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Richard Greeman

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (1)

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'Islamism' in the Western Imagination

'There is no more important issue facing the West than Islamism, Islamofascism or — to use another label — radical Islam. And there is no more necessary precondition to countering that threat than understanding it, where it springs from, how it is expressed, and the ways in which it is spreading. But before we do any of that, we have to agree that the threat exists.' Thus writes Stephen Pollard, in a recent issue of the *N.Y. Times Book Review* under the headline 'Appeasers,' his review of Bruce Bower's *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom*. [1] But does 'the threat' indeed exist? And is it really 'more important' than catastrophic climate change, proliferating WMD's, or the world economic crisis?

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Before beginning our attempt to analyze the social forces which express themselves under the various banners of what Westerners have lumped together under the heading of 'Islamism,' I think we first need to deconstruct the concept and to situate it in the context of the Orientalist ideology of Western colonialism/imperialism. And what better place to

start than the moderate, middlebrow *Sunday Times Book Review*, which has reviewed one or more of the proliferating new books on 'political Islam' almost every week over the past decade and which is generally a good barometer of middle-of-the-road opinion in the U.S. According to Pollard's 'Appeasers' piece, the 'insidious problem' is that 'many liberals and others on the European left are making common cause with radical Islam and then brazenly and bizarrely denying both the existence of that alliance and in fact the existence of any Islamic threat whatsoever.' Bower's book *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* supports Pollard's thesis by rounding up the usual suspects: the insidiously charming Islamic theologian Tariq Ramadan, the left-wing former Mayor of London Ken Livingston, and the unnamed 'Western leaders' who allegedly failed to defend the publisher of the anti-Moslem Danish cartoons. *The Times*' Pollard concludes: 'Bower is unquestionably correct, and that fact is quite simply terrifying.'

To be sure the silver-tongued scholar Ramadan, does send different messages to the Faithful and to the *goyim*; and Livingston was an unprincipled, opportunistic Left politician looking for votes among England's fast-growing Moslem population (along with the British Socialist Workers' Party and its erstwhile ally Respect). But this is old news. Neither has much influence any more, and although 'insidious' they were hardly 'terrifying.' On the other hand, equating Western leaders' alleged 'appeasement' of political Islam with the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930's is sheer hysterical (and historical) lunacy, as those of us who actually live in Europe can testify.

Far from 'appeasing' Islam, the Swiss, after a virulently anti-Moslem right-wing campaign, have just voted by referendum to ban the construction of minarets. Meanwhile, at this writing the right-wing Sarkozy government is orchestrating a summit-level discussion of 'French national identity' while simultaneously demonizing and expelling non-white immigrants including long-time residents and human rights activists. Nor is there a dearth of French anti-Moslem books denouncing the 'appeasement' of Islamicism with titles like *Conquering the West: the Secret Project of the Islamists* and *France Infected with Islamism: Terrorist Threats within the Hexagon*. [2]

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Ironically, in the U.S. the domestic War on Terror seems to be aimed exclusively at hunting largely imaginary conspiracies among American Moslems and peace activists — not at interdicting actually-existing white racist militias and violent rightwing Christian terrorist networks. There was no investigation or round up of suspects when Tim McVeigh, an avowed member of a network of right-wing Christian militias, bombed the Oklahoma City Federal building killing 168 people and seriously injuring 800 more. And although Christian anti-abortionist organizations post

the names and addresses of 'Murderers' (abortion providers) and their families on the Internet and openly terrorize women's health clinics, there are no investigations of 'terrorist conspiracies' — even when a saintly Dr. Tiller is gunned down in his church on Sunday by a member of a fanatical Christian organization.

What we are dealing with here turns out to be not so much a Clash of Civilizations as an ideological Clash of Fundamentalisms. [3] While hyping the threat of 'Islamism,' U.S. media and politicians conveniently fail to point out that their own 'Political Christianity' is based on the same kind of reactionary hard-shell fundamentalism as 'Political Islam.' The Christian right in the U.S. aspires to the same kind of theocratic domination over government and peoples' private lives as the Ayatollahs. Its members speak with the same hysterical absolutist certainty, believe the ends justify the means, and are willing resort to violent means — like murdering abortion-providers and bombing women's health centers. Both fundamentalisms offer identity and community to the disaffected masses while silencing opposition and bullying the hesitant through fear. The Zionists and the Jewish Religious Right are equally ruthless, and recently the U.S. Christian right has overcome its traditional anti-Semitism to form a reactionary pro-Israel, pro-U.S. alliance with the right-wing Jewish organizations and leaders like Senator Lieberman — much to the dismay of the vast majority of liberal, secular U.S. Jews.

