

From the City of God to Universal Chaos

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Abstract: The author raises and reflects on a series of questions to try to understand a phenomenon that began in 1989 and has only grown more pronounced since 11 September 2001. Specifically, “Western civilization”, spearheaded by the United States of America, has championed the creation of a universal City of God, which, the author contends, is above the law and justice. However, what this civilisation truly advocates is a paradise for the few, with the aim of consolidating a hegemonic unilateralism that will ultimately exclude the rest of humanity. The author argues that the UN’s standing is the last hope for the pacification and democratization of international relations through international humanitarian law and human rights.

“Time gives the pictures; I merely speak the words
which accompany them”

Stefan ZWEIG, *The World of Yesterday* (1943)

(A) AFTER THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

Every once and a while, we round the corner of time and everything is relativized: from the evolution of ideas to life itself. Sometimes, the pressure becomes overbearing. Then, we scrutinize the past, suffer the present and feel obliged to look ahead to a future that, as always, is increasingly elusive and uncertain. Those of us who were born in the age of reason – or unreason – with World War II (1939-1945), and who grew up in the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), have lived through half a century rife with upheaval, but also with utopias and hopes. That many of the former turned out to be false and a large part of the latter were dashed does not change the historical correlate, let alone the specific biographies. We have witnessed troubled times and, to the extent of our commitment – a word largely discredited by so-called pragmatists, who are actually nothing more than opportunists – we have also been humble participants, albeit with a humility that neither prevents us from championing the fecundity of individual stories nor tarnishes the work and days.

The end of the 20th century was marked by the spectacular and unexpected collapse of the communist model and, with it, the fearsome leviathan of the Soviet Union. Now, today’s

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commentators are seeking to grant similar start-of-the-century status to the attacks of 11 September 2001, with all the aggravating circumstances of that bloody day. They may be right, but, for now, we lack the historical perspective, the distance needed to accurately gauge the exponential magnitude of the disaster. It is one of so many others that tell the miserable tale of humanity, and yet, because of its monstrosity and, especially, because it took place in the very heart of the global leader, it has taken on all the symbolic value of an era.

Those of us with more than fifty years under our belts have witnessed the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps and the Soviet *Gulag*, the atrocities of nuclear weapons, dictatorships of all stripes: the entire catalogue of indignities that human beings can be made to suffer. We saw the rise, peak, decline and collapse of the Soviet empire and the panic of the Korean, Indochina and Vietnam wars. We are aware of the permanent injustice to which the Arab peoples are subjected. We close our eyes to the daily tragedy of sub-Saharan Africa. We bemoan, constantly and vocally, the Latin American purgatory and the hell in which its indigenous communities are languishing. At the same time, we are witnessing the greatest venture to be undertaken by humankind in the 20th century: the end of the colonialism with which the West fuelled its development and enrichment for more than four centuries. We look on impassively as the Earth is exhausted. We have leapt, almost overnight, from a childhood of “crystal” radio receivers to the technological and communicative miracle of computer science and the Internet. We have experienced the loftiest of the sublime and the lowliest of the full range of human perversities and exploitation. For all of us, Primo Levi is much more than the name of an Italian deportee. The chronicle of a small world quickly ballooned into a universe that surpasses the logical coordinates of understanding has marched before the doors of our lives.

We may have fallen prey to credulity when some proclaimed that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), injustice would disappear from the face of the Earth. It is not that we naively accepted the clumsily interested and even more ham-handedly articulated message put forward by Fukuyama. He may have considered himself a gifted disciple of Hegel, but he was actually a mere reductionist in the service of short-sighted and even shorter-lived policy. In his view, and so he predicated, the demise of communism meant the end of ideologies. Almost immediately, however, it became clear that as long as there was injustice and a lack of freedom, ideological proposals and utopian projects to change and transform the world would persist.

The end of communism did mean the end of a historical era, but it did not lead, as its advocates predicted, to the advent of a different and better time. No new international society arose, nor did there emerge a new international order. But the bipolar system of the Cold War is being replaced by a very different one, which, if the gods and, especially, humankind do nothing to remedy it, will end in an imperial unipolar system led by the United States.

