

# GILBERT ACHCAR

## The Clash of Barbarisms

Interviewed by David Barsamian

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Gilbert Achcar lived in Lebanon for many years before moving to France, where he teaches politics and international relations at the University of Paris. He's a frequent contributor to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and is the author of several books on contemporary politics. His new book, published by Monthly Review Press, is *The Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*.

*The title of your book is interesting because there is a well-known book published by Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington entitled The Clash of Civilizations. What do you mean by "the clash of barbarisms"?*

I mean that in a certain sense civilizations could not clash. The process of civilization is described as a historical process of pacification of human relations, overcoming aggressiveness and the rule of law. And what we are seeing in this kind of clash is not, therefore, a clash of civilizations or features of civilizations clashing, but a clash of those kinds of barbaric potentials that every civilization include, whether Islamic or Western. These are barbarian forms which are potentially included in every kind of civilization and which can take over in periods of crisis or some specific historical periods.

*In your introduction, "From One September 11th to Another," you quote the 16th century Florentine political philosopher and writer, Machiavelli. You quote him, "We see from recent experience that those princes have accomplished most who paid little to keeping their promises but who knew how to craftily manipulate the minds of men. A certain prince of our time who it's just as well not to name, preaches nothing but peace and mutual trust, yet he is the determined enemy of both." Why were you quoting Machiavelli there?*

That is a quote that I mentioned after quoting from the same speech of Bush Sr., George H.W. Bush, when he formulated the famous phrase about the new world order which he was promising at that time and which he described, as an era of justice, peace, respect for the rights of the weak by the strong, priority for economic progress, etc. That famous speech, it so happens, also was given on September 11, 1990, by a kind of irony of history. I think Machiavelli applies here very well, because all these speeches we heard, whether from Bush Sr., or from his son, actually, are contradicted by their actual behavior, and therefore there is a big deal of hypocrisy in pretending that they work for peace on this earth.

*The official Bush story about explaining what happened, the reasons behind the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, is that the United States was attacked because of its "values" and that it is the "beacon of democracy." Is that how it seems, let's say, from your perspective in Europe and the Middle East?*

I think this is one of the most absurd explanations I've ever heard. That is, to believe for one second that people would come from their part of the world and commit suicide in another place in order to kill as many people as possible because they don't like the way the people there live and the kind of values they embody there is something which is completely absurd. This

kind of explanation, actually, was an attempt at concealing the real reasons behind all that. It's much more convenient for the Bush Administration to say that all these people hate us because of the values we cherish, as George W. Bush, puts it. If it is because of that, you have no way of dealing with that except through force, because you won't surrender the values you cherish. But actually, if you say the truth, that these people hate us because of our policies in their part of the world, because of what the United States is busy doing in the Middle East, then the logical conclusion that follows is, Well, why the hell are we doing that, and why are we putting ourselves in such dangers? And therefore, you draw very different political conclusions. So this kind of explanation about the values is a very convenient one, but it's just mystification.

*You also cite Michel Foucault, the French political thinker and philosopher, when he talks about the dangers of mystification.*

Yes.

*In terms of making political issues become occluded and very vague so people think Americans believe that they are simply hated for being Americans.*

Yes, exactly. That's exactly what the major attempt was done. I would say this is all the more, let's say, ridiculous, that kind of explanation -- that one should definitely agree on the fact that Osama bin Laden is not a representative of Islamic civilization. On that you have a kind of broad consensus, even in Washington and even on the part of Samuel Huntington, whom you just quoted and who is the author of this thesis about the clash of civilizations. All of them said, it is not the clash of civilizations in the sense that these people, bin Laden and his cohorts, are not representatives of Islamic civilizations and the United States is not fighting Islam. If we take this explanation as granted -- and I would certainly not dispute that, because I certainly do not, as I said, consider bin Laden as a representative of Islamic civilization but as a kind of barbaric degeneration -- I also definitely do not consider that the present U.S. administration is representative of Western values. If one means by Western values all those values that were accomplished by the historical process of civilization, and especially through enlightenment and all the gains of the history and the mass movements throughout history, actually, this is the most anti-enlightenment administration in the history of the United States and, I would say, one of the most anti-Enlightenment administrations in the Western world probably since the end of the Second World War.