In any case, writers representing the 'Appeasers' school of anti-Islamism (not to mention the Times' fact-checkers) can hardly be unaware that the U.S. and Britain (not to mention Israel) have been systematically boycotting, bombing, invading and assassinating Islamic leaders and the countries that back them for at least a decade. They call that 'appeasement?' The ongoing wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have already lasted much longer than WWII, with concomitant waste of lives and treasure and no end in sight. Can Messrs. Pollard, Bower and the Book Review editors who commissioned, headlined and ran this hysterical propaganda piece really believe that the feeble, phoney left-liberal voices of Ramadan, Livingston and the like threaten to prevail over negative stereotypes with which CNN, Fox News, the *N.Y. Times* and Western leaders have been bombarding us for years as justification for hugely expensive oil-wars in the Middle-East? What we read in their texts is not empirical argument but ideology which, like religion itself, is supremely indifferent to fact and logic. It is easy for us Westerners to laugh at the Ayatollahs' depiction of dear old Uncle Sam as the 'Great Satan,' but harder to see the ideological demonization of Moslems and Arabs in our own 'liberal' media.

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'Urgent Threats' of Yesteryear

To understand the lunacy of the problematic Islamic 'threat' being hyped in mainstream U.S. political discourse, we need to place the concept in the historical context of Western, particularly U.S. imperialism's collective self-image. White American identity has from the beginning defined itself in opposition a dangerous, threatening 'other' who had to be conquered, subdued, and/or exterminated: in the first instance the 'savages' native to the Americas. Thus European invaders projected their own inner savagery on the 'Indians' in order to brutally displace them in the name of Civilization, as Richard Slotkin has demonstrated in his seminal *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier (1600-1860)* and subsequent works. After the 'Indians' were deprived of their lands and nearly wiped out, the laboring classes replaced them as American capitalism's terror-inspiring 'other.' This 'threat' was incarnated in two fear-inspiring images: the potent Negro slave ready to rape his mistress and slit his master's throat in the South, and in the North the specter of bloody conspiracies among the immigrant workers, whether Irish ('Molly Maquires'), Italian ('anarchist bomb throwers'), Jewish ('subversive communists conspirators') or just foreign-born ('disloyal'). These demonizing images of the 'other' were useful for ruling class divide-and-rule domination, pitting native workers against immigrants and black bondsmen against free white labor — to the extent that even today labor in Dixie remains largely non-unionized under anti-labor 'right to work' laws.

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The Red Scare of 1919 mobilized these stereotypes to justify government roundups (the Palmer Raids) more violent than the Cold War witch hunts or the post-9/11 anti-terrorist campaign. At the end of WWI, returning black and immigrant vets were full of democratic aspirations. The high hopes inspired by Wilson's 'self-determination of peoples' and ignited by the 1917 Russian Revolution were met with union-busting, mass arrests and massacres of strikers, deportations of the foreign-born, lynchings and race-riots against 'Negroes.' A nation-wide campaign of Nazi-type raids on Socialists, Communists and Wobblies was organized, with the FBI, vigilantes and local police sacking offices, smashing presses, beating and arresting leaders. It wasn't until the Depression of the Thirties that the American Left came back to life. Likewise, in the Forties, after WWII had once again raised democratic aspirations, the FBI, HUAC and the Truman Administration came up with the mass anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthyite 'witch-hunts' — investigations aimed at hounding alleged Communists and subversives out of their government jobs, purging radicals from the unions, the schools, the entertainment industry, the universities, thus silencing any political debate about foreign policy — henceforth considered 'treasonable.' Americans were forced to incriminate themselves and rat on their associates through compulsory Loyalty Oaths taken under pain of Perjury. To be sure, there were actually-existing Communists in the U.S., and yes some of them did agree to collect information for the Russians — albeit at a time when the Soviets were U.S. allies against Hitler. But the CPUSA had at most 180,000 members at its height, and by the late Fifties it had dwindled to the point where it was said that the dues payments of FBI infiltrators kept the Party treasury afloat. Yet when I was coming of age in the Fifties, the word 'Communist' was the functional equivalent of 'terrorist' today in the world outside our Left-wing family circle. The sensational Rosenberg atom-spy trial was the Fifties '9/11 wake up call,' alerting Americans to the 'urgent threat' of us Commies. [\[4\]](#)