The shift was accompanied by a terminology that was intended to be original but failed to mask the miseries it concealed. Heralds of the past sought to pass off a set of obsolete and thoroughly damaged goods as novel, falsely encouraging finds. Whilst some declared the death of man, the end of history and the decline of ideologies, others were calling for new Crusades in defence of an imperilled Western civilisation. They have proclaimed the advent of an impregnable City of God, above the law and justice, artfully presented as universal, when what they are truly advocating and defending is a paradise for the few at the cost of excluding the rest of humanity.

In the wake of this collection of archaisms, of old news, glided a word of magical airs: globalization, the banner of the supposed City of God. The world freed, at last, from the yoke of communism, the doors would be thrown wide to a borderless era in which happiness and peace would reign supreme. This new era would be founded on a universal international order governed by the justice of a few. We were all one now. Under the rule of a single monolithic worldview. Any resemblance to the brave new world foretold by Aldous Huxley was no mere coincidence. And yet, as soon as the proposal was formulated, the usual malcontents, killjoys and dissenters appeared. Some refused to accept that globalization was synonymous with homogeneity, let alone that it would open a path to the equality and convergence of cultures.

In the few short years since, rivers of ink have been spilled proposing different, when not outright antipodal alternatives. According to Giddens, one of the most noted theorists of the so-called third way:

“Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”¹

Faced with this definition, far more restrictive than the verbal excesses of the usual coryphaei, critics soon began to ask whether this highly touted globalization was actually a new and original phenomenon in the history of humankind. The most pessimistic amongst them, their feet firmly on the ground, argue merely that it is a new stage in capitalist development, which merits the label “global” due to its dimensions and aspirations. This is the position taken by, amongst others, Samir Amin.

However, it would be foolish to deny the evidence of processes that point to a certain unifying trend, which is not to say that they are necessarily good or, if you prefer, universally beneficial. Years ago, Manuel Castells, amongst others, pointed to the growing existence of cross-cutting global networks, mainly in the fields of information and communication, with the Internet at the helm, and financial mechanisms, especially, the speculative aspects. This

¹ Giddens, A., *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press, 1990.

gave rise to what the late Susan Strange christened, quite graphically, “casino capitalism” and the creation of what she described as “mad money”.

The leap from there to the notion that we already live in a global society woven and governed by networks is a giant one and should not be taken lightly. To understand the present world, let us return to Amin and what, according to him, are the two main features that, for the purposes of this essay, I find especially interesting. The first is the erosion of the nation state: could this weakening lead to its extinction? The second is the deepening abyss separating the industrialized centre from the non-industrialized and, at an ever-faster pace, increasingly impoverished periphery.²

Thus, if we stick to the facts and not just opinions, we find ourselves returning to the same old issues, albeit revamped and with renewed impetus. However, new times call for new responses, or, better yet, for finding the most suitable procedures for the analysis. With no desire to offend, it is no coincidence that, as the flag of globalization was being hoisted, we began to hear people sing the praises of the so-called civil society, which further came to be described as “international”. It is a way of rounding off the argument to affirm the impossibility of changing something presented as destined and inevitable.

We must thus ask whether the nation state is actually fated to disappear or, on the contrary, whether its stubborn continued existence is a hindrance to the interests of capitalism in the age of globalization. Of course, there will be some who will discredit this dilemma, dismissing it as outdated leftism. However, challenging it on pseudo-ideological or grammatical grounds does not answer the question. That question can be restated: has the nation state achieved the objectives for which it was created and, thus, has the time come to lay it to rest? The bells may well have tolled too soon: the clocks of history cannot be reset on a whim or to further an interest. A very different matter is whether the power of large multinationals and other de facto monopolies, as well as that of a large number of financial institutions, is beyond states’ control and there are thus myriad states that merely cater to more powerful interests. However, as weak as they may be, state borders still constitute obstacles that the boosters of globalization dream of toppling.

