

AMERICA ALONE
THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

MARK STEYN

Prologue

To Be or Not to Be

We know what we are, but know not what we may be.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, HAMLET (1601)

Do you worry? You look like you do. Worrying is the way the responsible citizen of an advanced society demonstrates his virtue: he feels good about feeling bad.

But what to worry about? Iranian nukes? Nah, that's just some racket cooked up by the Christian fundamentalist Bush and his Zionist buddies to give Halliburton a pretext to take over the Persian carpet industry. Worrying about nukes is so eighties. "They make me want to throw up They make me feel sick to my stomach," wrote the British novelist Martin Amis, who couldn't stop thinking about them during the Thatcher Terror. In the introduction to a collection of short stories, he worried about the Big One and outlined his own plan for coping with a nuclear winter wonderland:

Suppose I survive. Suppose my eyes aren't pouring down my face, suppose I am untouched by the hurricane of secondary missiles that all mortar, metal, and glass has abruptly become: suppose all this. I shall be obliged (and it's the last thing I feel like doing) to retrace that long mile home, through the firestorm, the remains of the thousand-miles-an-hour winds, the warped atoms, the groveling dead. Then - God willing, if I still have the strength, and, of course, if they are still alive - I must find my wife and children and I must kill them.

But the Big One never fell. And instead of killing his wife Martin Amis had to make do with divorcing her. Back then it was just crazies like Reagan and Thatcher who had nukes, so you can understand why everyone was terrified. But now Kim Jong-il and the ayatollahs have them, so we're all sophisticated and relaxed about it, like the French hearing that their president's acquired a couple more mistresses. Martin Amis hasn't thrown up a word about the subject in years. To the best of my knowledge, he has no plans to kill the present Mrs. Amis.

So what should we be covering in terror over? How about - stop me if you've heard this one before - "climate change"? If you've seen Al Gore's acclaimed documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* you'll know that it begins with a searing, harrowing nightmare vision of the world to come:

One day Chicken Little was walking in the woods when - KERPLUNK - an acorn fell on her head.

"Oh my goodness!" said Chicken Little. "The sky is falling!
I must go and tell the king."

Whoops, my mistake. I must be mixing AI's movie up with a previous eco-doom blockbuster. They come rolling in like rising sea levels in the Maldives. You may have seen yet another example of the genre, the film *The Day After Tomorrow*, in which (warning: plot spoiler) a speech by Dick Cheney brings on the flash-freezing of the entire northern hemisphere. I'm not a climatologist so I'll take Dennis Quaid's word for it that that's scientifically possible. But the point is that from Chicken Little to AI Gore to Dennis Quaid, respected figures have, been forecasting the end of the world pretty much since the beginning of the world. In Professor Little's day, the sky was falling. In Vice President Gore's time, it's the Earth that's falling apart. *Plus ça change* of direction, plus *c'est la même prose*. But, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So let me put it in a nutshell:

It's the end of the world!! Head for the hills!!!

No, wait. Don't head for the hills-they're full of Islamist terrorist camps. Let me put it in a slightly bigger nutshell: much of what we loosely call the Western world will not survive the twenty-first century, and much of it will effectively disappear within our lifetimes, including many if not most European countries. There'll probably still be a geographical area on the map marked as Italy or the Netherlands - probably - just as in Istanbul there's still a building known as Hagia Sophia, or St. Sophia's Cathedral. But it's not a cathedral; it's merely a designation for a piece of real estate. Likewise, Italy and the Netherlands will merely be designations for real estate.

That's just for starters. And, unlike the ecochondriacs' obsession with rising sea levels, this isn't something that might possibly conceivably hypothetically threaten the Maldivian Islands circa the year 2500; the process is already well advanced as we speak. With respect to Francis Fukuyama, it's not the end of history; it's the end of the world as we know it. Whether we like what replaces it depends on whether America can summon the will to shape at least part of the emerging world. If not, then it's also the end of the American moment, and the dawn of the new Dark Ages (if darkness can dawn): a planet on which much of the map is re-primitivized.

Does that make me sound as nuts as AI Gore and the rest of the ecodoom set? It's true the end of the world's nighness isn't something you'd want to set your watch by. Consider some of Chicken Little's eminent successors in this field:

In 1968, in his bestselling book *The Population Bomb*, distinguished scientist Paul Ehrlich declared: "In the 1970s the world will undergo famines - hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death."

In 1972, in their landmark study *The Limits to Growth*, the Club of Rome announced that the world would run out of gold by 1981, of mercury by 1985, tin by 1987, zinc by 1990, petroleum by 1992, and copper, lead, and gas by 1993.

In 1976, Lowell Ponte published a huge bestseller called *The Cooling: Has the New Ice Age Already Begun? Can We Survive?*

In 1977, Jimmy Carter, president of the United States (incredible as it may seem), confidently predicted that "we could use up all of the proven reserves of oil in the entire world by the end of the next decade."

None of these things occurred. Contrary to the doom-mongers' predictions, millions didn't starve and the oil and gas and gold didn't run out, and, though the NHL now has hockey franchises in Anaheim and Tampa Bay, ambitious kids are still unable to spend their winters knocking a puck around the frozen Everglades. But that doesn't mean nothing much went on during the last third of the twentieth century. Here's what did happen between 1970

and 2000: in that period, the developed world declined from just under 30 percent of the global population to just over 20 percent, and the Muslim nations increased from about 15 percent to 20 percent.

Is that fact less significant to the future of the world than the fate of some tree or the endangered sloth hanging from it? In 1970, very few non-Muslims outside the Indian subcontinent gave much thought to Islam. Even the Palestinian situation was seen within the framework of a more or less conventional ethnic nationalist problem. Yet today it's Islam a-go-go: almost every geopolitical crisis takes place on what Samuel Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, calls "the boundary looping across Eurasia and Africa that separates Muslims from non-Muslims." That looping boundary is never not in the news. One week, it's a bomb in Bali. The next, some beheadings in southern Thailand. Next, an insurrection in an obscure resource-rich Muslim republic in the Russian Federation. And then Madrid, and London, and suddenly that looping, loopy boundary has penetrated into the very heart of the West. In little more than a generation.

1970 doesn't seem that long ago. If you're in your fifties or sixties, as many of the chaps running the Western world today are wont to be, your pants are narrower than they were back then and your hair's less groovy, but the landscape of your life - the look of your house, the layout of your car, the shape of your kitchen appliances, the brand names of the stuff in the fridge - isn't significantly different. And yet that world is utterly altered. Just to recap those bald statistics: in 1970, the developed nations had twice as big a share of the global population as the Muslim world: 30 percent to 15 percent. By 2000, they were at parity: each had about 20 percent.

And by 2020?

September 11, 2001, was not "the day everything changed," but the day that revealed how much had already changed. On September 10, how many journalists had the Council on American-Islamic Relations or the Canadian Islamic Congress or the Muslim Council of Britain in their Rolodexes? If you'd said that whether something does or does not cause offense to Muslims would be the early twenty-first century's principal political dynamic in Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom, most folks would have thought you were crazy. Yet on that Tuesday morning the top of the iceberg bobbed up and toppled the Twin Towers.

This book is about the seven-eighths below the surface - the larger forces at play in the developed world that have left Europe too enfeebled to resist its remorseless transformation into Eurabia and that call into question the future of much of the rest of the world, including the United States, Canada, and beyond. The key factors are:

1. Demographic decline
2. The unsustainability of the advanced Western social-democratic state
3. Civilizational exhaustion

Let's start with demography, because everything does.

PEOPLE POWER

If your school has two hundred guys and you're playing a school with two thousand pupils, it doesn't mean your baseball team is definitely going to lose, but it certainly gives the other fellows a big starting advantage. Likewise, if you want to launch a revolution, it's not

very likely if you've only got seven revolutionaries. And they're all over eighty. But if you've got two million and seven revolutionaries and they're all under thirty, you're in business.

I wonder how many pontificators on the "Middle East peace process" ever run this number: the median age in the Gaza Strip is 15.8 years.

Once you know that, all the rest is details. If you were a "moderate Palestinian" leader, would you want to try to persuade a nation - or pseudo-nation - of unemployed poorly educated teenage boys raised in a UN-supervised European-funded death cult to see sense? Any analysis of the "Palestinian problem" that doesn't take into account the most important determinant on the ground is a waste of time.

Likewise, the salient feature of Europe, Canada, Japan, and Russia is that they're running out of babies. What's happening in the developed world is one of the fastest demographic evolutions in history. Most of us have seen a gazillion heartwarming ethnic comedies - My Big Fat Greek Wedding and its ilk - in which some uptight WASPy type starts dating a gal from a vast, loving, fecund Mediterranean family, so abundantly endowed with sisters and cousins and uncles that you can barely get in the room. It is, in fact, the inversion of the truth. Greece has a fertility rate hovering just below 1.3 births per couple, which is what demographers call the point of "lowest-low" fertility from which no human society has ever recovered. And Greece's fertility is the healthiest in Mediterranean Europe: Italy has a fertility rate of 1.2, Spain, 1.1. Insofar as any citizens of the developed world have "big" families these days, it's the Anglo democracies: America's fertility rate is 2.1, New Zealand's a little below. Hollywood should be making My Big Fat Uptight Protestant Wedding, in which some sad Greek only child marries into a big heartwarming New Zealand family where the spouse actually has a sibling.