After the 1989 collapse of Russian bureaucratic state-capitalism parading as 'Communism' and with 'Red' China born again as a U.S. capitalist trading partner, a new demon was needed to deflect from unrest over increasing economic and social inequality in the U.S. and around the world. The War on Drugs worked for a while. It proved useful for sending U.S. military advisors and equipment abroad to prop up pro-U.S. governments in Latin America while profitably filling the expanding US private prison system with unwilling customers from among unemployed Black and Hispanic youth. But after Osama bin Laden and his cohort pulled off the attacks of September 11, 2001, the War on Terror took precedence and 'political Islam' was suddenly discovered as the major threat to Western Civilization. This distant threat has proven a sufficient ideological pretext for curtailing democratic freedoms and creating a security state at home while using torture, terror bombing and outright invasion in pursuit of insanely unrealistic hegemonic foreign policy goals in the oil-rich Middle East.

The same 'threat of Islamism' myth was evoked to justify the U.S.'s routine, brazen use of 'secret' torture on captured Moslems. Of course, this torture was secret only to the U.S. media and public, not to the victims and their families. Arabic broadcasters like Al Jazeera gave U.S. torture-camps a big play all over the Moslem world. Machiavelli writes that cruelty is useful as a deterrent to enemies only if it is well-publicized. If letting potential 'enemy combatants' know the fate awaiting them if captured by the Americans was the goal of the U.S. torture program, the 'intelligence' community achieved it at the price of alienating a billion Moslems and eradicating any residual pro-American feelings dating from 9/11/01. The irony is that such 'enhanced interrogation' methods have proven notoriously useless for actual intelligence gathering, since people will say anything under torture. Yet the torturers and their superiors in the Bush Administration who sullied America's reputation and who violated U.S. and international law remain unpunished. The new President was made to understand that the U.S. may need these guys in the future and so his Administration decided not to 'look backward' only forward ! Forward to what ? More useless 'intelligence' ? Further degradation of the image of progressive, liberal, Western democratic values exemplified by kidnappings, torture chambers and brutal concentration camps like Abu Graib? As we shall argue below, such extreme methods are evidence of desperation.

Returning now to the ideological nature of today's problematic 'Islamic threat,' we see that historically it fits into an established tradition of hysterical propaganda campaigns which distort and exaggerate real and potential challenges to U.S. capitalism /imperialism so as to justify state terror at home and abroad. Indeed, the most recent published intelligence about Al-Qaeda indicates that its strength is down to 'only about two hundred hard-core followers [...] hunkered down, presumably along the Afghan-Pakistani border [...] with Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.' [5]

This is not to deny the very real challenge to U.S. imperialism and its allies, particularly Israel, posed by the social forces and regimes nebulously grouped under the heading 'political Islam.' We mean only to demythologize the actual threat, contextualize it and reduce it to its just proportions so as to actually understand 'where it springs from, how it is expressed, and the ways in which it is spreading' – something the Times' Pollard promised to do but never quite got around to.

With the oil-wars escalating and with U.S. and British voters less and less enthusiastic about paying for them, there is a need to ratchet up the pitch of anti-Moslem hysteria so as to 'stay the course' in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan and Yemen. Knowledge of the history, politics, sociology and even the languages of these threatening 'others' would only get in the way. In fact, the CIA and State Department actually dismissed their staff of Arabic-language translators years ago, when 'human intelligence' was replaced by spy satellites which capture megabytes of important information in Arabic which the Americans can't read. Who said 'Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make blind'? Are not ideological constructions like the 'terrorism' the blinders rulers put over their own eyes and the eyes of their subjects when they embark on a fatal course of *hubris*.

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Obama's Dangerous Escalations

We can see U.S. imperialism's desperation reflected in Obama's decision to radically escalate the wars he was ostensibly elected to terminate. It's not just that our erstwhile peace candidate and Nobel Peace laureate is withdrawing exhausted U.S. troops from the frying pan of Iraq only to transfer them into the fire of Afghanistan, although that was itself an act of desperation. Many of these 'volunteer' soldiers and reservists, shattered after several devastating tours of duty in Iraq, are being forced to remain in the service years beyond their contracts. Blackwater and other mercenaries now outnumber U.S. troops in Afghanistan with more escalation in sight. Yet, a new and highly dangerous stage was reached in January 2009 when Mr. Obama officially extended the 'anti-terror' oil-war into unstable, corrupt, nuclear-armed Pakistan. And if that weren't enough, as our 2009 Xmas present from the CIA, we have received a new war in Yemen. Thus our new President rounds out his first year in office, which began last January with the drone attacks on Pakistani civilians.