Notwithstanding the above, and quite contrary to what the detractors of states maintain, based on criteria that might strike some as anachronistic, “international civil society” may well have given rise to two parallel phenomena that make today’s reality different from that of the last fifty years. First, numerous new international actors have emerged, most of whom are neither subject to any rules of conduct nor committed to abiding by any law. Second, the number of states has grown considerably since 1945, due, first, to decolonization and, much

² Amin, Samir, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society*, 1999.

later, to the exacerbation of nationalisms after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which, in Central and Eastern Europe, have caused parochial patriotisms to flourish.

Besides, it would be foolish to pretend that the dogma of the sovereign equality of states, which today number nearly 200, continues unchanged and substantively in force. It is much more likely that international society, civil or otherwise, is undergoing a process of social stratification encompassing states of all possible sizes and countless other similarly heterogeneous international actors. Thus, by the end of the process, we would have an international society rigidly structured in iron-clad class metaphors.

Such a hypothesis would be highly conducive to the designs of globalization. Or, more precisely, to the disappearance of the dreamed of City of God, if it ever truly existed, and its replacement by an utterly uncontainable international anarchy. Simply speaking, the dilemma lies between, on the one hand, those chaotic trends or, more accurately, a perfectly organized chaos from which the powerful would extract their benefits, with nothing at all to temper their profit motive; and, on the other, humankind's undeniable achievements, enabling our survival and development, and its continued pursuit of a horizon of freedom, equality, justice and solidarity. In other words, despite Fukuyama and his acolytes, ideologies once again prevail, opening the door to the return of utopias.

The struggle is unequal, because the weapons are too. Economic might and the power of the media invoke the materiality of the real. In contrast, ideologies are doctrines that, if they advance at all, do so in fits and starts, creating their proposals from the feelings of reason. Richard Falk, an eminent jurist well-versed in such matters since the distant days of the Vietnam War, has quite convincingly described the organizational landscape of the new and threatening times thusly:

“The main statist/market project of the North is to sustain geopolitical stability, which in turn calls for the continuous expansion of world trade, economic growth and the suppression of nationalist and regionalist challenges emanating from the South – by force if necessary.”³

Obviously, this perspective retains nothing of the promises made after the fall of the Berlin Wall. There is no new international order, if by that one means the triumph of ethics transplanted to the universe of the norm. On the contrary, we are witnessing the instrumentalization, if not the outright violation, of rules that were hard enough to develop in the first place. Nor has the end of the Cold War and the demise of communism given rise to a harmonious international system. Contrary to the predictions, once the obstacles imposed by the rivalry with communism and the need to contain it were removed, the system fell into the starkest realpolitik. Thus, international society, in terms of its corporate patterns, remains a

³ Falk, R., *Predatory Globalization: A Critique*, 1999.

more unattainable goal than ever, even more so than in the times of Tönnies. Globalization has not meant homogeneity and standardization. The world continues to be organized around the existence of specific societies that differ in terms of both their political power and economic and demographic capabilities and with regard to their manifest and fortunate cultural diversity.

All of this is something that people must face. And, as if that were not enough, we must do so living in unbridled times, during an intense process of historical acceleration, a time that leaves virtually no room for reflection, only for action, which must invariably be improvised over the very course of events. Perhaps it is this constantly compounded rush, aggravated by the overload of information and the demand for immediate responses, that has resulted in one of the most striking shortcomings of the present day: the lack of intellectuals, in the sense of guides, of *maîtres à penser*, so essential in times of crisis. Instead, we are left with the hacks, the Monday-morning opinion peddlers, the manufacturers of an ephemeral *pensée unique*, consumed and exhausted twenty-four hours a day.