As I say, this isn't a projection - it's happening now. There's no need to extrapolate, and if you do it gets a little freaky, but, just for fun, here goes: by 2050, 60 percent of Italians will have no brothers, no sisters, no cousins, no aunts, no uncles. The big Italian family, with papa pouring the vino and mama spooning out the pasta down an endless table of grandparents and nieces and nephews, will be gone, no more, dead as the dinosaurs. As Noel Coward once remarked in another context, "Funiculi, funicula, funic yourself." By mid-century, Italians will have no choice in the matter.

Experts talk about root causes. But demography is the most basic root of all. Many of the developed world's citizens gave no conscious thought to Islam before September 11. Now we switch on the news every evening and, though there are many trouble spots around the world, as a general rule it's easy to make an educated guess at one of the participants: Muslims vs. Jews in "Palestine," Muslims vs. Hindus in Kashmir, Muslims vs. Christians in Africa, Muslims vs. Buddhists in Thailand, Muslims vs. Russians in the Caucasus, Muslims vs. backpacking tourists in Bali, Muslims vs. Danish cartoonists in Scandinavia. The environmentalists may claim to think globally but act locally, but these guys live it. They open up a new front somewhere on the planet with nary a thought. Why? Because they've got the manpower. Because in the seventies and eighties, Muslims had children (those self-detonating Islamists in London and Gaza are a literal baby boom) while Westerners took all those silly doomsday tomes about "overpopulation" seriously. We still do. In 2005, Jared Diamond published a bestselling book called Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed. A timely subject, so I bought a copy. More fool me. It's all about Easter Island going belly up because they chopped down all their trees. That's why they're not in the G-7 or a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Same with the Greenlanders and the

Mayans and Diamond's other curious choices of "societies." Indeed, as the author sees it, pretty much every society collapses because it chops down its trees.

Poor old Diamond can't see the forest because of his obsession with the trees. Russia's collapsing and it's nothing to do with deforestation. It's not the tree, it's the family tree. It's the babes in the wood. A people that won't multiply can't go forth or go anywhere. Those who do will shape the age we live in. Because, when history comes a-calling, it starts with the most basic question of all:

Knock-knock. Who's there?

WELFARE AND WARFARE

Demographic decline and the unsustainability of the social-democratic state are closely related. In America, politicians upset about the federal deficit like to complain that we're piling up debts our children and grandchildren will have to payoff. But in Europe the unaffordable entitlements are in even worse shape: there are no kids or grandkids to stick it to.

In my town in New Hampshire, the population peaked in 1820 and then declined until 1940, when it started edging up again until it stands today almost at what it was two centuries ago. The opening up of the west killed Granite State sheep farming, and young people fanned out across the plains, or to the mill towns in southern New England. It's sad to see cellar holes and abandoned barns and meadows reclaimed by the forest. But it didn't kill my town because we had no extravagant social programs to which our old-timers had become partial. Similarly, in the post-Gold Rush Yukon, one minute the saloons are bustling and the garters of the hoochie-koochie dancers are stuffed with dollar bills; next they're all shuttered up and everyone's skedaddled out on the last southbound dogsled. But the territory isn't stuck trying to figure who's going to pay for the hoochie-koochie gals' retirement complex. Unlike the emptying saloons of Whitehorse and Dawson City, demography is an existential crisis for the developed world, because the twentieth-century social-democratic state was built on a careless model that requires a constantly growing population to sustain it.

You might formulate it like this:

Age + Welfare = Disaster for you

Youth + Will = Disaster for whoever gets in your way

By "will," I mean the metaphorical spine of a culture. Africa, to take another example, also has plenty of young people, but it's riddled with AIDS and, for the most part, Africans don't think of themselves as Africans; as we saw in Rwanda, their primary identity is tribal, and most tribes have no global ambitions. Islam, however, has serious global ambitions, and it forms the primal, core identity of most of its adherents in the Middle East, South Asia, and elsewhere. Islam has youth and will, Europe has age and welfare.

We are witnessing the end of the late twentieth-century progressive welfare democracy. Its fiscal bankruptcy is merely a symptom of a more fundamental bankruptcy: its insufficiency as an animating principle for society. The children and grandchildren of those Fascists and Republicans who waged a bitter civil war for the future of Spain now shrug when a bunch of foreigners blow up their capital. Too sedated even to sue for terms, they capitulate instantly. Over on the other side of the equation, the modern multicultural state is too watery a concept to bind huge numbers of immigrants to the land of their nominal citizenship. So they look elsewhere and find the jihad. The Western Muslim's pan-Islamic

identity is merely the first great cause in a world where globalized pathologies are taking the place of old-school nationalism.

For states in demographic decline with ever more lavish social programs, the question is a simple one: Can they get real? Can they grow up before they grow old? If not, then they'll end their days in societies dominated by people with a very different world view.

FIGHTING VAINLY THE OLD ENNUI

Which brings us to the third factor - the enervated state of the Western world, the sense of civilizational ennui, of nations too mired in cultural relativism to understand what's at stake. As it happens, that third point is closely related to the first two. To Americans, it doesn't always seem obvious that there's any connection between the "war on terror" and the so-called "pocketbook issues" of domestic politics. But there is a correlation between the structural weaknesses of the social-democratic state and the rise of a globalized Islam. The state has gradually annexed all the responsibilities of adulthood-health care, child care, care of the elderly - to the point where it's effectively severed its citizens from humanity's primal instincts, not least the survival instinct. In the American context, the federal "deficit" isn't the problem; it's the government programs that cause the deficit. These programs would be wrong even if Bill Gates wrote a check to cover them each month. They corrode the citizen's sense of self-reliance to a potentially fatal degree. Big government is a national security threat: it increases your vulnerability to threats like Islamism, and makes it less likely you'll be able to summon the will to rebuff it. We should have learned that lesson on September 11, 2001, when big government flopped big-time and the only good news of the day came from the ad hoc citizen militia of Flight 93 .

There were two forces at play in the late twentieth century: in the eastern bloc, the collapse of Communism; in the West, the collapse of confidence. One of the most obvious refutations of Francis Fukuyama's famous thesis *The End of History* - written at the victory of liberal pluralist democracy over Soviet Communism - is that the victors didn't see it as such. Americans - or at least non-Democrat-voting Americans may talk about "winning" the Cold War but the French and the Belgians and the Germans and the Canadians don't. Very few British do. These are all formal NATO allies - they were, technically, on the winning side against a horrible tyranny few would wish to live under themselves. In Europe, there was an initial moment of euphoria: it was hard not to be moved by the crowds sweeping through the Berlin Wall, especially as so many of them were hot-looking Red babes eager to enjoy a Carlsberg or Stella Artois with even the nerdiest running dog of imperialism. But when the moment faded, *pace* Fukuyama, there was no sense on the Continent that our Big Idea had beaten their Big Idea. With the best will in the world, it's hard to credit the citizens of France or Italy as having made any serious contribution to the defeat of Communism. *Au contraire*, millions of them voted for it, year in, year out. And with the end of the Soviet existential threat, the enervation of the West only accelerated.

In Thomas P. M. Barnett's book *Blueprint for Action*, Robert D. Kaplan, a very shrewd observer of global affairs, is quoted referring to the lawless fringes of the map as "Indian territory." It's a droll joke but a misleading one. The difference between the old Indian territory and the new is this: no one had to worry about the Sioux riding down Fifth Avenue. Today, with a few hundred bucks on his ATM card, the fellow from the Badlands can be in the heart of the metropolis within hours. Here's another difference: in the old days, the white man settled the Indian territory. Now the followers of the Badland's radical imams settle the metropolis. And another difference: technology. In the old days, the Injuns had bows and

arrows and the cavalry had rifles. In today's Indian territory, countries that can't feed their own people have nuclear weapons.

But beyond that, the very phrase "Indian territory" presumes that inevitably these badlands will be brought within the bounds of the ordered world. In fact, a lot of today's "Indian territory" was relatively ordered a generation or two back - West Africa, Pakistan, Bosnia. Though Eastern Europe and Latin America and parts of Asia are freer now than they were in the seventies, other swathes of the map have spiraled backwards. Which is more likely? That the parts of the world under pressure will turn into post-Communist Poland or post-Communist Yugoslavia? In Europe, the demographic pressures favor the latter.

The enemies we face in the future will look a lot like al Qaeda: transnational, globalized, locally franchised, extensively outsourced - but tied together through a powerful identity that leaps frontiers and continents. They won't be nation states and they'll have no interest in becoming nation states, though they might use the husks thereof, as they did in Afghanistan and then Somalia. The jihad may be the first, but other transnational deformities will embrace similar techniques. September 10 institutions like the UN and the EU will be unlikely to provide effective responses.

