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Vanity and the Bonfires of the “isms”

RALPH PETERS

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Not long ago, with communism coughing up its diseased lungs, radical Islamic fundamentalism seemed the obvious candidate to provide the West with a galvanizing threat. While politically correct intellectuals were initially a bit disoriented by the notion that indigenous forces in the stagnant areas of the world might be less than virtuous, the repeated brutalities of fundamentalists from Iran to Lebanon so bloodied the fairy tales about the psychology of underdevelopment that it became acceptable to oppose—circumspectly—the “excesses” of fundamentalism. God’s men in Teheran slaughtered Bahais and communists with equal fervor, savagely repressed all political dissent, shackled the media, tossed their countrywomen back into the Dark Ages, and refused to compromise on anything ever. Fundamentalists deepened the ineffably stupid Lebanese civil war, rolled back social progress in Pakistan, and nearly ousted the “progressive” government of Algeria. They blew up airliners and killed tourists. They poked pocketknives into charred American corpses and took hostages. Then they danced in the streets, fired their rifles into the air, and yelled at us. Not only were they unashamed, they seemed to be having an astonishingly good time. We had found our new bad guys.

Then came Yugoslavia. Nagorno-Karabakh. Moldova. Ossetia. Abkhazia. An epidemic of virulent xenophobia erupted, from the Baltic states down through the Balkans: a black new beginning, not the end of something. The ending was the death of neo-Leninist hegemony and the Soviet empire. What we see now is the brave new world.

Even within the fortress of the Russian Federation, tiny peoples whose homelands Western experts cannot pinpoint on a map demand independence from Moscow. Reason as a political force plays no role. Ethnic

groups of 100,000 or so—little more than extended families—cry out for their own governments and flags. Nationalism, against which our century's great wars had supposedly inoculated us, has come back with a power over the human soul simply not comprehensible to the educated US citizen (although, even within the United States, a nativist fringe in Hawaii calls for secession).

Fundamentalism, which to Americans, after all, is primarily a bother to foreigners, has fallen to second place on the roll of threats to Western well-being. The horrendous images and reports from Yugoslavia—so recently the exemplary darling of intellectuals (and where the people look a bit more like us)—drove home the revised lesson: the real number one threat of the future is nationalism, and nationalism is now the domain where academics and government analysts can make careers. . . .

As always, we are reacting to the crisis—or crises—of the moment. We never thought the fundamentalist problem through. Conditioned socio-political inhibitions may make it even more difficult to understand what nationalism is about, since it not only thumbs its nose at an incredibly wide range of cherished disciplines, from sociology to political science, but also discredits virtually every cola commercial produced in the last 30 years. We are not going to teach the world to sing by handing it a sweet little bottle of tolerance. The world is too busy shrieking. And those indigenous peoples who were supposed to teach us humanity, the nobility of poverty, and how to be one with nature are having a grand time killing their neighbors, mass raping the women from the next village, blasting and burning out the homes and history of anyone born on the other side of the ridge or across the river, and threatening to explode dams, chemical plants, and nuclear reactors.

Is nationalism, then, the critical factor with which we must cope?

Or does fundamentalism remain the ultimately greater menace, despite the transitory, if bloody, dynamics at play in the Red wreckage?

Must we now prepare to fight a two-front ideology-inspired war?

The answer is no. On technical grounds:

Nationalism and fundamentalism are not separate problems. They are essentially identical. If their rhetoric differs, their causal impulses do not. Their

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psychological appeal to the masses is identical. Nationalism is simply secular fundamentalism. To the extent they differ at all, religious fundamentalism may even become the preferable disease from the US standpoint. In any case, these are *twin* enemies. And we are going to have to struggle with them, on many fields, for a very long time to come.

How could all of those people in the intriguing folk costumes let us down like this? We planned our vacations to admire them, we made charitable contributions to give them a helping hand, we praised them lavishly when they took their first baby steps toward the sort of behavior we valued. They were such charming waiters, and it was fun to go shopping in the bazaar. To prove our earnestness, we helped them study in our universities and even let them open restaurants in our cities where we could drink terrible wine and reminisce about our holidays. Materially speaking, they were making progress.

We've been through all this, of course. We are conversant with the idea of "perceived relative deprivation," the observation that societies slip into crisis when expectations exceed the possibilities of fulfillment, no matter the objective measure of progress. But even this basically sound insight understates the sheer vanity of humankind.

Every major religion warns its adherents of the danger of vanity, decrying the sin of pride or insisting that only humility can lead to enlightenment. In our rush from religion—be that flight good or bad—we have certainly lost this fundamental insight. Everyone everywhere wants more, usually in the most vulgar material sense, because the display of possessions seems to verify the worth of the self—"I have, therefore I am." We announce ourselves to our peers through the possession of the mutually desired object. And while European intellectuals, caught in a pathetic timewarp, rail against American materialism, the importance of "signifying" possessions is far greater in economically stagnant or developing states. In Moscow, home-grown entrepreneurs in top-of-the-line Mercedes speed by the newly impoverished. For an Iranian, possession of a foreign-made VCR is a far greater mark of distinction than possession of a locally printed Koran. Within the United States, the most baldly materialistic social sector is composed of young males from the inner cities, with their ritual gold chain jewelry and their willingness to risk prison if not their lives to acquire an expensive car or at least an ornate pair of athletic shoes. These young people fit a classic Third World rejectionist model—they know what they want and believe they deserve, but they are impatient with the legitimate means for acquiring it.