*Could you elaborate further on that. What are the elements of the Bush Administration that you characterize as anti-enlightenment? Is it the role of religious fundamentalists?*

Definitely. And in this aspect there are some obvious and striking similarities, symmetries between the mental structure of the people in Washington and the mental structure of Islamic fundamentalists like bin Laden, the same way of seeing the world as an evil-versus-good kind of structure and this belief that they are the only upholders of truth and what is good. More generally speaking, if we speak of the gains of civilization in terms of democracy, this administration is responsible for the most massive onslaught on civil liberties that you've got in the United States since McCarthyism.

*You do mention in your opening chapter, actually, about "the climate of intellectual intimidation resembling some of the dark hours of the Cold War." Do you have any examples of people being intimidated?*

I guess that on this level you know better than I do, because this relates to the United States, and you remember the kind of climate in the weeks and months following 9/11 and the harsh bashing against any person who just tried to find some political explanation for what was happening and tried to draw some conclusion about the necessity for Washington to change its policy. And one of the most used weapons in this kind of intimidation was the accusation of anti-Americanism; that is, anyone daring to criticize George W. Bush and his crowd in Washington would become necessarily an anti-American, which is completely ridiculous, obviously. And this means that these people believe that they are the only, here again, representatives of what is American. I would say that this climate - and that's a very great thing to remark now - that this climate has to a large extent dissipated, and we are very, very far now from the kind of climate you had in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. And that's all the more remarkable that you have got this fantastic antiwar movement in this country, which started gathering momentum hardly one year after 9/11. This is unbelievable.

*It may be difficult, I think, for a lot of Americans to accept your assumption that there are acute similarities between Osama bin Laden, who, of course, is portrayed here as the personification of evil itself, and the president of the United States. But what about in terms of speaking through or with the authority of God? Both of these people say that God is on their side.*

This is a striking similarity, isn't it? I'm not saying that they are the exact equivalent. There are obviously differences between the two and differences in their position and differences in the way they act and the kind of organization or structure that they lead. But what I'm saying is -- actually, I was quoting in the book something that a German media person had written and which led to a lot of criticism in this country, when he wrote that the mental structure of George W. Bush and bin Laden is similar. But there are obvious similarities. The one that you just pointed to and this kind of religious fanatical view of the world, whether truly religious or translated into also political conceptions, as is the case with the U.S. administration.

*What is your view, in retrospect, on the attack on Afghanistan? Do you feel it was justified?*

The attack on Afghanistan was led in a way which was a kind of retaliation from the United States. I will try to deal with that in

terms of international law. The only wars that are legal are either wars of self-defense in immediate reaction to an aggression or wars that have been decided upon by the U.N. Security Council and under the command of the United Nations. The war in Afghanistan does not fall, obviously, in the second category, since it was not waged by the U.N. but by the U.S. alone. And I don't think that it falls even in the first category in the sense that this is not a war of self-defense, this is not the direct reaction to an ongoing aggression. That was a kind of massive retaliation several weeks after the event. The comparison that has been cited more than once, I'd say, is that the difference between when you're aggressed in the street and you defend yourself, and when you're aggressed in the street and two weeks later you go with some weapons and you blow up the house of the person whom you think is harboring those who attacked you. This is not self-defense. No tribunal would consider that as self-defense. So in that sense the war in Afghanistan was waged in such a way as a kind of demonstration of U.S. force and the fact that no one can ever think of harboring people who would attack the United States.

Washington did not want to go through the process of international institutions. And we know why. This administration in particular, but more generally since the end of the Cold War, the tendency in the Washington is to consider the U.N. as some kind of obsolete organization. And the reason for that is that in the U.N. Security Council you have five permanent members holding veto power, and as seen from Washington, these are four too many. Seen from Washington, there should only be one country in the world with veto power on the rest of the world, which is the United States. And Washington does not accept any other kind of veto. We are now seeing again the illustration of that in the way that they are going to circumvent the United Nations because they are not able to secure any green light for the war. And while I'm speaking, I know that probably when this talk between us will be broadcast the war very probably will be already on, and that would then be just out of the frame of international legality.