I never thought I'd find myself in the Doom-Mongering section of the bookstore, and, to be fair to myself, there is one significant difference between what you're about to read and the frostbitten-population explosions-foraging for zinc scenarios above. I'll come to that difference in a moment, because it's critical to understanding the central equation in human development: the intersection of demography and will. Demography is mainly a matter of number-crunching, dry statistics. The second phenomenon - will - is a little less concrete, but just as important.

When Osama bin Laden made his observation about people being attracted to the strong horse rather than the weak horse, it was partly a perception issue. You can be, technically, the strong horse - plenty of tanks and bombs and nukes and whatnot - but, if you're seen as too feeble ever to deploy them, you'll be kitted out for the weak-horse suit. He wasn't thinking of Europe, whose reabsorption within the caliphate Islamists see as all but complete. Rather, he was considering the hyperpower. In late September 2001 Maulana Inyadullah was holed up in Peshawar awaiting the call to arms against the Great Satan and offered this pithy soundbite to David Blair of Britain's Daily Telegraph: "The Americans love Pepsi-Cola, we love death."

Compare Mr. Inyadullah with the acclaimed London novelist Margaret Drabble, also speaking in the Daily Telegraph, just after the Iraq war. She feels the same way, at least about carbonated beverages: "I detest Coca Cola, I detest burgers, I detest sentimental and violent Hollywood movies that tell lies about history. I detest American imperialism, American infantilism, and American triumphalism about victories it didn't even win."

Look at Ms. Drabble's list of grievances. If you lived in Poland in the 1930s, you weren't worried about the Soviets' taste in soft drinks or sentimental Third Reich movies. America is the most benign hegemon in history: it's the world's first non-imperial superpower and, at the dawn of the American moment, it chose to set itself up as a kind of geopolitical sugar daddy. By picking up the tab for Europe's defense, it hoped to prevent those countries lapsing into traditional power rivalries. Nice idea. But it also absolved them of the traditional responsibilities of nationhood, turning the alliance into a dysfunctional sitcom family, with one grown-up presiding over a brood of whiny teenagers - albeit (demographically) the world's wrinkliest teenagers. America's preference for diluting its power within the UN and other organs of an embryo world government has not won it friends. All dominant powers

are hated - Britain was, and Rome - but they're usually hated for the right reasons. America is hated for every reason. The fanatical Muslims despise America because it's all lap-dancing and gay porn; the secular Europeans despise America because it's all born-again Christians hung up on abortion; the anti-Semites despise America because it's controlled by Jews. Too Jewish, too Christian, too godless, America is George Orwell's Room 101: whatever your bugbear you will find it therein; whatever you're against, America is the prime example of it.

That's one reason why its disparagers have embraced environmentalism. If Washington were a conventional great power, the intellectual class would be arguing that the United States is a threat to France or India or Gabon or some such. But because it's so obviously not that kind of power the world has had to concoct a thesis that the hyperpower is a threat not merely to this or that rinky-dink nation state but to the entire planet, if not the entire galaxy. "We are," warns Al Gore portentously, "altering the balance of energy between our planet and the rest of the universe."

Think globally, act lunarly. The "balance of energy" between Earth and "the rest of the universe"? You wouldn't happen to have the statistical evidence for that, would you? Universal "balance of energy" graphs for 1940 and 1873? Heigh-ho. America is a threat not because of conventional great-power designs, but because - even scarier - of its "consumption," its way of life. Those Drabble-detested Cokes and burgers are straining the Earth in ways that straightforward genocidal conquerors like Hitler and Stalin could only have dreamed of. The construct of this fantasy is very revealing about how unthreatening America is.

But others cast the hyperpower's geniality in a different light. Visitors to America often remark on that popular T-shirt slogan usually found below a bold Stars and Stripes: "These Colors Don't Run." To non-Americans, it can seem a trifle touchy. But for a quarter century the presumption of the country's enemies was that those colors did run - they ran from Vietnam, they ran from the downed choppers in the Iranian desert, they ran from Somalia. Even the successful campaigns - the inconclusively concluded 1991 Gulf War and the air-only 1999 Kosovo war - seemed manifestly designed to avoid putting those colors in the position of having to run. As Osama saw it, those colors ran from the African embassy bombings and the Khobar towers, just as Zarqawi figured those colors would run from the Sunni Triangle. Being seen not to run - or, if you prefer, being seen to show "resolve" - should be the indispensable objective of U.S. foreign policy. Were these colors to run from Iraq, it would be the end of the American era - for why would Russia, China, or even Belgium ever again take seriously a superpower that runs screaming for home at the first pinprick?

Don't take Osama's, or Saddam's, or Mullah Omar's, or the Chinese politburo's word for it. Consider those nations who (a) regard themselves as broadly well-disposed toward America and (b) share the view that Islamism represents a critical global security threat, yet (c) have concluded that the United States lacks the will to get the job done. You hear such worries routinely expressed by the political class in India, Singapore, and other emerging nations. The British historian Niall Ferguson talks about "the clay feet of the colossus." Admiral Yamamoto's "sleeping giant" has become harder to rouse - the La-Z-Boy recliner's a lot more comfortable and pampering than the old rocker on the porch. In Vietnam, it took 50,000 deaths to drive the giant away; maybe in the Middle East, it will only take 5,000. And maybe in the next war the giant will give up after 500, or 50, or not bother at all. Our enemies have made a bet - that the West in general and the United States in particular are soft and decadent and have no attention span. America has the advantage of the most

powerful army on the face of the planet, but she doesn't have the stomach for war, so it's no advantage at all. After all, if you were a typical viewer of CNN International (which makes CNN's domestic service look like a 24/7 Michael Savage channel), what would have made the biggest impression on you since September 11? That America has the best, biggest, and most technologically advanced military on the planet? Or that the minute you send it anywhere hysterical congressmen are shrieking that we need an "exit strategy"? The corpulent snorer in the La-ZBoy recliner may have a beautifully waxed Ferrari in the garage, but he hates having to take it out on the potholed roads. Still, it looks mighty nice parked in the driveway when he washes it.

ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

If Europe's dwindling manpower and will are a one-way ticket on the oblivion express, numbers plus will is the most potent combination of all: serious people power. What does it mean when the fastest-growing population on the planet is a group that, to put it at its mildest, has a somewhat fractious relationship with the characteristics of a free society?

Can the developed world get more Muslim in its demographic character without becoming more Muslim in its political character? And what consequences does that have for art and culture, science and medicine, innovation and energy ... and basic liberties?

Perhaps the differences will be minimal. In France, the Catholic churches will become mosques; in England, the village pubs will cease serving alcohol; in the Netherlands, the gay nightclubs will close up shop and relocate to San Francisco. But otherwise life will go on much as before. The new Europeans will be observant Muslims instead of post-Christian secularists, but they will still be recognizably European. It will be like *Cats* after a cast change: same long-running show, new actors. Or maybe the all-black Broadway production of *Hello, Dolly!* is a better comparison:

Pearl Bailey instead of Carol Channing, but the plot, the music, the sets are all the same. The animating principles of advanced societies are so strong that they will thrive, whoever's at the switch.

But what if it doesn't work out like that? In the 2005 rankings of Freedom House's survey of personal liberty and democracy around the world, five of the eight countries with the lowest "freedom" score were Muslim. Of the forty-six Muslim majority nations in the world, only three were free. Of the sixteen nations in which Muslims form between 20 and 50 percent of the population, only another three were ranked as free: Benin, Serbia and Montenegro, and Suriname. It will be interesting to follow France's fortunes as a fourth member of that group.

We can argue about what consequences these demographic trends will have, but to say blithely they have none is ridiculous. In his book *The Empty Cradle*, Philip Longman writes:

So where will the children of the future come from? Increasingly they will come from people who are at odds with the modern world. Such a trend, if sustained, could drive human culture off its current market-driven, individualistic, modernist course, gradually creating an anti-market culture dominated by fundamentalism - a new Dark Ages.

Mr. Longman's point is well taken. The refined antennae of Western liberals mean that whenever one raises the question of whether there will be any Italians living in the geographical zone marked as Italy a generation or three hence, they cry, "Racism!" To agitate about what proportion of the population is "white" is grotesque and inappropriate. But it's

not about race; it's about culture. If 100 percent of your population believes in liberal pluralist democracy, it doesn't matter whether 70 percent of them are "white" or only 5 percent are. But if one part of your population believes in liberal pluralist democracy and the other doesn't, then it becomes a matter of great importance whether the part that does is 90 percent of the population or only 60 percent, or 50, or 45 percent. Which is why that question lies at the heart of almost any big international news story of recent years - the French riots, the attacks on Danish embassies and consulates over the publication of cartoons of Mohammed, the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, Turkey's membership in the European Union, Pakistani riots over Newsweek's Koran-down-the-toilet story. Whenever I make that point, lefties always respond, "Oh, well, that's typical right-wing racism." In fact, it ought to be the Left's issue. I'm a "social conservative." When the mullahs take over, I'll grow my beard a little fuller, get a couple extra wives, and keep my head down. It's the feminists and gays who'll have a tougher time. If, say, three of the five judges on the Massachusetts Supreme Court are Muslim, what are the chances of them approving "gay marriage"? That's the scenario Europe's looking at a few years down the road.