The Obama Administration's *fuite en avant*, escalating a losing Mideast campaign into dangerous new territory, makes about as much sense as sticking one's member into a beehive. Yet Mr. Obama is no gross fool, unlike his predecessor. The President is wise enough to know that every time he orders another CIA-Blackwater Predator drone to drop out of the sky over Pakistan and blow up a village or family of traditionally warlike Pashtuns, ten or a hundred new dedicated 'enemy combatants' rise from the ashes swearing (by Allah, who else?) eternal vengeance on the West. The President has enough imagination to visualize the consequences, yet like King Cadmus in the Greek myth, Obama is 'sowing dragons' teeth'

and 'reaping armed warriors' — myriads of whom spring up from the soil after each cluster-bomb sown. Militant Islamic groups like the Taliban stand ready and eager to inspire and direct such future martyrs. Angry poor men, particularly warriors from 'honor cultures,' are always eager to listen to ministers of religions that sanctify Holy War. In any case, the fierce tribes who inhabit Afghanistan and West Pakistan have never been conquered, having defeated

invasions by Darius the Persian, Alexander the Great, the British and the Soviet Russian empires.

Obama's radical escalation into the Pakistani nuclear danger-zone is arguably even more irrational than Bush II's Iraq occupation or Johnson's Vietnam escalations. Yet this new folly was accepted as a matter of course, without any serious discussion, by the U.S. mainstream media and politicians of both parties — the same way they accepted Bush's Saddam=Osama and WMDs lies and Lyndon Johnson's 'Bay of Tonkin Incidents.' Today, after these gross deceptions, dangerously aggressive irrational policies can no longer be sold on rational political grounds to the wary, anti-war silent majorities in the U.S and Britain. The enemy must be demonized and the threat must be magnified in an atmosphere of a hysterical, irrational Islamophobic and anti-Arab propaganda. Under Bush II, we had an explicit Clash of Fundamentalisms, Judeo-Christian versus Islamic. Yet paradoxically it was born-again Bush who finally signed off

on U.S. withdrawal from Iraq just before slinking out of office, leaving his successor a free hand — one hoped to make peace, but in the event to escalate ! Was it a deal with the Pentagon made quietly behind the scenes during Obama's 'seamless transition ?' In any case, we quickly learned the truth when Obama launched a Predator attack on Pakistan during his first week in office, 'bleeding' himself as Commander-in Chief and setting a hawkish precedent for his Administration. Thanks to this 'seamless transition' Obama gave new political legitimacy to the hawks in the CIA and the Pentagon – the very people who got Iraq wrong in the first place. And now, in the wake of the botched Xmas Day bomb attack, another 'secret' U.S. war has come to the surface in Yemen, a strategic country divided by decades of civil war, with rival factions armed by Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States. On January 7, Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister Rashad al-Alami reporting declared, 'If there is direct intervention by the United States, it will strengthen al-Qaeda. We cannot accept any foreign troops on Yemeni territory.' Time for 'regime change' in Yemen? Yet how many Vietnamese puppet presidents did the U.S. remove or assassinate before finally withdrawing, humiliated by defeat, abandoning its Vietnamese allies to their fates?

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The U.S. March of Folly in the Middle-East

Does desperation alone account for reckless escalation of U.S. military aggression in the Middle East for which the threat of an aggressive Islamism provides the rationalization? Certainly the worsening world economic crisis directly conditions the international context, aggravating U.S. capital's frantic rush to control the world's remaining oil reserves. America's willingness to use excessive force and to go it alone also serves to intimidate would-be imperialist rivals like China, Russia and France so

as to retain its lion's share. But it makes little geo-political sense for U.S. imperialism to have become so obsessively focussed on its Middle-Eastern crusade that it has apparently lost sight of the main prize in its own back yard, Latin America. Thus *Yanqui* imperialism's oldest and most important sphere of influence has been quietly slipping out of Washington's grasp. North American capital now faces regional rivals like Brazil and heavy-duty competition from China. An expanding coalition of more or

less democratic regimes backed by popular movements has shown itself determined to break free from U.S. economic and political hegemony. Indeed, the U.S. has only two reliable allies left in Latin America, Colombia and Mexico, and both are hopelessly corrupt semi-dictatorships bemired in bloody drug wars. This major setback for U.S. global interests is further proof of the irrationality of the ideologically-driven U.S. campaign against 'Islamism.'