*What dangers do you see in this unipolar world where there is no countervailing force to temper the supremacy of U.S. power, which is simply unchallenged today?*

Fortunately, there is a countervailing force. People used to consider that the countervailing force during the Cold War was the Soviet Union. To a certain extent it indeed was a countervailing force, in the sense that you had a kind of global rivalry between the two global empires, the one dominated by the United States and the one dominated by the Soviet Union. But, nevertheless, at the same time they had some kind of complicity in the fact that they tolerated for each other the domination over each other's domain, that is, U.S. interventions in the U.S. sphere of control, of influence, and vice versa, Soviet interventions in the Soviet sphere of control, like the repeated interventions in Eastern Europe.

But there was, even at the time of the Cold War, another countervailing power to at least the United States power, which was the antiwar movement, and especially the antiwar movement in the United States. It was not the Soviet Union that stopped the Vietnam war; it was the U.S. population, the antiwar movement in the United States, that was decisive in, first of all, preventing the escalation in Vietnam from going further than

what it reached, then forcing, eventually, the withdrawal of the troops from that country, and then paralyzing Washington for something like more than 15 years, during which Washington was not able to launch any kind of massive military intervention, even in the immediate backyard of the United States, like in Nicaragua. Despite all his efforts, Ronald Reagan was not able to overcome what they called the Vietnam Syndrome. They used medical terms because they considered this as some kind of disease, while I would definitely see in that one of the most healthy features ever displayed by the U.S. population, or any population, actually.

The real countervailing power, the most effective countervailing power to U.S. power, was thought more or less dead after the end of the Cold War and when George H. W. Bush succeeded in, let's say, overcoming this kind of inhibition that existed and resumed those massive military interventions, especially with the previous Gulf War, where you had, let's say, a smaller intervention in Panama, but the first major-scale war waged by Washington since Vietnam was the previous Gulf War of 1991. So people thought that this Vietnam Syndrome had been buried - that's what Bush Sr. thought - and that they were able from now on to launch wars, wage wars, without encountering any resistance but for a few thousand people demonstrating here and there.

What we have seen - and that's absolutely great - since last autumn, last fall, is the resumption of a massive antiwar movement worldwide, and actually, to a certain degree a movement which has reached unprecedented levels of strength and coordination when you look at it on the global level. At the level of the United States, it has not yet reached the levels that --

*In Europe, for example.*

In Europe, yes, but in the United States the peak of the Vietnam era has not yet been reached. And I'm hopeful that that will be the case, because this movement is gathering momentum. It's getting stronger and stronger week after week, and that's absolutely great. In Europe, we have already, as I said, reached the highest level ever in international mobilization against any war, and that's absolutely great. Actually, we know that description of all that as countervailing power was already on the pages of *The New York Times*. You had this article by Patrick Tyler on February 17, where he said, Well, now we see that there are two global superpowers: one is the United States, the second is global public opinion. That's a very accurate statement.

And, actually, this is the only power that has the slightest chance of really stopping this war machine, this war drive, this descent into barbarism, into the law of the jungle, the law of the strongest that Washington is leading worldwide. Only the public opinion, the public mobilization - obviously, not just public opinion as expressed in polls, but the demonstration in the streets, the mobilization - only this is capable of stopping that. And especially the most strategic, the most important contingent of the antiwar mobilization, which is the U.S. contingent. Because you can have 3 million people demonstrating in Madrid or even in London. That won't be able to prevent the U.S. administration from going to war. Only the mobilization in the United States could achieve that. But the mobilization in the United States is itself narrowly linked and influenced by the

mobilization on the global level. And that's why all that constitutes some kind of unity, which is very, very important.

*There was also, I should just interject, a 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada.*

That was on the scale of a police operation. I was speaking of massive military intervention.