The basic demography explains, for example, the critical difference between the "war on terror" for Americans and Europeans: in the U.S., the war is something to be fought in the treacherous sands of the Sunni Triangle and the caves of the Hindu Kush; you go to faraway places and kill foreigners. But in Europe it's a civil war. Neville Chamberlain dismissed Czechoslovakia as "a faraway country of which we know little." This time around, for much of Western Europe it turned out the faraway country of which they knew little was their own.

As for America, Shelby Steele sees the tentativeness of our performance in Iraq as a geopolitical version of "white guilt," a "secular penitence" for the sins of the past. Even while waging war, our culture has internalized the morbid syndromes of the age: who are we to liberate the Iraqis? We represent imperialism and all the other evils.

On that point, I wish we did represent imperialism, at least to this extent: there's a lot to be said for a great nation that understands its greatness is not an accident and that therefore it should spread the secrets of its success around; conversely, there's not much to be said for a great nation that chooses to hobble itself by pretending it's merely one vote among co-equals on international bodies manned by Cuba and Sudan-the transnational version of "affirmative action," to extend Shelby Steele's thought.

As clashes of civilizations go, this one's between two extremes: on the one hand, a world that has everything it needs to wage decisive warwealth, armies, industry, technology; on the other, a world that has nothing but pure ideology and plenty of believers. Everything else it requires it can pick up at Radio Shack: cell phones and laptops, which, along with ATM cards and some dime-store box-cutters, were all it took to pull off September 11.

For this to be an existential struggle, as the Cold War was, the question is: are they a credible enemy to us?

For a projection of the likely outcome, the question is: are we a credible enemy to them?

You may recall a pertinent detail during the bogus controversy over the "torture" of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay: U.S. guards at Gitmo are under instructions to handle copies of the Koran only when wearing gloves. The reason for this is that the detainees regard infidels as "unclean." But it's one thing for the Islamists to think infidels are unclean, quite another for the infidels to agree with them - and, by doing so, to validate their bigotry. Far

from being tortured, the prisoners are being handled literally with kid gloves (or simulated kid-effect gloves). The U.S. military hands each jihadist his complimentary copy of the Koran as delicately as white-gloved butlers bringing His Lordship the Times of London. It's not just unbecoming to buy in to Muslim psychoses; in the end, it's selfdefeating. And our self-defeat is their surest shot at victory. Four years into the "war on terror," the Bush administration began promoting a new formulation: "the long war." Not a good sign. In a short war, put your money on tanks and bombs - our strengths. In a long war, the better bet is will and manpower - their strengths. Even a loser can win when he's up against a defeatist. A big chunk of Western Civilization, consciously or otherwise, has given the impression that it's dying to surrender to somebody, anybody. Reasonably enough, the jihadists figure: hey, why not us?

The longer the long war gets, the harder it will be, because it's a race against time, against lengthening demographic, economic, and geopolitical odds. By "demographic," I mean the Muslim world's high birth rate, which by mid-century will give tiny Yemen a higher population than vast empty Russia. By "economic," I mean the perfect storm the Europeans will face within this decade, because their lavish welfare states are unsustainable with their post-Christian birth rates. By "geopolitical," I mean that if you think the United Nations and other international organizations are antipathetic to America now, wait a few years and see what kind of support you get from a semi-Islamified Europe.

I said above that there is one difference between me and the other doom-mongers. For Al Gore and Paul Ehrlich and Co., whatever the problem, the solution is always the same. Whether it's global cooling, global warming, or overpopulation, we need bigger government, more regulation, higher taxes, and a massive transfer of power from the citizen to some unelected self-perpetuating crisis lobby. Not only does this not solve the problem, it is, in fact, a symptom of the real problem: the torpor of the West derives in part from the annexation by government of most of the core functions of adulthood. Even in America, too many Democrats take it as read that the natural destination of an advanced Western democracy is Scandinavia. If it is, we're all doomed. Every successful society is a balancing act between the private and the public, but in Europe and Canada the balance is way out of whack. When the foreign policy panjandrums talk about our enemies, they distinguish between "rogue states" like Iran and North Korea and "non-state actors" like al Qaeda and Hezbollah. But those distinctions apply on the home front too. Big governments are "rogue states," out of control and lacking the wit and agility to see off the threats to our freedom. Citizens willing to be "non-state actors" are just as important and, as we saw on Flight 93, a decisive part of our defense, nimbler and more efficient than the federal behemoth. The free world's citizenry could use more non-state actors.

So this is a doomsday book with a twist: an apocalyptic scenario that can best be avoided not by more government but by less - by government returning to the citizenry the primal responsibilities it's taken from them in the modern era.

The alternative is stark: Europe has all but succumbed to the dull opiate of multiculturalism. In its drowsy numbness, it stirs but has no idea what to do and so does nothing. One day, years from now, as archaeologists sift through the ruins of an ancient civilization for clues to its downfall, they'll marvel at how easy it all was. You don't need to fly jets into skyscrapers and kill thousands of people. As a matter of fact, that's a bad strategy, because even the wimpiest state will feel obliged to respond. But if you frame the issue in terms of multicultural "sensitivity," the wimp state will bend over backward to give you everything you want - including, eventually, the keys to those skyscrapers. Thus, during

the Danish "cartoon jihad" of 2006, Jack Straw, then British foreign secretary, hailed the "sensitivity" of Fleet Street in not reprinting the offending representations of the Prophet.

No doubt he was similarly impressed by the "sensitivity" of Burger King, which withdrew ice cream cones from its British menus because Mr. Rashad Akhtar of High Wycombe complained that the creamy swirl shown on the lid looked like the word "Allah" in Arabic script. I don't know which sura in the Koran says, "Don't forget, folks, it's not just physical representations of God or the Prophet but also chocolate ice cream squiggly representations of the name," but ixnay on both just to be "sensitive."

And doubtless the British foreign secretary also appreciated the "sensitivity" of the owner of France-Soir, who fired his editor for republishing the Danish cartoons. And maybe he even admires the "sensitivity" of the increasing numbers of Dutch people who dislike the pervasive fear and tension in certain parts of the Netherlands and so have emigrated to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

One day the British foreign secretary will wake up and discover that, in practice, there's very little difference between living under Exquisitely Refined Multicultural Sensitivity and sharia. As a famously sensitive noncartooning Dane once put it: "To be or not to be: that is the question."

And, in the end, the answer to that question is the only one that matters.

Chapter Seven

The State-of-the-Art Primitive

THE KNOWN UNKNOWN VS THE KNOWINGLY UNKNOWN

Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight
But Roaring Bill (who killed him) thought it right.

HILAIRE BELLOC, "THE PACIFIST" (1938)

Every so often, I find myself, for the umpteenth time, driving behind a Vermont granolamobile whose bumper not only proclaims the driver's enduring post-2004 support for Kerry/Edwards but also bears the slogan "FREE TIBET."

It must be great to be the guy with the printing contract for the "FREE TIBET" stickers. Not so good to be the guy back in Tibet wondering when the freeing thereof will actually get under way. Are you in favor of a Free Tibet? It's hard to find anyone who isn't. Every college in America is. There's the Indiana University Students for a Free Tibet, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Students for a Free Tibet, and the Students for a Free Tibet University of Michigan chapter, and the University of Montana Students for a Free Tibet in Missoula, which is where they might as well relocate the last three Tibetans by the time it is freed.

Everyone's for a free Tibet, but no one's for freeing Tibet. So Tibet will stay unfree--as unfree now as it was when the first Free Tibet campaigner slapped the 'very first "FREE TIBET" sticker onto the back of his Edsel. Idealism as inertia is the hallmark of the movement. Well, not entirely inert: it must be a pain in the neck when you trade in the Volvo for a Subaru and have to bend down and paste on a new "FREE TIBET" sticker. For a while, my otherwise not terribly political wife got extremely irritated by the Free Tibet shtick, demanding to know at a pancake breakfast at the local church what precisely some harmless hippy-dippy old neighbor of ours meant by the sticker he'd been proudly displaying decade in, decade out: "But what exactly are you 'doing to free Tibet?" she insisted. "You're not doing anything, are you?"

"Give the guy a break," I said when we got back home. "He's advertising his moral superiority, not calling for action. If Rumsfeld were to say, 'Free Tibet? Jiminy, what a swell idea! The Third Infantry Division goes in on Thursday,' the bumper-sticker crowd would be aghast. They'd have to bend down and peel off the 'FREE TIBET' stickers and replace them with 'WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER.'"

But there'll never be a Free Tibet--because, through all the decades Americans were driving around with the bumper stickers, the Chinese were moving populations, torturing Tibetans, imposing inter-marriage until Tibet was altered beyond recognition. By the time the guys with the Free Tibet stickers get around to freeing Tibet there'll be no Tibet left to free.

That's "stability."

