced to concede. In the case of Iraq, Ledeen refers to Saddam Hussein’s routine use of terrorism—unwittingly affirming the concept of *state* terrorism otherwise anathema to the neocons—rooted in the “Stalinist model” of rule. Fair enough, though Ledeen again forgets about the longstanding alliance between this same Hussein and the U.S., which gave the dictator economic and military aid in the service of Washington interests. Ledeen claims that Iraq has “always been an integral part of the terror network, working intimately with Syria and Iran . . .” (p.181), a connection never supported by any evidence furnished by U.S. and British intelligence, and one that defies logic owing to the history of bitter antagonism between the secular Hussein and fundamentalist bin Laden. Not content with this fictitious assertion, he writes that Iraq was probably involved in the 1993 WTC bombing, for which again there is no evidence—as even Ledeen admits. Finally we run across the

delirious statement that if Bush senior had decided to overthrow Hussein in 1991, the problem of international terrorism would likely have vanished (pp.215-16), which contradicts Ledeen's own premise about Iranian culpability and, more significantly, ignores the complex historical origins of Islamic terrorism explored by such writers as Lacqueur, Dilip Hiro, and Tariq Ali.

While the U.S. has a lengthy record of installing and rewarding dictatorial regimes from Central America to Chile, from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia, Ledeen is somehow able to locate a "national tradition of fighting tyranny" (p.232), yet another familiar neocon fairy tale. The reader is told that the struggle for democracy is historically congruent with the "American character." A central undertaking of U.S. foreign policy has been to bring "rules of a free society" to nations where such rules previously did not exist, to help people learn the fundamentals of democracy. Of course such noble rules will have to be imposed by force where they cannot be developed indigenously. No mention here or anywhere in *Terror Masters* of U.S. economic and geopolitical interests that might be at stake. No mention either of the fraudulent claim that democracy could be built in a milieu permeated by massive corporate power and military violence.

The idea that impoverished political cultures should or could be forcibly transformed by superior military power has always provided the ideological veneer for imperial rule. Ledeen supposedly owes this insight to Machiavelli, famous for his recognition that politics is in great measure about power and coercion. Machiavelli is said to have taught that *virtu* must be imposed on a brutish world by means of state power, including military force. Moreover: "Machiavelli tells us that if we win, everyone will judge our methods to have been appropriate." (p.221) The Bush administration has clearly taken such neocon "Machiavellian" injunctions to heart.

But Ledeen's version of Machiavelli is distorted to justify a neocon-style militarism that, under conditions of increasing blowback, is destined to backfire. Machiavelli did argue that violence and warfare were inevitable components of political power. Yet in *The Prince* and other writings he also addressed the question of how to *minimize* violence and coercion by establishing power on a foundation of laws, social institutions, and habits of civility. He grasped what would later become a truism, that popular consent is necessary for broad-based legitimacy and stable governance which, used wisely by the prince, would ultimately *reduce* dependency on societal coercion

and violence. This explains why Machiavelli preferred a Republican form of government rooted in its own fertile soil, why he opposed the naked imposition of political rule. Ledeen's own militaristic outlook combined with the familiar neocon imperial hubris demands another theoretical source, more akin to the ideologues of the British and French empires in their heyday, or the early architects of Manifest Destiny.

If there is any recent book on war, terrorism, and U.S. foreign policy that can be said to be worse than Ledeen's, Christopher Hitchens' *A Long Short War* would be it. The author of such provocative works as *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, Hitchens has assembled this loosely-connected series of brief essays (initially written for the on-line magazine *Slate*) that amount to little more than an occasionally witty but standard brief for an aggressive U.S. imperial strategy. For the politically-reborn Hitchens, it seems, any country officially targeted by the U.S. for imminent attack is deserving of its fate—the costs and casualties to be debated another time.

Contemptuous of all dissenters, Hitchens eagerly latches onto every phony argument drummed up by the Bush circles to justify their (long-overdue) invasion and conquest of Iraq. Virtually every page of this book contains expressions of moral outrage directed at some villain who deserves to be quickly and forcibly removed from the world scene. The Hussein regime did naturally fit every criterion of a demonic villain, a mixture of Darth Vader and Joe Stalin that righteous Americans are called upon to vanquish. In this combat drama we are informed that Iraq had become a “patron” of Al Qaeda (p.8), that Hussein was a “bad guy's bad guy” with no business controlling nine percent of the world's oil reserves. It remained for the U.S. military to “liberate” the long-suffering Iraqis while coincidentally freeing the world of Hussein's vast stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons assembled and hidden by its “madman-plus-WMD club.” (p.10) Meanwhile, the Kurds had required aid in their heroic struggle for democratic independence. Iraqis leaders regularly and flagrantly violated international law and would have to be taught a lesson, in this case by the world's moral tutor and policeman. Most grievous of all, Hussein represented an imminent threat not only to those incredibly rich oil fields but to his neighbors and the entire world, which everyone knows Bush and Rumsfeld repeated *ad nauseum*.