(B) THE WORLD AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER

This was the simplistically evoked state of affairs when the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks took place in New York and Washington, targeting the most significant and spectacular symbols of the power of the United States of America, the only country that, today, can boast and don the mantle of sole global superpower and, should the anti-missile shield prosper, sole stratospheric space superpower, as well. The entire West was paralysed by the terror caused by the enormity and brutality of the crimes for which there is no human justification. As if any more proof were needed, it was once again shown that criminal acts are even more criminal when they are carried out in the developed North than when they take place in the South, where violence and death are *de jour*. The solidarity with the United States in the first few hours was total, with the criminal exceptions of Afghanistan and Iraq, amongst very few others. Emotions were, legitimately, running high. The unanimity of the condemnation was as absolute as the decision to apprehend the perpetrators of the horrendous crimes and bring them before courts that would bring to bear the full weight of the law. There was no room for reflection, only feelings, if not outright revenge.

Immediately, almost simultaneously, old proposals and assorted doctrines were dragged out and dusted off and, although they had not matured, proffered in an attempt to offer certainty to all those lost in the darkness of uncertainty. At such times, the role of the intellectual, of the thinking person, is precisely the opposite of what was demanded: he or she must reject the temptation to become a prophet, let alone, the Messiah. The intellectual's role is not to give answers, when he or she lacks them, but rather to sow concerns, to raise questions. If the West aspires to remain what it is, it cannot renounce the noblest trait of its historical identity: the

exercise of reason, the use of secular thought, not the sacralization of irrationality.

If, once we have controlled our emotions, we apply the aforementioned template, then the following are just some, obviously not all, of the questions of varying degrees of depth and complexity that must be answered in the aftermath of the disastrous events of 11 September, especially before we take any steps in the wrong direction.

(1) Are we looking at a new Cold War?

Although most people would be inclined to say no, it is worth making sure before answering emphatically. When the international environment reverts to a jungle and existence is ruled by survival of the fittest, people invariably seek some sort of legitimation to mask or conceal the indiscriminate use of power. At such moments, it is very useful to fabricate an enemy; if it is universal, all the better. Might the West not be seeking to do just that with Islam and the Arab world? In so doing, it would moreover be combining all the necessary ingredients for confrontation in a single rival: from exoticism to geostrategic values, by way of ownership of the world's most fabulous energy resources and the use and enjoyment of geographical positions. Like in the good old days of Rätzkel and, later, of Haushofer's *lebensraum*. A single whole steeped in ignorance and unfamiliarity: how better to graduate seamlessly to hatred? And if we should happen to add enough ideological elements to the mix, we can return without delay to the old and disinterred times of the Crusades against absolute evil.

If a single enemy is defined, in this case more dangerous than ever, due to its diffuse and intangible nature, we should prepare for a virtually eternal battle, waged in darkness, in which everything will be done for a sole purpose: to annihilate the rival. Military spending will skyrocket, inevitably to the detriment of the welfare state (but that is what civil society is for, the neoliberals will cry hypocritically); a network of bases will be woven around the world; and, finally, as in the past, thought itself will be militarized and all free reflection will be considered a crime of maximum disloyalty.

(2) Are we living through a bad time for democracy?

Can the entirely understandable alarm at the international panorama justify the suspension, even if just temporary, of the system of freedoms and guarantees? What dangers are implicit in the debate, the false choice, between security and freedom? One hardly needs to recall the measures adopted in the United States authorizing the limited (?) use of torture to obtain supposedly crucial information for preventing potential terrorist attacks. This practice is already systematically carried out in Israel, where, with a subtlety worthy of a better cause, a distinction is drawn between physical and psychological torture or, to put it more bluntly, between torture that leaves a visible trace and torture that does not, one dirty, the other clean. We must not forget that torture humiliates the victim, but it also degrades the torturer, turning

him or her into a monster. Does nobody recall the effects of this appalling practice in France in the years of Algerian decolonization? Recently, the US government has expressed interest in having the passports of foreign nationals who apply for a visa to enter the United States include their biometric data, a prospect that would fill the most racist Lombrosians with joy. Lastly, can any democrat in his or her right mind remain silent in the face of the military courts, outside of national territory no less, that the White House seeks to create to try those people, American and foreign alike, suspected or guilty of having committed terrorist acts or having abetted in their perpetration? Under such conditions, will any democratic government agree to the extraditions that Washington will surely request? What nauseating aroma is this that wafts from our historical memory, from the images of people caged, like animals or like the great poet Ezra Pound, at Guantánamo?