As President Reagan liked to say, "status quo" is Latin for "the mess we're in." When Amr Moussa, secretary-general of the Arab League, warns (as he did before the Iraq war) that America is threatening "the whole stability of the Middle East," it's important to remember that "stability" is Arabic for "the mess we're in."

Yet just as the environmentalists believe in ongoing dramatic "climate change," so the foreign policy establishment believes equally in ongoing, undramatic geopolitical non-change. And, just as there's minimal evidence for "climate change," so there's minimal evidence for "stability." The geopolitical scene is never stable; it's always dynamic. If the Western world decides in 2005 that it can "contain" President Sy Kottik of Wackistan indefinitely, that doesn't mean the relationship between the two parties is set in aspic. Wackistan has a higher birth rate than the West, so after forty years of "stability" there are a lot more Wackistanis and a lot fewer Frenchmen. And Wackistan has immense oil reserves, and President Kottik has used the wealth of those oil reserves to fund radical schools and mosques in hitherto moderate parts of the Muslim world. And large numbers of Wackistanis have emigrated to the European Union, obliging opportunist politicians in marginal constituencies to pitch for their vote. And cheap air travel and the Internet and bank machines that take every card on the planet and the freelancing of nuclear technology mean that Wackistan's problems are no longer confined to Wackistan; for a few hundred bucks, they can be outside the Empire State Building within eight or nine hours.

"Stability" is a surface illusion, like a frozen river; underneath, the currents are moving, and to the casual observer the ice looks equally "stable" whether there's a foot of it or just two inches. There is no status quo in world affairs. "Stability" is a fancy term to dignify inertia and complacency as sophistication. If America and its allies defer to their foreign policy stability fetishists in the years ahead and continue to place their faith in September 10 institutions like the UN, then in the long run we'll all go the way of Tibet: there'll be nothing left to free.

"Containment" is another overvalued commodity: it's an expensive dictator-management program that, in the case of Iraq after the first Gulf War, required the United States Air Force and the RAF to bomb the country ineffectually every other week for twelve years, in return for which the Americans and British were blamed for UN sanctions and systematically starving to death a million Iraqi kids--or two million, according to which "humanitarian" agency you believe. Of course, the minute the war started and these genocidal sanctions came to an end, the Left decided this UN "containment" had after all been a marvelous and desirable thing. Even what's regarded as a successful example of the strategy--the West's decision to "contain" the Warsaw Pact--was in practice no such thing, not for those on the receiving end. Aside from the fact that telling the other fellow he has to spend fifty years under Communism is easy for you to say, the toll taken on those nations with every passing decade was grisly. On the hit parade of nations with the unhealthiest demographic profile, the top five are all former provinces of European Communism: Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Russia, and Ukraine. Of the top ten, nine are ex-Commie (the exception is Spain). Of the top twenty, sixteen are. Communism was so loathed by its subjects they gave up even breeding. And every year we allowed the Warsaw Pact to remain in place we weakened further the viability of any post-Communist societies that might emerge from the rubble.

"Stability" and "containment" pose the opposite challenge in the Muslim world. Those countries are mostly in the upper reaches of the fertility hit parade. Whatever they loathe about their regimes; they don't loathe Islam: in many cases, the mosques provide the only

political space in those lands. So they breed with gusto, and thus every year we remain committed to "stability" increases the Islamists' principal advantage: it strengthens the religion--the vehicle for their political project--and multiplies the raw material.

So another decade or two of "stability" and the world will be well on its way to a new Dark Ages. Now, as then, Europe has its do-nothing kings--les rois fainéants--though these days we call them European commissioners and chancellors and prime ministers. Now, as then, we have a Great Plague--the virus of Islamism--and the great migrations--the continent-wide version of "white flight" already under way in Holland, as the beleaguered Dutch leave their native land for Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Now, as then, we must all bow before the "edict of toleration"--as laws and customs are rearranged to abase themselves before the gods of boundless multicultural tolerance.

But the central fact of a new Dark Ages is this: it would be not a world in which the American superpower is succeeded by other powers but a world with no dominant powers at all. Today, lots of experts crank out analyses positing China as the unstoppable hegemon of the twenty-first century. Yet the real threat is not the strengths of your enemies but their weaknesses. China is a weak power: its demographic and other structural defects are already hobbling its long-term ambitions. Russia is a weak power, a kind of greatest-hits medley of all the planet's worst pathologies--disease-wise, nuke-wise, Islamist-wise. Europe is a weak power, a supposed Greater France remorselessly evolving month by month into Greater Bosnia.

Islam is a weak power: in the words of Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammed, the former prime minister of Malaysia, one of the least worst Muslim nations in the world, "We produce practically nothing on our own, we can do almost nothing for ourselves, we cannot even manage our wealth." Yet in Iran they're working full-speed on nukes that will be able to hit every European city.

North Korea is the weakest power of all. But on the Fourth of July 2006 its dictator gamely got in the spirit and held a fireworks display. Impressive stuff: the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air--though, as sometimes happens with your highest-price firecracker, it was over sooner than expected. Kim Jong-il has No Dong. Please, no giggling. It's not a side effect of that counterfeit Viagra that North Korea manufactures (seriously). No Dong is the name of his missile system. "Dong" is Korean for "dong," and "no" is Korean for "big swinging," and that's how Kim Jong-il sees himself on the freelance nuke scene. Anyway, on the Glorious Fourth, he decided to test the latest version of his No Dong. That's a "test" in the sense that I test my new shotgun by firing it through your kitchen window and seeing if it penetrates to the living room. Kim's Dong went up and came straight down again forty seconds later. From the trajectory, experts calculated that it was headed to Hawaii. Instead, it fell in the Sea of Japan.

And everyone had a big laugh. What a loser, what a bozo. Mister Nukes R Us talks the talk but he can't nuke the nuke. Ha ha, what a joke.

But no, that's the point. That's why he's dangerous. He's not the United States, not the Soviet Union, not India, he's not even France. He's an incompetent but he's got nuclear weapons. In 2006, he aimed for Hawaii and just about cleared his perimeter fence. Next time, he might aim for Hawaii and hit San Diego. Or Oakland. Or Calgary, or Presque Isle, Maine. Or Beijing, Addis Ababa, Salzburg, or Dublin. He's a self-taught nuclear madman and he hasn't quite gotten the hang of it. If you're on the New Jersey Turnpike and there's a confused ninety-three-year-old granny behind the wheel of a Toyota Corolla, that's mostly a problem for her. If she's in an eighteen-wheeler and coming across the median, that's a

problem for you. North Korea has millions of starving people; it has one of the lowest GDPs per capita on the planet, lower than Ghana, lower than Zimbabwe, lower than Mongolia.

But it's a nuclear power.

The danger we face is not a Chinese superpower or an Islamist superpower: if there's a new boss, you learn the new rules and adjust as best you can. But the greater likelihood is of a world with no superpower at all, in which unipolar geopolitics gives way to non-polar geopolitics, a world without order in which pipsqueak thug states who can't feed their own people globalize their psychoses.

Take the subject of, say, decapitation--not something most of us had given a thought to since, oh, the French Revolution. But there's a lot of it about. In 2006, a Taliban-like Islamist regime took control of Somalia, and, in the course of their seizure of Mogadishu, captured troops from the warlords' side and beheaded them. The so-called emir of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, made beheading his signature act, cutting the throats of American hostage Nick Berg and British hostage Ken Bigley and then releasing the footage as boffo snuff videos over the Internet.

And it's not just guerrillas and insurgents who are hot for decapitation. The Saudis, who are famously "our friends," behead folks on a daily basis. In 2005, the kingdom beheaded six Somalis. What for? Murder? Rape? Homosexuality? No, it was worse than that: auto theft. They'd been convicted and served five-year sentences but at the end thereof the Saudi courts decided to upgrade their crime to a capital offense. Some two-thirds of those beheaded in Saudi Arabia are foreign nationals, which would be an unlikely criminal profile in any civilized state and suggests that the justice "system" is driven by the Saudis' contempt for non-Saudis as much as anything else.

The decapitators are getting closer. In an Ontario courtroom in 2006, it was alleged that a terrorist cell planned to storm the Canadian parliament and behead the prime minister. On the face of it, that sounds ridiculous. As ridiculous as it must have seemed to Ken Bigley, a British contractor in Iraq with no illusions about the world. He'd spent most of his adult life grubbing around the seedier outposts of empire and thought he knew the way the native chappies did things. He never imagined the last sounds he'd ever hear were delirious cries of "Allahu Akhbar" and the man behind him reaching for the blade to saw his head off.