*Also in that same year interesting events occurred in Lebanon involving U.S. troops, as you discuss in your book, the first instances of suicide bombings directed against Americans. Do you want to talk about that?*

U.S. troops in Lebanon were deployed as part of the so-called multinational force.

*But it was on the heels of the Israeli 1982 invasion.*

Exactly. That was to supervise Israeli withdrawal from Beirut and act as some kind of peacekeeping force between the Israeli troops and the rest. But they were very quickly perceived as kind of, actually, unwanted troops and Washington seen for what it is, that is, rather an ally of Israel than some kind of honest peace broker or real peacekeeping force. That was also in the framework of, actually, the opposition between -- or the rising tensions between Iran and Washington. And therefore, that was the time indeed when you had the first suicide attacks against U.S. targets.

*1982 was an example, I think, of what powers try to do when they tried to create new orders. You may remember that Israel was bent on creating a new order in Lebanon, and that indeed backfired on them, and it resulted in the death of some 17,000 Lebanese. As well as major massacres at Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in which General Ariel Sharon was directly implicated by the Kahan Commission of Israel.*

Yes.

*An earlier example of nation building, and I'm talking about this because the United States is clearly embarked on reconstructing Iraq, is Iran in 1953. A democratically elected government, Muhammad Mossedegh, was overthrown in a CIA coup, which led to the Shah of Iran, which had some very unpleasant consequences.*

Yes. But if you mean by the unpleasant consequences the fact that you had this terrible dictatorship of the Shah for many years but leading to such strong resentment in the country that that laid the ground for the Islamic revolution led by Khomeini in 1979, this kind of pattern is something which is more general to the whole area. It's obvious that one of the key factors in the development of Islamic fundamentalism that we've seen throughout the recent period is Washington's policies in that area.

By fostering despotic regimes, despotic regimes which are loathed by their populations and identified by their populations as regimes closely linked to Washington and protected by Washington, you have one additional factor in this area, aside from issues like the Israeli-Palestinian issue. You have an

additional factor of the very strong resentment toward the United States that exists there, and you have a breeding ground for radicalizations on that level, but at the same time the fact that Washington has been busy throughout the Cold War and after to crush any kind of progressive alternative in that part of the world. And you mentioned one example of that in the early 1950s was Mossadegh in Iran and the role of the CIA in overthrowing him. The fact that Washington has been busy crushing every kind of progressive alternative and countering any kind of progressive alternative with Islamic fundamentalist ideology, through the alliance between Washington and its closest ally and oldest ally in the Arab world, which is the Saudi kingdom, all that also backfired in a spectacular way.

We all know now of the fact that bin Laden, before becoming the public enemy number one of Washington, or supposedly so, was working in collaboration with U.S. agencies for several years during the war in Afghanistan, which was a war through which Washington was in alliance with Islamic fundamentalist forces, backed by also the Pakistani dictatorship and the Saudi monarchy, against the Soviet occupation of that country. And so the examples of backfiring, the examples of Frankenstein, of producing monsters and getting them turned against you, abound in the history of U.S. foreign policy.

*Saddam Hussein himself is an example of that kind of blowback.*

To a certain extent, yes, though Saddam Hussein has not been put into power by the CIA. That would be exaggerated as a claim.

*But throughout the 1980s he was extended enormous military and economic aid, during his worst atrocities.*

Not by Washington. For instance, U.S. companies sold Iraq the ingredients for what is now considered as weapons of mass destruction, but the main sources of Iraq's armaments were the Soviet Union and France. These were the two main backers of Saddam Hussein. Washington's attitude on the Iraq-Iran war -- contrary to what some people thought at the time, Washington was not one of supporting Iraq versus Iran. Washington's attitude was much more cynical, much more Machiavellian. It was to say, A plague on both houses in that case, which means, Let them destroy each other as much as possible, and our interests mean that this war should go as long as possible. And therefore we have seen Washington supporting alternatively each side, getting in contact of that kind with each side. You remember the Iran-Contra scandal, which was linked also to the fact that the Reagan Administration --

*Using Israel and Saudi Arabia to get arms to Iran.*

Exactly.