The ultimate goal, Hitchens writes, is to bring pluralism, tolerance, and peace to the Middle East, to establish conditions where downtrodden populations can finally govern themselves. This would be dutifully achieved by the

Pentagon, along with a few British and other detachments, by means of preemptive warfare. The costs and consequences of such intervention do not much trouble Hitchens, for the main issue is the absolute correctness of policies: “There’s nothing like the feeling of being in the right and proclaiming firmness of purpose.” (p.31) Regarding prospects for blowback, of heightened rather than reduced global terrorism, we are informed that “warfare is an enterprise where, very noticeably, nice guys finish last.” (p.43) The entire military extravaganza is worth the price, since the U.S. is obliged to defend “civil society” against the horrors of “theocratic nihilism”—here forgetting the likelihood that U.S. occupation can only undermine “civil society.” As for Bush, he is praised as a moderate, rational, wise leader who exhibited great patience before deciding to invade, extending deadline after deadline. (At the time Bush’s “patience” was hardly a function of moderation or wisdom but of the simple U.N. refusal to sanction the invasion.) One cannot find in *The Long Short War* a single criticism directed at Bush, arguably the most reactionary and dangerous U.S. president in historical memory. Well-known for his fiercely-independent journalism, Hitchens comes across in this volume as the ultimate insider, often prefacing his remarks with statements like “from conversations I have had on this subject in Washington . . .” As for the great warrior Wolfowitz, he gets strong praise for being “right” about regime change in Iraq well before anyone else, as early as 1978 (even before Hussein fully consolidated his power!).

Hitchens’ seeming penchant for U.S. military action resonates throughout the book. Moving through Iraq in the company of U.S. and British troops during the invasion, he writes triumphantly of rapid military victories and the strong welcome “liberated” Iraqis gave to advancing soldiers with cries of “Boosh, Boosh!” coming even from young children—hardly, as it turns out, a prelude to the coming nightmare of occupation. Hitchens refers to the warmhearted presence of “big, happy, friendly, gullible Western officers” (p.99), taking another page from Hollywood’s World War II propaganda movies. Of course those officers had every reason to be happy: they were on the road to heartening successes, getting rid of all the thieves, rapists, murderers, and other monsters lurking about Iraq on their way to uncovering the vast hidden caches of WMD. (If the U.S. military could then get rid of theft, murder, and rape in the U.S.—not to mention the huge stockpiles of WMD—*that* would be an even more impressive success.) The sprawling allied military convoys were to link up with the brave Kurds engaged in “fighting a battle for all of us.” (p.102) Hitchens observes that the invasion not only liberated Iraq but saved the oil from Hussein’s clutches “with scarcely a drop [of blood]

spilled.” (p.83) Reports of thousands of Iraqi deaths—not counting the long-term costs and consequences of occupation—apparently do not register on Hitchens’ otherwise sensitive moral radar screen.

Next to Hussein as modern incarnation of Stalin, Hitchens saves his most venomous prose for the antiwar movement that, to his great dismay, grew during 2002 and early 2003 to mobilize the energies of more people worldwide than any comparable movement in history. Hitchens was not particularly impressed: he says (without any evidence) that the movement was organized by people who do not think Hussein is such a bad guy and supported by “blithering ex-flower children” and “ranting neo-Stalinists in the streets”. (p.11) If the “potluck peaceniks” had their way, the world would be overrun by monsters like Milosevic and Hussein because the misguided activists are sadly obsessed with fighting *American* power. Hitchens writes of “phony” antiwar protests based on “hysterical predictions.” Phony? Hysterical? Critics of the war had rejected the official and media claims as propaganda employed to justify an illegal war—claims in every case shown to be outright lies, more boldly so as this horrid saga unfolds. Hitchens mocks the leftist notion of corporate influence on U.S. politics as a “puerile” belief entertained by people who in their silly opposition to companies like Halliburton and Bechtel taking over Iraq would rather have “some windmill power concern run by Naomi Klein or the anti-Starbucks Seattle coalition with their Buddhist mantras.” Buddhists? Neo-Stalinists? Flower Children? At least Hitchens cannot be faulted for lack of imagination.

In Hitchens’ illusory world, the U.S. stands tall against international gangsterism, terrorism, and ethnic cleansing, ready to punish all transgressors. Since the U.S. has been the leading purveyor of violence in the world—not to mention the most militarized nation ever—this would be startling news to the vast majority of people on the planet. Hitchens envisions a “new imperialism” where U.S. military force lays the groundwork for democracy and human rights in the most inhospitable settings—a claim apparently *not* made tongue-in-cheek. We have Thomas Paine spreading the word, only this time backed by Tomahawk missiles, attack helicopters, and an endless arsenal of “smart” bombs available to crush the enemies of freedom, and of course the wondrous technologies of Halliburton and Bechtel. Hitchens cites Frederick Douglas to the effect that liberty is well worth fighting for; after all, anyone with strong doubts need only look at the results in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. We do not know whether the Bush-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz crowd ever paid much attention to Paine and Douglas

as architects of the New World Order, in contrast to, say, the pressing resource needs of an all-consuming industrial-military machine that utilizes 25 percent of global resources. Of course imperialism has for centuries dressed itself in such ideological garb, but Hitchens knows *this* imperialism is entirely different—benevolent, generous, out to slay all tyrants, true to its official proclamations.