And why would an act of such awesome symbolic power remain confined to Islamists? A week or two after the revelation of that Toronto plot, there was a flurry of beheadings on America's southern border: the heads of three decapitated policemen were found in the Tijuana River; a fourth turned up in Acapulco a week later. It's wishful thinking to assume hip depravity won't migrate beyond the Islamist world. But no doubt Al Gore will carry on talking about global warming and Nancy Pelosi about college tuition costs and Hillary Clinton about prescription drug plans as the world sinks into economic decline, arbitrary bombings and kidnappings, the occasional nuking--and a million small concessions to Muslim sensitivities that will nudge Western society ever further down a bleaker path. Writing about the collapse of nations such as Somalia, the Atlantic Monthly's Robert D. Kaplan referred to the "citizens" of such "states" as "re-primitivized man." When lifelong Torontonians are hot for decapitation, when Yorkshiremen born and bred into fish n' chips and cricket and lousy English pop music self-detonate on the London Tube, it would seem that the phenomenon of "re-primitivized man" is being successfully exported around the planet.

In 1998, Thomas Friedman of the New York Times unveiled his Golden Arches theory--that no two countries with a McDonald's franchise ever went to war. The ink was barely dry when America and NATO began bombing Serbia. So much for the civilizing effects of Big Macs in Belgrade. The Yugoslav meltdown of the nineties suggests the opposite of Friedman's thesis. In the eighties, the federation was on its way to a comfortable, prosperous, post-Communist future: Croatia was a popular holiday destination with Britons, Germans, and other wealthy Westerners. But, invited to choose between a booming economy and ancient hatreds, the people of Yugoslavia preferred to reduce their country to rubble. How many other bits of the map, under pressure from predatory forces and with a leading power unable to lead, might opt for "re-primitivization" ?

A couple of weeks after September 11, Edward Said, the New York based America disparager and author of the bestselling *Orientalism*, made some remarks about the "interconnectedness" of the West and Islam. The professor deplored the tendency of commentators to separate cultures into what he called "sealed-off entities," when in reality Western Civilization and the Muslim world are so "intertwined" that it was impossible to "draw the line" between them.

Rich Lowry, the editor of *National Review*, wasn't impressed by this notion. "The line seems pretty clear," he said. "Developing mass commercial aviation and soaring skyscrapers was the West's idea; slashing the throats of stewardesses and flying the planes into the skyscrapers was radical Islam's idea."

True. But, as a form of cross-civilization intertwining, that's not to be disdained, at least from one party's point of view. Indeed, Mr. Lowry has identified the only "interconnectedness" a significant chunk of Islam is interested in. Islamism is a twenty-first-century political project driven by seventh-century ideology. That's a potent combination of ancient and modern. In Europe and North America, incendiary imams--uneducated and knowing barely a word of the language spoken by the society in which they live--have nevertheless done a grand job at re-primitivizing second- and third-generation Western Muslims. Not all of them, of course, but how many does it have to be to become a problem?

There are three strategies Islam deploys against a dying West: first, demography; second, conversion; and third, the murky "intertwining" of modern technology and ancient hatreds.

For example, I hadn't really followed Sudanese current events closely since, oh, General Kitchener's victory at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, but in 2003 a story from that benighted land happened to catch my eye. In the fall of that year mass hysteria apparently swept the capital city, Khartoum, after reports that foreigners were shaking hands with Sudanese men and causing their penises to disappear. One victim, a fabric merchant, told his story to the London Arabic newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*: a man from West Africa came into the shop and "shook the store owner's hand powerfully until the owner felt his penis melt into his body."

I know the feeling. The same thing happened to me after shaking hands with Senator Clinton. Anyway, as *Al-Quds* reported, "The store owner became hysterical, and was taken to the hospital." The country's chief criminal attorney general, Yasser Ahmad Muhammad, told the Sudanese daily *Al-Rai Al-A'am* that "the rumor broke out when one merchant went to another merchant to buy some Karkady [a Sudanese beverage]. Suddenly, the seller felt his penis shriveling." The invaluable Middle East Media Research Institute, in its exhaustive coverage, noted that the penises of Khartoum were vulnerable not merely to handshaking: "Another victim, who refused to give his name, said that while he was at the market, a man

approached him, gave him a comb, and asked him to comb his hair. When he did so, within seconds, he said, he felt a strange sensation and discovered that he had lost his penis."

Tales of the vanishing penises ran rampant through the city. Sudan's attorney general, Salah Abu Zayed, declared that all complaints about missing dangly bits would be brought before a special investigative committee, though doctors had determined that the first plaintiff was "perfectly healthy." The health minister, Ahmad Bilal Othman, said that the epidemic was "scientifically groundless," and that it was "sorcery, magic, or an emotional problem."

Whatever it is, it's the perfect tale of Islamic victimhood: the foreigners have made us impotent! It doesn't matter that the foreigners didn't do anything except shake hands. It doesn't matter whether you are, in fact, impotent. You feel impotent, just as (so we're told constantly) millions of Muslims from Algerian Islamists to the Bali bombers on the other side of the world feel "humiliated" by the Palestinian situation. Whether there is a rational basis for their sense of humiliation or impotence is irrelevant.

But here's the telling detail: the vanishing-penis hysteria was spread by cell phones and text messaging.

Think about that: you can own a cell phone, yet still believe that shaking hands with an infidel will cause you to lose your penis. That's a state-of-the-art primitive.

Aside from its doubts in its collective manhood, Sudan is no laughing matter. Two million people were slaughtered there in the nineties. That's one-third of the victims of the Holocaust--and the world barely noticed. So much for "never again." The Christian minority is vanishing a lot faster than that fabric merchant's privates. Among the, er, non-Christian majority, Osama certainly found the country fertile ground for his ideology: Sudanese mujahideen have been captured as far afield as Algeria, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan. Sudan is an economic basket case with a 27 percent literacy rate that nevertheless has managed to find enough spare cash to export revolutionary Islam to many other countries. And they've got half a billion dollars' worth of top Chinese weaponry imported via Iran.

What else might Sudan get from Tehran in the years ahead? In April 2006, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, announced that his government was ready to share its nuclear technology with other interested parties. "Iran's nuclear capability is one example of various scientific capabilities in the country," said the ayatollah. "The Islamic Republic of Iran is prepared to transfer the experience, knowledge, and technology of its scientists."

He made this offer at a meeting with the president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir.

A handshake-fearing guy with a cell phone is one thing; what happens when the handshake-fearers have cell phones and a suitcase nuke? It's at the meeting of apparently indestructible ancient ignorance and cheap, widely available modern technology that the dark imponderables of the future lie.

How far does that techno-primitive hybrid reach? In 2004, there was another story about cell phones in the paper. Not Khartoum this time. The Times of London reported that "mobile phones are being used by young Muslims living in Britain to watch videos of hostages being beheaded by militants in Iraq." "This is the best use of this phone," the paper was told by "an Algerian in his thirties who has lived in London for almost ten years" and has collected the entire set of snuff videos on his cell. "Most of the people in this country are using it to download pictures of naked women. For us the jihad is alive in our hands as we watch American infidels get their heads chopped off Within a few minutes of the Americans dying last week I was watching them on my phone. The Englishman should not

have been there," he added, referring to then hostage Ken Bigley. "He will be beheaded and I can tell you I will see it here on my phone."

He was and that Muslim Londoner undoubtedly did.

In 1898, after Kitchener slaughtered the dervishes at Omdurman, Hilaire Belloc wrote a characteristically pithy summation of the British technological advantage:

Whatever happens
We have got
The Maxim gun
And they have not.

But the dervishes have cell phones now, and there are plenty of people out there willing to help them get cheap knock-offs of the twenty-first century's Maxim gun. And, Maxim guns aside, we're bound by "maxims of prudence" (in Kant's phrase), and they're not. As Lee Harris wrote, "The liberal world system has collapsed internally." We no longer know the limits of behavior. When the president of Iran threatens to wipe Israel off the face of the map, we cannot reliably assure ourselves that this is just a bit of rhetorical red meat, a little playing to the gallery for the Saturday-night jihad crowd.

Nonetheless, many foolish experts do. We persist in seeing Iran's President Ahmadinejad as the equivalent of the Sudanese crazy raving about his vanished manhood, except that in this case he's raving about having No Dong, which, like a nuclear K-Mart, Kim Jong-il is happily dispersing around the planet. (One could foresee certain problems if the president of Sudan goes on TV and announces, "I am proud to tell the people I have No Dong." Oh no--the epidemic's spread to the palace! Mass panic, etc.) Confronted by the minimal degrees of separation between the loonies and many of their leaders, we look away and pretend that President Ahmadinejad is no different from the Politburo of yore. The Reds could have nuked us but they had compelling reasons not to. They had the capability but we were able to make a rational assessment of their intent by considering what we would do in their situation. It's the other way around with Iran. They have the intent and the only question mark is over their capability.