*I don't agree with you entirely, because the U.S. also supplied Saddam Hussein with crucial satellite intelligence photos, and they had operatives on the ground pinpointing Iranian military positions for the Iraqi armed forces.*

I agree with you. But you said massive military aid. This is not massive military aid. They were playing in a very cynical way. Kissinger at that time wrote it openly in an article I think that

was published in *The Economist* or something like that, where he explained, Yes, our interests are that this war should go as long as possible. And these are two rogue states, in the view of the United States, and we wish they destroy each other. That was at the cost of hundreds of thousands of people killed in that war while the so-called international community was just watching.

*Just toward the end of the war, the United States crucially intervened on Iraq's behalf in the Persian Gulf using the navy to attack Iranian tankers and oil rigs, and shooting down a civilian Iranian plane over international air space, killing 290 Iranians.*

Yes. That was after Iran threatened to block the Gulf navigation and used that as a leverage, and also acting against Kuwait and other Arab states, oil monarchies, which were definitely backing Saddam Hussein and actually providing him with the funds he needed to pursue his war. Yes, this escalation led Washington to intervene. But that was not to stop the war, obviously; that was just to secure the security of oil trade through the Gulf so that the war doesn't spill over that, so that war can go on longer from that time.

*You mentioned Afghanistan. I've recently talked to both Ahmed Rashid and Tariq Ali, and they describe Afghanistan today in kind of these terms, that Hamid Karzai, who is the appointed U.S. leader of that country, is kind of like the mayor of Kabul. His power really doesn't extend outside the city. The warlords are back in power. Drug trafficking has now resumed and Afghanistan is again the number one heroin exporter in the world. And the U.S. military commander General Tommy Franks says the United States is going to be in Afghanistan "for years." So here's an example of nation building that is not very promising.*

Even what you said is granting Karzai more power than he has.

*You don't think he's the mayor of Kabul?*

Not even. It so happens that by a coincidence I have before my eyes yesterday's - that's March 15 - *New York Times*, where you have an op-ed by the chief of staff for Hamid Karzai. And he writes, "Kabul should receive immediate attention, for it is a special case. Provincial visitors and dignitaries in their distinct local dress are subject to humiliation and browbeating from armed men. They conclude that Kabul, the capital, is not really theirs. They return home with their faith in the unparalleled Afghan experiment in nation building eroded." This is hilarious. This is hilarious, and tragic at the same time. But they don't even control Kabul. That's the problem for them.

But, in the first place, I don't think that the U.S. administration ever had any illusion about achieving control and stability of Afghanistan - unless one believes that they are completely stupid. They are not to that extent. They have a lot of advisers, counselors, and they know things. I think they had no illusion about that. And that's one of the reasons, for instance, why, despite what people thought, George W. Bush was faithful to what he said during his electoral campaign about refusing the deployment of Pentagon troops for nation building, that is, for police kind of activities. At that time he was speaking of the Balkans. But in Afghanistan Washington refused that

U.S. troops patrol a city like Kabul and left that for Turkish, German, British groups, allied with the U.S. but not U.S. troops. The United States is just sticking to its military bases, from which they launch operations. And, actually, the war in Afghanistan is still going on, although in kind of low-intensity warfare, if compared to the previous months.

But for them the main goal that Washington achieved during this war in Afghanistan was not to control Afghanistan. That was not the real prize in this war. The real prize in this war was using that war and the political climate created by 9/11 in the United States in order to achieve something far more important than whatever presence in Afghanistan, which is the establishment of a direct U.S. military presence in former Soviet Central Asia. That is far more important. And that has been achieved. You have bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and they are trying to push more military facilities in other neighboring states. They went as far as sending troops to Georgia even. But here the importance is far greater. In Central Asia those troops, those military bases are located in -- if you just look at the map, this is in the middle of this continental mass, of this Eurasian land mass which goes from Russia to China. And Russia and China are still considered in Washington as the two main potential rivals of U.S. hegemony in the medium or long range.