Perhaps not fully convinced of such arguments, Hitchens falls back on yet another platitudinous rationale for preemptive militarism against Iraq: the war on terrorism. On its face this may seem credible enough, but Hitchens never gets around to discussing how the legacy of U.S. military intervention itself leads to blowback, that is, even more terrorism. Like Lacqueur, Hitchens believes that organized state violence belongs to a totally separate category, since, while it is no doubt more systematic and lethal, it is also more “rational” than that practiced by terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. What makes substate terrorism uniquely fearsome, he notes, is its shadowy, random, irrational character. Hitchens cannot deny that the violent pursuit of political aims is and has been more or less universal. But he never explains how terrorist networks are peculiarly irrational, nor why they should be any more reprehensible than more “rationalized” military warfare carried out on behalf of U.S. global domination, where its destructive impact has been many times greater. After all, even the Nazis employed organized military power to achieve “rational” (i.e., state-defined, geopolitical) agendas.

Whether it is the epic struggle for democracy or the militarized war on terrorism, Hitchens is ready to trumpet the great achievements of U.S. intervention in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He has apparently paid less attention to actual developments on the ground than to White House public relations statements. In Kosovo, 79 days of fierce NATO bombings left a demolished, broken society now ruled by a Taliban-style government, with escalating poverty and joblessness, civic violence, and renewed ethnic conflict the daily fare of a dispirited population. Islamic militants operate out of Kosovo and Bosnia, not too far from the sprawling Bondsteel U.S. army base that blights the Yugoslav landscape. If “democracy” exists there, it is only in the minds of Pentagon shells who gather for conferences at AEI and Hoover. In Afghanistan, lacking any viable central government and overrun by warlords and militias, all armed with the most sophisticated weapons, the situation has steadily deteriorated since U.S. military operations began in late 2001, leaving the country in economic and political ruins not to mention a continuing haven for terrorist actions.

As for Hitchens' favorite project—regime change in Iraq—circumstances have turned even more dire than in the Balkans and Afghanistan. By late 2003 violence and chaos had worsened, as the (fully-anticipated) Iraqi resistance intensified, with mounting casualties on both sides. Guerrilla insurgency had spread, with attacks numbering *on average* more than 30 daily (as of January 2004). U.S. military authorities governed the country with an iron fist through a hand-picked government run by “terrorism-expert” L. Paul Bremer III, all the while promising a future return to Iraqi sovereignty with full democracy. “Liberation” was taking place, as Hitchens excitedly reports, but the word has never gotten to the Iraqi people for whom the alien ruling structure understandably has no legitimacy. As with any foreign occupation, there can be no capacity to govern effectively. Meanwhile, 70 percent of Iraqis were unemployed, the country was left with crushing poverty and international debt, and a public infrastructure already decimated by wars and sanctions remained in an advanced state of decay.

And Hitchens' emancipatory Kurds? Far from being a zone of self-governance, Kurdistan had been ruled for 12 years by two military juntas exercising nearly total power—and little changed after the invasion except that the U.S./CIA presence has been solidified. As throughout Iraq, there have been repeated claims of human-rights violations. Independent reports show that local inhabitants see little difference between their own henchmen and Hussein's, who for years had collaborated with Kurdish groups, as Hiro points out in his highly-informative book *Iraq*. At the same time, most Kurds have formed positive feelings toward Americans owing to a steady stream of economic and military largesse, as U.S. operatives used the Kurds to subvert the Iraqi regime. A few U.S. officials and hawkish reporters have championed the idea of Kurdish democracy for writers like Hitchens. (Interestingly enough, Hitchens' great love for Kurdish democracy stops short of the Turkish border, where millions of Kurds have waged a long, bloody struggle for independence against Turkish repression. Of course Turkey is a close ally of both the U.S. and Israel. The movement? Dismissed by Hitchens as simply the work of a few Pol-Pot-style leaders, presumably worthy of its brutal fate.)

Very little historical investigation is required to prove that U.S. military action has precious little to do with democracy and everything to do with corporate and geopolitical interests, above all in the resource-laden Middle East and Central Asia. Oddly, as imperial ambitions grow more naked and ruthless the

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myths and deceits shrouding them appear more attractive to Hitchens, Ledeen, and assorted defenders of Empire. Unfortunately, the costs of such ambitions have been horrific: wide areas of death and destruction, economic and political breakdown, ecological disaster, global blowback and insecurity, growing international hatred of the U.S. The barbarism of Al Qaeda is more than equaled by an increasingly arrogant and technologically efficient U.S. military. None of this, however, can be expected to deter writers like Ledeen and Hitchens from eagerly looking forward to the next “regime change” as a new chapter in the history of world democracy.