(3) Who are the victims of the 11 September attacks?

Without a doubt, first and foremost, the victims were all those who were killed or wounded in the Twin Towers, at the Pentagon and on the other plane that was shot down, whose true story we will never know. Certainly, too, the victims include the citizens of those countries whose governments have taken advantage of the situation to severely restrict their already precarious freedoms. However, quite significantly, the Palestinian people also figure sadly high on the list of victims. Within hours of the events of 11 September, Ariel Sharon proclaimed, “Arafat is our Bin Laden.” The sentence was passed. Since then, helicopters and fighter jets have bombed both the territories still under military occupation and those administered by the Palestinian National Authority. Israel has violated the Oslo I and Oslo II accords with utter impunity, not to mention its continued violations of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. It should thus come as no surprise that the Islamists have taken up the Palestinian cause as their own. It is therefore imperative to create the so oft-promised Palestinian state and not just a smattering of Bantustans comprising Israel’s backyard. It is essential to reclaim the flags and symbols from international terrorism, if not strictly for reasons of justice, then for purely selfish reasons, too. As long as there is no justice for the Palestinians, the Middle East will remain a powder keg for international peace and security.

You cannot respond to terrorism with terror. Nobody disputes the usefulness of valid and legal police measures to combat the harrowing crime of terrorism. But not even the blindest can deny the need to address the deeper causes. The best antidote to terrorism is to eliminate its causes. Fanaticism will quite likely always exist, but it will attract far fewer followers once we have rid ourselves of injustice, poverty, discrimination and lack of freedom.

(4) “Infinite Justice” or “Enduring Freedom”?

These two mottos could easily double as the titles of Westerns, replete with bounty hunters.

But what are the real intentions behind them? The mass bombing of the Afghan population in search of a Bin Laden whose whereabouts are unknown hardly seems to have served justice, unless we are talking about a justice far more blind than infinite. Nor does it seem like the most suitable means of stoking the enthusiasm of the Afghan masses, in particular, and of the wretched of the Earth, in general, for the military prowess of a democratizing West. It might not be such a bad idea to reread the unjustly forgotten Frantz Fanon.

At the same time, can one really pursue so-called “Enduring Freedom” through a grand alliance that includes all manner of dictatorial regimes? Writing off all kinds of outrages committed by Pakistan’s military dictatorship, even forgiving debt, and turning a blind eye to Russia’s massacres in Chechnya are likewise not the most suitable mechanisms for defending justice and freedom. Bush’s statement, that you are either with the United States or with the terrorists, does not augur the most democratic of horizons; however, it may prophetically announce the most militarized and disciplined scenario of the emerging international reality.

These pursuits of endless justice and perpetual freedom, in constant struggle, require us to search for new theatres in which to fight evil. If the Arab countries do not object, we may have to unfurl the flags against Iraq, and that imperilled satrap Saddam Hussein. And, immediately thereafter, move on to Iran and North Korea. That will rid us of the “Axis of Evil”, but then we will have to proceed to the Philippines, fight drug trafficking in Colombia, and perhaps do something about Fidel Castro.

Of course, this is not an original or novel theory. The mid-19th century saw the formulation of the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny” in the United States. Its postulate was quite simple: “It will be a happy day when the Stars and Stripes flies over all corners of the world.” Perhaps we are looking for a new dawn: a single ruler, a single law, and a single universal policeman.

(5) Is it lawful to casually discuss the possibility of war, as is so shamelessly done?

Since 11 September, the word “war” has been on the lips of politicians and social communicators across the board. Hadn’t we prohibited war? Has the Briand-Kellogg Treaty renouncing it been stripped of effect or, even worse, has the UN Charter been repealed? Or perhaps legitimate self-defence is now synonymous with war? Does anything remain, in the wake of the Twin Towers, of the fundamental concepts of aggressor and aggression? Everything seems to suggest that international law is headed for hard times, that we are reverting to a Hobbesian era, when *raison d’État*, the rule of force, and the misnomered national interest, in the most sinister sense, prevailed.