And also the other importance of being there militarily is to provide a kind of guarantee to U.S. oil companies, who have entered the area after the collapse of the Soviet Union but which were reluctant to invest because of the uncertainties about the political future of the area around the Caspian Sea. For all these reasons, the real thing that was happening in Afghanistan was actually in Central Asia, but the attention of the world, the attention of public opinion was focused on Afghanistan.

Washington is busy trying to expand. Actually, the end of the Cold War, instead of seeing the network of military bases and alliances that was built during the Cold War, instead of seeing that dismantled, the end of the Cold War has seen, on the contrary, the expansion of that. Washington is busy expanding the network and finalizing this buildup of a network which covers now the entire planet.

*I remember vividly the U.S. proclaiming that its citizens would reap the benefit of what was called a peace dividend. Billions of dollars going to the military would instead go to education, health care and social programs. Of course, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin both have tremendous oil reserves as well as natural gas, and the U.S. bases now are now, poised, as you said, almost on a permanent basis. What do you think in terms of the United States' overextending its empire? There are troops now in the Philippines to Colombia, from Korea to northeast Africa. It seems that there has been a massive surge since 9/11 of the projection of U.S. military power.*

Definitely. 9/11 provided Washington with the political conditions for doing that. That would not have been possible without 9/11. And in that sense 9/11 is an obvious illustration of the very shortsighted character of this kind of terrorism, not to mention, obviously, its criminal character, which is obvious. But I say that, even politically speaking, it produces exactly the opposite result that those who achieved it thought that they were producing. And in that sense 9/11 was exploited, very obviously, by the U.S. administration.

At the domestic level, 9/11 was decisive in turning this administration, which lacked to a certain extent even legitimacy, given the way it snatched power through the electoral process, and turning that administration and this president as one with very high levels of popularity, enabling the administration to just go through the Enron scandal, which is a hugely important scandal, far more important than, for example, the Monica Lewinsky affair was. And nevertheless they were able just to go through all that.

At the international level, at the level of the agenda globally, 9/11 provided the political condition, the ideological legitimation, in the name of the war against terrorism, which they thought would be some equivalent of what the war against communism had been for the years since the beginning of the Cold War up to Vietnam, that is, ideological legitimation for military expansion, for renewed military interventionism of a very extensive character. And, yes, what we are seeing is that the end of the Cold War -- the key option of Washington at the end of the Cold War was not whether to dismantle the Cold War legacy, the Cold War legacy of military expenditure and this network of bases, military bases and alliances, but, on the contrary, the option was to actually carry on to keep that kind of structure and even to expand the network in order to achieve and consolidate this unipolar hegemony of the United States. You were mentioning the peace dividend. And it's true, that was one of the great expectations at the time when the Berlin Wall fell. And then you had --

*The collapse of the Soviet Union.*

-- and the end of the Cold War. And you had so many people around the world believing that this will usher in an era of world peace, disarmament and a priority to solving the huge economic and social problems of this planet. So the expectations were very, very high at that time. And that's actually what Bush Sr., who I mentioned at the beginning, promised in his famous speech about the new world order. He tried to sell the public opinion that the war he was going to launch against Iraq was some kind of inauguration for that new era.

But, actually, the oxymoron was obvious there, because the Gulf War was not ushering in an era of world peace, but, on the contrary, was a massive demonstration by Washington to the rest of the world of its military superiority and a massive demonstration by Washington to its partners in Western Europe and Japan of the fact that Washington is, to put it in Madeleine Albright's famous phrase, "the indispensable nation," which means the indispensable global cop for the interests of the world system. So this Cold War legacy is carried on, and even expanded.