This cult of sheer material possession as a substitute for practical accomplishment is one of the most severe childhood diseases of civilization—it stunted the growth of Islamic culture just as it has, more recently, incalculably retarded the development of functioning economies in sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America. Any culture or subculture where possession

has been disassociated from positive contributory accomplishment degenerates into social cannibalism. This is as true of the US welfare class as it was of the proprietary culture of the Spanish Empire in America or as it is of the oil-rich lands of the Persian Gulf. Much of the world has simply disassociated the concept of “having” from that of “earning,” while the recognition of the need to earn—either God’s Grace or an improvement in the individual’s material lot—was a motive force in the rise of the West.

The collision with foreign modernity has brought most non-Western cultures the worst of both worlds: they retain the vanity impulse, even experience it in an intoxicatingly aggravated form, while imagining they can skip entirely the difficult process that has legitimized the possession of “signifying” objects in Euro-America. Our own good-hearted intellectual corruption compounds the problem whenever we apologetically agree with a failing nation or continent as it cries out that the West has no right to the wealth it has earned. Too often, those of us most sincerely concerned with foreign suffering simply reinforce utterly groundless assumptions that aggravate the plight of the object of pity. Europeans—and Japanese and other successful Asians—did not always have computers in their homes and CAT-scan equipment in every hospital. If anything, resource-deprived Europe (and, again, Japan) had to come from behind in the race for well-being. Now we are the adulated model (until disillusionment sets in—see below), and the world’s failures, both individuals and entire cultures, don’t much like it.

The emergence of enduring liberal democracies in a small corner of the globe is probably the most complex cosmic accident of the past millenium. Expecting violently different cultures to adopt the finery of liberal democracy and wear it with panache is as silly as expecting Malawi to compete with Silicon Valley or Tokyo in the technological sphere. Rather than entering a new golden age of liberal democracy, we may find that other cultures are beginning to fall farther away from our standard, just as the lower echelons of the Third World continue to fall farther behind the West in both absolute and relative measures of modernity.

While hybrid democracies may function in Latin America because they have been adapted to suit regional, popular, and elite vanities, we may find that democracy’s high-water mark has already been reached elsewhere: the echoes we hear mark its melancholy retreat.

What are the common denominators of nationalism and fundamentalism?

- Both are born of a sense of collective failure which frees the individual from responsibility for personal failure. Nationalism and fundamentalism both then transfer the blame for the collective failure to another culture, religion, or ethnic group, or, initially, to internal opponents. Thus, the

individual has failed only because his party was driven to failure by a malevolent external force. Shouts of "Death to America," or ethnic battle cries in the Balkans, punctuate the efforts of broken men and failed cultures to become whole again.

- There is always a sense of historical grievance. This may be real, exaggerated, or imaginary. It does not necessarily involve the contemporary opponent, but deepens and solemnizes the sense of national or religious martyrdom.

- Both preach a lost golden age which can only be resurrected when the nation is purged of corrupting foreign influences. Interestingly, although fundamentalism reinforces this golden-age myth with promises of a gorgeous hereafter, no significant fundamentalist movement has omitted the vision of an earthly paradise lost and to be regained.

- Both dehumanize their opponents and view mercy toward enemies as an irresponsible show of weakness. The corollary to this is that both preach the inherent superiority of their kind, whether ethnic, religious, or a combination of the two.

- Both are dynamically violent. Nationalist and fundamentalist leaders come to power on two-track platforms of rebirth and revenge. They can excuse purges, severe economic sacrifice, bloody battlefield stalemates, and even comprehensive failure—but they cannot excuse inaction; their adherents want change, even if it proves cataclysmic. One of the rare differences is that fundamentalism can longer content itself with the persecution of domestic enemies—heretics real and imagined—while nationalism generally carries with it the spirochete of irredentism, of tribal unification, of *enosis*.

- Both are aggravated by exposure to Euro-America. Not so long ago, this exposure was limited to diplomats, adventurers of miraculous variety, and the occasional thin red line drawn up at the foot of a hill. Today, Euro-America—especially the United States—is everywhere, thanks to the proliferation of media technology. But far from serving the causes of education and understanding, mass media have become the world's single greatest cause of cultural disorientation. We provide ill-chosen information to people unprepared to process it and thus elicit shock, revulsion, and jealousy, along with pathetic attempts at emulation whose failure leads to embitterment.

We have yet to grasp the crisis of values that arises when an insular, traditional culture is flooded by images of another culture that is vastly more successful materially but whose values are antithetical to those cherished by the receptor society.