President Ahmaddamatree is the globalized version of those Khartoum men who own cell phones and yet believe a handshake can make one's manhood disappear. He owns nukes and he believes he can make the West's manhood disappear. Indeed, his wish to obliterate Israel is one of his less nutty aspects. That can be seen as a slightly overheated version of politics-as-usual in the Middle East. What's more significant is that he believes in the return of the Twelfth Imam--the so-called "hidden imam" --and quite possibly that he personally is the fellow's designated deputy. The president, as mayor of Tehran, wanted the city's boulevards widened so that the hidden imam wouldn't be insulted by having to ride in triumph through narrow streets. He's also claimed that when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 a mystical halo appeared and bathed him in its aura. (It wasn't the "Exit" sign--or, if it was, it didn't endow the prime minister of Canada with any similar beatific aura.) Shortly afterwards, he told Natwar Singh, the Indian foreign minister, that everything would be hunky-dory in two years' time, which Mr. Singh took to mean when Iran's nukes would be ready but which turned out to be the Twelfth Imam's ETA. Human history has never wanted for millennial cultists of one form or another, but ours is the first age in which such men have the means to pull off the apocalypse. In medieval Europe, the apocalyptic had intent; President Ahmageddonoutthere is an apocalyptic with a delivery system. "The end is nigh" is an old slogan. Now the means are nigh.

THE LOOK

One of the most enduring vignettes of the Great War comes from its first Christmas: December 1914. The Germans and British, separated by a few yards of mud on the western front, put up banners to wish each other season's greetings, sang "Silent Night" in the dark in both languages, and eventually scrambled up from their opposing trenches to play a Christmas Day football match in No Man's Land and share some German beer and English plum jam. After this Yuletide interlude, they went back to killing each other.

The many films, books, and plays inspired by that No Man's Land truce all take for granted the story's central truth: that our common humanity transcends the temporary hell of war. When the politicians and generals have done with us, those who are left will live in peace, playing footie (i.e., soccer), singing songs, as they did for a moment in the midst of carnage.

Now cross to Israel, to Haifa on a Saturday night in 2003: nineteen diners were killed in a packed restaurant by a twenty-something female suicide bomber, her hair attractively tied in a Western-style ponytail, to judge from the detached head she left as her calling card. Try to find the common humanity between the participants in that war. Try to imagine the two sides ever kicking a ball around, swapping songs. The only place in the modern Middle East where Arabs and Jews coexist is in Israel, especially in Haifa. The restaurant, young Hanadi Jaradat blew apart, had been jointly owned by an Arab family and a Jewish family for forty years. It would be interesting to know whether it was targeted for that very reason, in the same way that, in Northern Ireland, the IRA took to killing the Catholic caterers and cleaners who worked at army bases. But the intifada is too primal for anything that thought out. It's more likely that once Miss Jaradat had slipped into Israel proper--through a gap in the unfinished security fence the European Union and the State Department so deplore--she decided that any target would do. She was busting to blow.

The Palestinian death cult negates all the assumptions of Western sentimental pacifism--not least that war is a board game played by old men with young men as their chess pieces: if only the vengeful aged generals got out of the way, there'd be no conflict. But such common humanity as one can find on the West Bank resides, if only in their cynicism, in the leadership. Old Arafat may have showered glory and honor on his youthful martyrs but he was human enough to keep his own kid in Paris, well away from the suicide-bomber belts. It's hard to picture Saeb Erekat or Hanan Ashrawi or any of the other veteran terror apologists who hog the airwaves at CNN and the BBC celebrating the deaths of their loved ones the way Miss Jaradat's brother did. "We are receiving congratulations from people," said Thaher Jaradat. "Why should we cry? It is like her wedding day, the happiest day for her."

The problem is not the security fence, but the psychological fence--a chasm really--that separates a sizable proportion of the Palestinian population from all Jews. For one side, there is no common humanity, even with people they know well, who provide them with jobs, and much else: Wafa Samir Ibrahim al-Biss, a twenty-one-year-old woman who has received kind and exemplary treatment at an Israeli hospital in Beersheba, packs herself with explosives and sets off to blow apart that hospital and the doctors and nurses who've treated her.

Oh, well. If you're pro-Palestinian, you shrug that their depravity is born of "desperation." If you've had it with the Palestinians, you figure that after decades of UN coddling and EU funding and wily Arab manipulation they're the most comprehensively wrecked people on the planet. In either case, it's a very particular circumstance.

But what if that "desperation" goes global? What if it's shared by large numbers of other people around the planet?

Here's another death scene. Photographed from above, the body bags look empty. They seem to lie flat on the ground, and it's only when you peer closer that you realize that that's because the bodies in them are too small to fill the length of the bags. They're children. Row upon row of dead children, over a hundred of them, 150, more, many of them shot in the back as they tried to flee.

It was a picture from the Beslan massacre--the pupils of a Russian schoolhouse, taken hostage and slaughtered in September 2004. And, as Ken Bigley did, the very last thing they heard as they departed this world was the voice of their killer screaming "Allahu Akhbar!"

God is great.

This virus has been a long time incubating. In 1971, in the lobby of the Cairo Sheraton, terrorists shot the prime minister of Jordan at pointblank range. As he fell to the floor dying, one of his killers began drinking the blood gushing from his wounds. Thirty-five years later, the Palestinian Authority elections were a landslide for Hamas and among the incoming legislators was Mariam Farahat, a mother of three, elected in Gaza. She used to be a mother of six but three of her sons self-detonated on suicide missions against Israel. She's a household name to Palestinians, known as Umm Nidal-Mother of the Struggle--and, at the rate she's getting through her kids, the Struggle's all she'll be Mother of. She's famous for a Hamas recruitment video in which she shows her seventeen-year-old son how to kill Israelis and then tells him not to come back. It's the Hamas version of 42nd Street: you're going out there a youngster but you've got to come back in small pieces.

It may be that she stood for parliament because she's got a yen to be junior transport minister or deputy secretary of fisheries. But it seems more likely that she and her Hamas colleagues were elected because this is who the Palestinian people are, and this is what they believe. After sixty years as UN "refugees," they're now so inured they're electing candidates on the basis of child sacrifice. When you're there, in Gaza or the West Bank, that culture of death is pervasive. You go into a convenience store and they're affable and friendly and you exchange some pleasantries, and over the guy's shoulder you're looking at the Martyrs of the Week he's got proudly displayed on the wall. On my last visit, Palestinian schools were in the midst of a national letter-writing competition. Among the education ministry's first-prize winners was twelve-year-old Mahmoud Naji Chalilah for this epistle to the Zionist Entity: "My heart has turned into a sad block of pain. One day I will buy a weapon and I will blow away the fetters. I will propel my living-dead body into your arms "

The famously "moderate" mullah Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the favorite imam of London mayor Ken Livingstone, was invited to speak at the 2004 "Our Children Our Future" conference sponsored and funded by the Metropolitan Police and Britain's Department for Work and Pensions. When it comes to children and their future, Imam al-Qaradawi certainly has it all mapped out: "Israelis might have nuclear bombs but we have the children bomb and these human bombs must continue until liberation. "

Thank heaven for little girls; they blow up in the most delightful way.

We are not dealing with "enemies" like the Soviets, or "terrorists" like the IRA. We are a long way from the common humanity that bound those German and British soldiers at Christmas Eve 1914. Try to imagine what a jihadist feels when he looks at a Russian schoolchild or an Israeli diner or a British contractor or an American pacifist.

Now try to imagine how he'd feel if asked to participate in a nuclear plot, and to kill vastly greater numbers of Russians and Israelis and Britons and Americans.

That moment is now upon us. Or as the Daily Telegraph in London reported in 2006: "Iran's hard-line spiritual leaders have issued an unprecedented new fatwa, or holy order, sanctioning the use of atomic weapons against its enemies."

Well, there's a surprise.

WHAT PART OF "KNOW" DON'T WE UNDERSTAND?

In 2003, Donald Rumsfeld made a much quoted rumination. "Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me," the defense secretary began, "because, as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns--the ones we don't know we don't know."

A lot of people jeered at Rummy. The witless twits at Britain's Plain English Campaign gave him that year's award for the worst use of English. But Rumsfeld is perhaps the best speaker of Plain English in English-speaking politics, and it would be a less despised profession if there were more like him. His little riff about known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns is in fact a brilliant distillation of the dangers we face. Let's take an example close to the heart of arrogant Texas cowboys: John Wayne is holed up in an old prospector's shack. He peeks over the sill and drawls, "It's quiet out there. Too quiet."

What he means is that he knows the things he doesn't know. He doesn't know the precise location of the bad guys, but he knows they're out there somewhere, inching through the dust, perhaps trying to get to the large cactus from behind which they can get a clean shot at him. Thus he knows what to be on the lookout for: he is living in a world of known unknowns. But suppose, while he was scanning the horizon for a black hat or the glint of a revolver, a passenger jet suddenly ploughed into the shack. That would be one of Rumsfeld's unknown unknowns: something poor John Wayne didn't know he didn't know--until it hit him.

That's how most of the world reacted to September 11: we didn't know this was one of the things we didn't know. For most people in the developed world, terrorism meant detonating bombs in shopping streets, railway stations, and park bandstands--killing a couple dozen, maiming another thirty, tops. As Thomas Friedman wrote in the New York Times:

"The failure to prevent September 11 was not a failure of intelligence or co-ordination. It was a failure of imagination."

In other words, it was an unknown unknown: we didn't know enough to be alert for the things we didn't know.