Even the basic idea of cooperation may come to be understood only in the context of the judicial and police mechanisms used to fight terrorism, whilst solidarity may only be practiced with those who think and act like we do or in accordance with our own interests. Today, more than ever, it is necessary to recall the primacy of international law over domestic law and,

further, that all the general principles of international law remain fully valid. Even if the usual crowd of realists advocate the opposite, it is imperative to continue defending utopias, and, amongst them, the one closest to being achieved, namely, the establishment of the International Criminal Court over other jurisdictions that fail to conceal the desire of some to impose a national jurisdiction, i.e. that of the rich United States, in the disguise of a sweeping global justice. That is why, as was unfortunately to be expected, the United States has not ratified the Court's Statute; Washington does not accept any laws higher than its own, nor does it wish to see its leaders or members of its armed forces brought before international courts on charges of war crimes or crimes against humanity. Tellingly, US rejection of the International Criminal Court is warmly supported by countries such as Russia (with its Chechens), Israel (with its Palestinians) and the People's Republic of China (with its dissidents).

Of course, all of the foregoing means that no country can arrogate to itself the exclusive and unlimited use of force. Until otherwise agreed, Chapter VII of the UN Charter on action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression and, in particular, Article 42, which reserves the use of force for the UN Security Council, remain fully in force. The application, for the first time ever, of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty elicits even more reservations. Lingering nostalgia for the Cold War may finally have given the Washington Treaty (1949) a new dimension and even altered its practice, content, scope and geographical framework. Of course, that may simply be an unjustified apprehension. The United States is demonstrating, in the diplomatic terrain and on the battlefield, that it neither needs nor wants legal crutches for its new journey. It claims for itself all the power and glory of its endeavour, which it situates above concepts and ideas that it deems obsolete. The rest of the wide, complex world is left with just two options: to faithfully and loyally follow the United States or, simply by remaining passive, to stand up to the sole global super power. Although there are also those who think that, against all appearances, we are currently witnessing, as predicted years ago, the empire's decline.

Today, the defence of international lawfulness and the institutions of public international law is just as if not more important than the fight against terrorism. If we do not defend lawfulness, we will have retreated to a time that predates the Westphalian system.

(6) Should the United Nations be defended or destroyed?

Before going any further, it is worth clarifying, once again, what the essence of this universal organization is, i.e. to restate the obvious. Quite simply, the UN is the result of a multilateral treaty, its will is the sum of the wills of its Member States, and it has no powers other than those that they voluntarily assign to it. Obviously, it is the agreement reached by the winners of World War II, but that was no ordinary war: it was a battle for freedom and against nationalism, fascism and the Third Reich. The UN was what the victors wanted, and the

countries that had not yet achieved independence and remained under the colonial yoke did not participate in its design. However, both the capitalist and communist countries subscribed to its ideology, as did those that later acquired full political sovereignty. Peaceful co-existence and the non-alignment ideology breathed new life into the UN and developed the principles of international law.

Therefore, before we decry the UN's ineffectiveness, we need to denounce the states, which, when they are not paralysing it, are instrumentalizing it to further their own interests. Long gone are the days in which people debated whether the UN had a will of its own and whether the Secretary-General had sufficiently high standing to steer it towards goals that its Member States did not wish to pursue.