Another explanation for the U.S. government continuing blindly to pursue failed policies was put forward most recently by the Nobel prize-winning liberal economist Paul Krugman. Beginning in the 1970's, the enormous cost of political campaigns, the growing power of corporate lobbies, the direct and overwhelming domination of big money over every aspect of government has made reform impossible. Today, the demands of individual special interests predominate over the collective national interest, even over those of U.S. capitalism taken as a whole. The government is thus reduced to the role of hired 'enforcer' for the coal, petroleum, arms, pharmaceutical, insurance and banking industries in their frantic rush to accumulate short-term profits. Although Krugman — who is a Keynesian, not a Marxist —

doesn't go quite that far, he does conclude that this system of legal, quite open corruption has led to a paralysis of the U.S. political system, which is no longer able to change course or even to make token reforms to satisfy the aspirations of Obama's multi-class, multi-ethnic, heavily feminine, youthful and anti-war electorate. Within this corrupt system, the petroleum-military-industrial complex is by far the most powerful lobby and the one most deeply invested in continuation of that multi-billion-dollar boondoggle known as the crusade against radical Islamism — at whatever cost to the taxpayer and to U.S. longterm political interests.

Yet another factor limiting U.S. imperialism's ability to correct its course is the domination of the Religious Right over American political system. During the Bush years, it spoke directly through the drawl of the born-again Texan in charge. Since losing the White House, a headless Republican Party has now apparently been completely taken over by the Christian Right. Its deafening noise machine barks a crypto-racist message of hate through the halls of Congress and the media, harping on Obama's 'foreign birth certificate,' his 'forced-euthanasia communist healthcare plan,' his Arab middle name, his 'appeasement' of the Islamists. What should objectively be termed 'Political Christianity' (to balance 'Political Islamism') is arguably in an even stronger position under a Democratic President dedicated to 'bi-partisanship' who will predictably hold out his hand to the rabid, no-compromise Republicans and get his arm bit off. These economic and political pressures combine with ideological rigidity to make rational reform possible.

Given this delusional and self-defeating outlook, I can only conclude that the U.S. Establishment (dare I say 'Corporate Ruling Class?') is literally on the Road to Folly — a mental state defined as pursuing an irrational course without regard to the predictable consequences, refusing to listen to critics, and making the same mistakes again and again without drawing the lesson of past failures. 'Those whom the gods wish to destroy, the first make mad.' The erudite military historian Barbara Tuchman studied five historical examples of such disastrous 'Pursuits of Policy Contrary to

Self-Interest.' Her brilliant 1984 *March of Folly, From Troy to Vietnam* concludes with mad King George III's loss of his American colonies and (then) contemporary America caught in the Vietnam quagmire. To crown eight years of failure in Iraq and Afghanistan by destabilizing Pakistan

and invading Yemen seems the height of folly, yet it is the (ideo)logical consequence of today's Clash of Fundamentalisms. So much for deconstructing the ideological threat of 'Islamism' in the Western Imagination and the U.S. political and military follies it both justifies and engenders. Let us now turn to Islamism as it expresses itself concretely

on the ground in the Middle-East/Arab world and the Moslem *diaspora*.

Actually-existing Islamic Movements and States

As we have seen above, U.S. imperialism, deluded by its own ideology, has joined the March of Folly in Afghanistan/West Pakistan — following in the illustrious footsteps of other would-be conquerors including the Persian Emperor Darius I, Alexander the Great, the British Empire under Queen Victoria and Brezhnev's Soviet Russian empire. All these great powers

lost entire armies in the region before being driven out by the fiercely independent natives. The U.S. Government, dominated by powerful lobbies whose special interests trump the national interest, appears unable to change its irrational course. American imperialism justifies its dangerous and self-defeating policies through ideological constructs rooted in America's long history of conquest, projecting white American aggression outward onto a series of threatening 'others' from the 'Indians' to the 'Commies' and most recently the 'urgent threat' of 'Islamism, Islamo-fascism or... radical Islam' (in the words of the Times). Having thus deconstructed and contextualized the contested concept of the Islamic 'threat,' we now have a more objective perspective from which to examine Islamism empirically, on the ground as it were.