There's a legitimate disagreement about that. Given al Qaeda's stated ambitions, given its previous targeting of the World Trade Center, given the number of young Arab men taking flight lessons in America, one can make the case that September 11 should have been a known unknown--one of those things we ought to have been scanning the horizon for. Friedman insists that "even if all the raw intelligence signals had been shared among the FBI, the CIA, and the White House, I'm convinced that there was no one there who would have put them all together, who, would have imagined evil on the scale Osama bin Laden did." For the sake of argument, concede that. After all, the Cold War was a half century of very well-known unknowns. We didn't know the precise timing or specifics of what would

happen, but we knew the rough shape--a mushroom cloud--so well that, from Dr. Strangelove on, the known unknowns generated the most numbingly homogeneous body of predictive fiction ever seen.

It's trickier now. This is an age of unknown unknowns. If you've ever been at an airport counter buying a ticket when the computer goes down and the clerk explains that he can't do anything until the system's back up, you'll know that blank look on his face as he sits and waits and sits and waits, an able-bodied man effectively disabled. It wasn't like that if you were at the desk buying your ticket in 1937. He tore the stub off the book in his cash drawer and that was that. Today our system has a million points of vulnerability. Some of those are known unknowns--some type of terrorist-sparked electromagnetic pulse that wipes out every bank account in the United States and Canada and crashes the financial markets. We know some of the other things we don't know--who North Korea's been pitching its wares to, where the missing Soviet nuke materials have gone walkabout, who else has the kind of "explosive socks" found by Scotland Yard in 2003--but we have no real idea in what combination these states and groups and technology and footwear might impress themselves on us, or what other links in the chain there might be. And we might not know until we switch on the TV and the screen's full of smoke again, but this time it's May 7 in Frankfurt, or February 3 in Vancouver, or October 22 in Dallas. Or we might not be able to switch on the TV at all, because the unknown unknown is a variation of technological catastrophe we haven't imagined.

Yet what we're confronted with in Iran are known knowns: a state that's developing nuclear weapons, a state that's made repeated threats to use such weapons against a neighboring state, a state with a long track record of terrorist sponsorship, a state whose actions align with its rhetoric very precisely. What's not to know?

So the question is: will they do it?

And the minute you have to ask the question you know the answer.

It's the same answer to the same question: Will they go ahead and slaughter the Beslan schoolchildren? Will they decapitate the bumbling Englishman? Will they kill the Iraqi aid worker and the American "Christian peacemaker"? In 1993 a Hezbollah suicide bomber killed twenty-nine people and injured hundreds more in an attack on the Israeli embassy in Argentina. The following year, the Argentine Israel Mutual Association was bombed in Buenos Aires. Nearly a hundred people died and 250 were injured--the worst massacre of Jewish civilians since the Holocaust. An Argentine court eventually issued warrants for two Iranian diplomats and two former cabinet ministers. The chief perpetrator had flown from Lebanon a few days earlier and entered Latin America through the porous "tri-border" region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Suppose Iran had had a "dirty nuke" shipped to Hezbollah, or even the full-blown thing: Would it have been any less easy to get it into the country? And if a significant chunk of downtown Buenos Aires were rendered uninhabitable, what would the Argentine government do? Iran can project itself to South America effortlessly, but Argentina can't project itself to the Middle East at all. It can't nuke Tehran, and it can't attack Iran in conventional ways.

So any retaliation would be down to others. Would Washington act?

It depends how clear the fingerprints were. "Mutually Assured Destruction" only works if you know who lobbed the thing your way in the first place. One reason Iran set up Hezbollah and other terror franchises is to have "plausible deniability." Actually, it's implausible deniability, but that's good enough for the UN. So, if the links back to the

mullahs were just the teensy-weensy bit tenuous and murky, how eager would the United States be to reciprocate? Bush and Rumsfeld might, but an administration of a more Clinton-Powellite bent? How much pressure would there be for investigations under the auspices of the UN? Perhaps Hans Blix could come out of retirement, and we could have a six-month dance through Security Council coalition-building with the secretary of state making a last-minute flight to Khartoum to try to persuade Sudan to switch its vote.

The Iranian version of No Dong will be able to hit not just Tel Aviv but also Rome, Berlin, Paris, Madrid, and London. How will the European political class react? Will it stand firm against threats from Tehran? Or will it take the view that there are ways to avoid having to confront incoming Islamonukes? You might, for example, approve the spectacularly large mosque wealthy Muslims have been wanting to build in your capital city. Or make certain well-connected heads of Muslim lobby groups members of a special government commission. You might appoint a minister for Islamic education to your cabinet. In other words, "the Muslim bomb" is likely to accelerate the Islamification of Europe, because Islamification more or less brings you under the Persian nuclear umbrella and encourages Tehran and its clients to turn their attentions elsewhere.

OUR WORD IS OUR BOMB

"Men of intemperate mind never can be free; their passions forge their fetters," wrote Edmund Burke. From the ayatollahs to the freelance jihadists, there are, in the end, no "root causes"--or not ones that can be negotiated by troop withdrawals from Iraq or the flag-raising ceremony for a Palestinian state. There is only a metastasizing cancer that preys on whatever local conditions are to hand. Five days before the slaughter in Bali in 2005, nine Islamists were arrested in Paris for reportedly plotting to attack the Metro. Must be all those French troops in Iraq, right? So much for the sterling efforts of President Chirac and his prime minister, the two chief obstructionists to Bush-Blair-neocon-Zionist warmongering since 2001.

In the months after the Afghan campaign, France's foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, was deploring American "simplisme" on a daily basis, and Saddam understood from the get-go that the French veto was his best shot at torpedoing any meaningful UN action on Iraq. Yet the jihadists still blew up a French oil tanker. If you were to pick only one Western nation not to blow up the oil tankers of, the French would surely be it.

But they got blown up anyway. And afterwards a spokesman for the Islamic Army of Aden said, "We would have preferred to hit a U.S. frigate, but no problem because they are all infidels."

No problem. They are all infidels.

When people make certain statements and their acts conform to those statements I tend to take them at their word. As Hussein Massawi, former leader of Hezbollah, neatly put it, "We are not fighting so that you will offer us something. We are fighting to eliminate you." The first choice of Islamists is to kill Americans and Jews, or best of all an American Jew like Daniel Pearl, the late Wall Street Journal reporter. Failing that, they're happy to kill Australians, Britons, Canadians, Swedes, Germans, as they did in Bali. No problem. We are all infidels. You can be a hippy-dippy hey-man-I-love-everybody Dutch stoner hanging out in a bar in Bali, and they'll blow you up' with as much enthusiasm as if you were Dick Cheney.

Back in February 2002, Robert Fisk, the veteran Middle East correspondent (i.e., he's reliably wrong about practically everything), wrote a column headlined "Please Release My

Friend Daniel Pearl." It followed a familiar line: please release Daniel, then you'll be able to tell your story, get your message out. Taking him hostage is "an own goal of the worst kind," as it ensures he won't be able to get your message out, the message being--Fisky presumed--"the suffering of tens of thousands of Afghan refugees," "the plight of Pakistan's millions of poor," etc.

Somehow the apologists keep missing the point: the story did get out.

Pearl's severed head is the message. That's why they filmed the decapitation, released it on video, circulated it through the bazaars and madrassas and distributed it worldwide via the Internet. It was a huge hit. The message got out very effectively.

In our time, even the most fascistic ideologies have been canny enough to cover their darker impulses in bathetic labels. The Soviet bloc was comprised of wall-to-wall "People's Republics," which is the precise opposite of what they were--a stylistic audacity Orwell caught perfectly in 1984, with its "Ministry of Truth" (i.e., official lies). But the Islamists don't even bother going through the traditional rhetorical feints. They say what they mean and they mean what they say--and we choose to stay in ignorance. Blow up the London Underground during a G-8 summit and the world's leaders twitter about how "tragic" and "ironic" it is that this should have happened just as they're taking steps to deal with the issues--as though the terrorists are upset about poverty in Africa and global warming. Even in a great blinding flash of clarity, we can't wait to switch the lights off and go back to fumbling around on the darkling, plain.

A world without order eventually liberates all restraints. Even in low-level conflicts there's no monopoly of depravity: Americans think of "Northern Ireland" as being the IRA versus the Brits. But it doesn't stop there: there were plenty of "loyalist" paramilitaries too, groups that took the view that if the other side was blowing up their civilians maybe a little reciprocity was in order. Islamists are foolish to assume that freelance nukes go one way. If a dirty bomb with unclear fingerprints goes off in London or Delhi, it's not necessary to wait for the government to respond. As in Ulster, there'll always be groups who think the state power is too pussy to hit back. So unlisted numbers will be dialed hither and yon, arrangements will be made, and bombs will go off in Islamabad and Riyadh and Cairo. There will be plenty of non-state actors on the non-Islamic side. In the end the victims of the Islamist contagion will include many, many Muslims.

But we surely don't need to wait for Iranian nukes, do we? The Bali bombs and Madrid bombs and London bombs have already lit up the sky: they make unavoidable the truth that Islamism is a classic "armed doctrine"; it exists to destroy. One day it will, on an epic scale.