Certainly, during the Cold War, the UN General Assembly offered ample proof of its capacity as a discussion forum. The balance between the United States and the Soviet Union, despite its faults, largely prevented the Security Council from being manipulated. However, the end of the Cold War both revealed the UN's inadequacy for the new times and blocked any initiative to automate it, promote its transformation and orient it towards more ambitious goals. One need only look to the ouster of Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose reappointment the US vetoed, and the docility of his successor Kofi Annan. Today, the danger is that the United States will manipulate the UN, turning it into a useful tool for covering up its highly dubious actions. In this regard, the adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 1373 (2001), on 28 September 2001, is extremely unsettling. After adopting the pertinent measures to suppress the financing of international terrorism, it further implements a series of precepts aimed at controlling persons suspected of international terrorism or intending to perpetrate such abhorrent crimes. Such rules could place tremendous limits on such fundamental institutions for the protection of human beings as political asylum and refugee status. Furthermore, in keeping with the policy that served as the inspiration for that resolution, the Security Council called on all Member States to, within a period not to exceed 90 days, report on the steps their national legislative bodies have taken to implement these resolutions. It is worth considering the possible connection between these measures and the enactment in Spain, for example, of the infelicitous Immigration Law [*Ley de Extranjería*]. Another recent example of the UN's incapability is Israel's refusal to grant entry to a fact-finding mission into its territory, and into that which it occupies militarily, to clarify the circumstances surrounding the siege and destruction of the Palestinian city of Jenin. Is it permissible for a state, a member of the organization, to refuse to comply with a Security Council resolution? The answer bespeaks an unfortunate impotence, if not outright complicity with a government demonstrably in breach of UN resolutions.

Nevertheless, in these dangerous times for the pacification and democratization of

international relations, the UN is the last hope for a bulwark consisting of all those states, peoples, individuals and social groups who advocate peacemaking through justice, not force, and international co-existence, so greatly weakened today. In a situation like the current one, in view of the threats we face, concepts such as international humanitarian law, the responsibility to intervene, legitimate self-defence, and earlier questions come fully into play. On the one hand, there is the danger of inventing a new Cold War between two ideological ways of understanding our own existence and that of others, of advocating new Crusades to eradicate something that cannot be wiped from the map: cultural diversity. On the other, we could do swift and effective justice to perennially postponed demands and, first and foremost, enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right of self-determination. Then, or, better yet, at the same time, we should demonstrate, on the ground, that respect and tolerance are not just hollow words, emptied of all real content. In other words: we must enable the co-existence of the defence of human rights and dignity with respect for what makes us different. Of course, we must do so rejecting any form of exclusion based on the pretext of multiculturalism or, worse yet, the paternalism of cultural specificity, as well as any likewise manipulative exclusions aimed at allowing those who align themselves with us to curtail freedoms. We would also need to define, exactly and with millimetric precision, when intervention in the internal affairs of states whose governments flagrantly violate fundamental rights is appropriate. More clearly, we must prevent the defence of individual and collective rights from becoming an instrument at the service of expansionist, militaristic or economic goals, or even all three at once.

Finally, it is worth asking whether we might not also be facing—for these objectives are hardly mutually exclusive—a drive to impose a global policing system in the hands of a single policeman, one who would moreover decide at any given time what the proper method is, the applicable law and jurisdiction, and the list of targets. Such a goal would be backed by quite a few allies were it to happen to result in the redistribution of areas of influence and territories in a geographic region of vital importance to world peace and the global economy. This perspective would go some way to explaining the enthusiasm shown in recent months by Russia, Iran, and the People's Republic of China, amongst others, as well as the reawakening of the dormant conflict between India and Pakistan, in light of the conflict in Afghanistan.

So many questions remain to be answered if we are truly to understand this phenomenon that began in 1989 and, since 11 September 2001, has only taken on new and more spectacular dimensions. It is a challenge for all those who, in the face of war, choose peace and solidarity as the means of creating a different world or, at least, of rejecting the one so fervently and militaristically being sold to us. It is a challenge, especially, for the forces of the left, in general, and in Europe, in particular. And it is one that raises another question for another day, a question that, in these times of euro-enthusiasm, concerns us quite directly: what kind of

Europe are we talking about, when Europe remains silent and impassive, when it is not directly playing the faithful squire to the United States and its British proconsul? A Europe that shamefully yields to US pressure, reducing to ashes the hopes placed in the International Criminal Court? The next rendezvous, perhaps the renunciation of all ethical, legal and political principles, will be in Baghdad. It will be followed by an endless procession of “preventive” wars, which will be the perfect instrument to consolidate the hegemonic unilateralism of the United States of America.