Here we must account for two distinct, but related geographical and political phenomena. 1) militant Islamic movements, parties and states

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in the Moslem Middle East/Arab world (ME/A for short) and 2) Islamic fundamentalism among immigrant or immigrant-descended youth in Western countries who adopt it as an expression of their alienation, humiliation and need for cultural identity. Naturally these two strands are intertwined. Radical Islamic states and movements in the ME/A seek to influence and recruit among the Moslem *diaspora* in the West; they weave international propaganda networks aimed at gaining cultural and political hegemony over communities of often indifferent or irreligious Moslem immigrants, where family, cultural and emotional ties with the homeland nonetheless remain strong. Such networks may also be used to recruit militants for combat and suicide attacks among the disaffected masses of unemployed youth in the ME/A world and the frustrated, humiliated, educated elites in both Europe and the Moslem countries. Taken as a whole, these state and non-state actors form what has been described as a 'nebulous,' and the most striking thing about this nebulous is its lack of internal unity and coherence.

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To begin with, the 'Islamic world,' with its 1.3 billion inhabitants (1/5 of the world population), is itself as various as the so-called 'Christian-heritage' world with its right-wing Evangelicals and politicized Vatican at one extreme and its vast unchurched European majority at the other. Similarly, Islam as it is lived and practiced by millions of East Asians has a much less significant political role than in the Middle East/Arab (ME/A) lands, where it has become the ideological expression of exacerbated nationalism and a vehicle to political power. And even within this geographical area, division — or rather violent schism — predominates over unity and coherence. The intensity of the rivalry between Shiite and Sunni factions, each with its alliances of states and insurgent groups, has been compared to that of the 16th Century European inter-Christian religious wars between Catholics and Protestants, which continued through the 17th Century here in France and were bloodier and more destructive than the Crusades. *A propos*, the Crusades of the Middle Ages were organized under the Popes of a united Catholic Europe, which accounted for much of their success against the Moslems, who were divided, then as now. [6]

[1] Stephen Pollard, 'The Appeasers' (review of *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* by Bruce Bower) *NY Times Book Review*, Sunday July 26, 2009, p. 12.

[2] Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'Occident. Le projet secret des islamistes* (Paris, 2005), cited in Patrick Haenni and Samar Amghar, "Un spectre hante l'Europe : Le mythe renaissant de l'islam conquérant," ("A specter is haunting Europe: the rebirth of the Myth of Islam the Conquerer") *Le Monde diplomatique*, Jan. 2010. See also Mohamed Sifaoui, *La France malade de l'islamisme : Menaces terroristes sur l'Hexagone* (Paris, 2002).

[3] See Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms (Crusades, Jihads and Modernity)*, Verso 2002. In my opinion, given the retrogression of both the West and Islam to rape, torture, extermination of civilian and contempt for the rule of law or public opinion, "The Clash of Barbarisms" would be an even more appropriate description of the putative "Clash of Civilizations." As for "Western Civilization," I agree: "It would be a good idea."

[4] I well remember the electrocution in June 1953 of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, parents of two boys more or less my age, which took place in Ossining, N.Y. near my boyhood home. It took several jolts to kill the mother, Ethel, who looked like my aunt; the lights browned out in some places, and the kids in school were telling "frying" jokes. At thirteen I was old enough to know that the Communist couple had not been given a fair trial, that the intelligence work Julius was accused of carrying out for Russia took place during WWII when the Soviets were our allies, and that there was no such thing as "the secret" of the A-bomb that could justify a death sentence.

[5] See Steve Coll, 'Threats,' *The New Yorker*, Jan. 18, 2010 p. 19.

[6] Cf. Amin Malouf, *The Crusades through Moslem Eyes*. In fact there was internal division on both sides. The Crusaders' most significant victory

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was to lay waste to the Christian kingdom of Armenia and destroy Constantinople, the thousand-year-old capital of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (and the commercial rival of Catholic Venice). For a pagan like me, the only positive part of the Crusades was that some filthy Europeans adopted the Eastern practice of bathing — which the Church later banned when the bath-houses turned into brothels.