In terms of budget, the United States has kept a Cold War budget after the Cold War. It is a budget which is still one of permanent readiness for war. And, actually, not for one war but even for two wars, because the scenario in which the Pentagon budget is built is one of being able to wage simultaneously two major regional wars, two major "theater" wars, as they call them. And this has meant that at the lowest point of the evolution of the U.S. military budget in the 1990s, which was reached around the period between 1995-97, the United States was nevertheless spending over 30 percent of world military expenditure. And since 1998, 1999, and, actually, already under Clinton, you had a new upward trend in the military budget, a

new long-term increase, the first long-term increase in the military budget planned since the end of the Cold War. It obviously has been pushed forward by 9/11 - to the point that Washington is now spending more than 40 percent of world military expenditure and is on its way, probably, I would say, around the end of this present decade, to reach a point where the United States will be spending as much as the rest of the world combined, as much as more than 190 states, all the rest of the world. They will reach a point where Washington will be spending 50 percent of world military expenditure. And who knows if this threshold won't even be crossed. This is absolutely dramatic.

And you compare that to the fact that the United States is by far, among rich industrial countries, the one with the lowest percentage of its national product devoted to public aid for development, less than 0.1 percent of the U.S. gross national product. That is by far the lowest percentage among all the rich industrial countries. And this very fact, this comparison between these two figures, is very eloquent about the kind of choices and the kind of world order, producing world disorder, actually, that they are trying to build, one based on naked force and unipolar hegemony, the law of the jungle, the law of the strongest. That's what we are seeing.

And this means putting in jeopardy, actually, the lives of us all, because this is creating a frightening world situation. Just think of it. The present world is more frightening than whatever you had even at the height of the Cold War in a certain sense. Where people were expecting this great era of peace and a disarmament, you've got exactly the contrary. And it's obvious to me that Washington bears the main responsibility, because Washington was and is still, by far, in the dominant position worldwide, a position which enables them, as they say in their strategic documents, to shape the world. And that is what they are busy doing, shaping the world. When we see the result, it is absolutely frightening. And I would say, fortunately, that we have at least a ray of hope now with this spectacular rise of the only countervailing power that exists, which is the global antiwar mobilization.

*Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia. How central is oil in the war on Iraq? And is it subordinate to the whole issue of U.S. hegemony, or are they interlinked?*

They are absolutely interlinked, and the oil issue is absolutely central. The control of Iraq means, first of all, controlling the second, as you said -- the country has the second largest oil reserves, and is a key producer, which means that since Washington has already major influence on the Saudi kingdom, it means enhancing considerably Washington's leverage on OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. And secondly, Washington is trying to push forward some kind of reversal of the nationalizations of oil that you had in that part of the world since the 1970s and trying to impose production-sharing agreements for U.S. oil companies, which they will try to get, and therefore increase the part of the oil profits that they get. And then you have what the oil money represents; that is, you have the part that they take as oil profits, and then you have the part that is given to the producing countries. But the United States wants the oil and the money of the oil, the oil money, whether the one taken as profits or the one taken as recycled

petrodollars used by those countries in purchases of U.S. products and, for instance, in the case of the Saudi kingdom its mainly purchase of U.S. arms. The Saudi kingdom is one of the best customers of the U.S. arms industry. And also --

*Also Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.*

Absolutely. And they also put their assets in the U.S. economy, they invest there, and they are among the main buyers of U.S. Treasury Bonds. And in that way they contribute to subsidizing the U.S. budget.

*One final question. You conclude The Clash of Barbarisms, interestingly, with the story of Achilles and Hector from the Trojan War. What did you have in mind there?*

The story is a story about arrogance. There are so many stories about the fact that arrogance can lead to disasters, and one should learn to be modest, because some enemy would always find some weak point, something like the famous Achilles heel. You have always vulnerable points. And history is full of such lessons. But what we have now in Washington are people of an unprecedented level of arrogance. And it is already backfiring, I would say, because 9/11 was some kind of blowback, some aspect of the blowback, but actually it provided the Administration, as we said, with some political clout, actually. But what the arrogance is producing is that it has been decisive in fostering the development of the antiwar movement. And from that angle, the very clumsy management by this very arrogant administration of what is going on has been very helpful in building the antiwar movement and developing the conscience against this descent into barbarism that Washington is leading worldwide.

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