Initially, the young and capable often imagine that by aping externals they can transcend the differences and attain the level of (various forms of) wealth, comfort, and convenience of the external society. The two primary

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forms of this imitation of the external model are *domestic*, in which the subject seeks to “import” the lifestyle he desires; and *emigre*, in which the subject travels to the promised land. The domestic approach may lead to material well-being in lucky cases, but it fractures the society. The emigre model can work for those willing to assimilate to the necessary degree, who have a talent for mimicry, and who are “doers.” But it also produces fundamentalist and nationalist leaders through a process of *multiple alienations*. First, the subject becomes alienated from his own “backward” society; however, unable to satisfy his vanity in the adopted “progressive” society, he undergoes a second alienation and concludes that the superior virtues lay slumbering in the religion or ethnic culture he abandoned. He assumes the mission of reshaping his roots to meet a higher, exclusive standard, accenting differences, not commonalities, with the foreign culture that betrayed him. He runs home to an idealized mommy. Or, to use a more mature metaphor, the psychology parallels that of a man who leaves his wife for an intoxicating other woman, only to be ultimately rebuffed. He feels betrayed and seeks revenge; meanwhile his abandoned wife is idealized as the embodiment of virtue, whether or not this corresponds to objective reality.

The greatest failures among Third World emigres are consistently intellectuals and the children of established families (often one and the same person) who do not find the automatic, unqualified recognition in the object culture that they enjoyed at home. Even if they attain professorships or manage to buy lives of great mortal comfort, they tend to remain outsiders, also-rans. These are the men who go home to start (often reactionary and always xenophobic) revolutions that reject the foreign culture that rejected them. Wounded vanity has motivated cross-cultural problem children from Arminius, who recognized a Roman glass ceiling when he struck it with his Germanic head, to Ho Chi Minh, who had to work as a scullery knave in Paris; from Clausewitz, who learned to hate sweet, dirty France during his captivity as a prisoner of war, to a recent prime minister of Greece, whose academic career in California proved ultimately dissatisfying to the Balkan bully lurking under the tweeds.

It is impossible to satisfy the vanity of intellectuals, and the collision of intellectuals from the failing regions of the world with the ultimately exclusive cultural context of the West profoundly aggravates their ever-wounded pride. And, thanks to modern communication means, they don't even have to leave the farm to find out they're hicks. That is why we are so often shocked to find that bloody-minded nationalist leaders such as Karadzic or Gamsakhurdia were respected intellectual and cultural figures back home: poets, historians, doctors, professors.

So much of the progress imagined for the post-colonial era has come to nothing. All that remains to failing nations and cultures is the ceaseless assault of things foreign, dazzling, and humiliatingly unattainable.

Western popular media are immeasurably more powerful in their impact on the values of other cultures than on our own. Wailing that television and hit music play havoc with the morals of our youth, we become obsessed by the behavior of the marginalized elements of our society, while most kids grow up as normally as they ever did. Because our children receive the media in its greater environmental context, most learn intuitively to filter reality from fantasy to a workable degree. The impact about which we genuinely should worry strikes foreign cultures that have not acquired a discriminating mechanism from their social context and therefore cannot adequately separate fact from fiction. Gang movies may cause a temporary increase in minority-on-minority violence outside theaters in US cities—since segments of our urban youth also lack this discriminating mechanism to some degree—but Arnold Schwarzenegger films do not cause statistically significant eruptions of mass slaughter in middle America. An American ten-year-old knows intuitively that movies are an illusion. Many foreign adults do not. I have personally met no end of would-be Rambos in Armenia and Georgia, even in Moscow, and the grisly clowns driving the war in what was Yugoslavia are enraptured by film images. Yet Croatians, Serbs, Russians, Georgians, and Armenians have long-standing ties to Western culture. Imagine the effect on those who have no frame of reference whatsoever.

Last year I caught a rattling airliner from Yerevan to Moscow. The aged Aeroflot jumbo wore a new Armenian flag on its tail, and the cabin was crowded with travelers, many of them refugees, sitting on broken-backed seats or huddling in the aisles. It was almost impossible to move about, given the mounds of shabby luggage which had been brought aboard, and the flight attendants disappeared after takeoff, not to be seen again. All in all, it seemed like a typical domestic flight over the corpse of the USSR. And then they caught me off guard: they showed an in-flight movie, something unthinkable on the old Aeroflot domestic runs.

This nod to competitiveness and world custom was a bit marred, however, by the film chosen. It was a black-and-white, English-language,

“We are not going to teach the world to sing by handing it a sweet little bottle of tolerance. The world is too busy shrieking.”

ultra-cheap “dungeons and dragons” affair, with unknown players and a startling mix of cold steel violence and nudity—some of which involved imaginative perversions.

Some of the travelers were well-connected and relatively sophisticated; others were low-level entrepreneurs off to trade all they could carry in Moscow markets. Many were refugees from the sputtering, thug-fueled war in the mountains—refugees for whom Yerevan had no more resources and who hoped to rescue themselves with distant relatives or just a vague address in Moscow. Some of these people had never been on an aircraft before—and many of them certainly had not seen a film of this sort. But, suddenly, there it was: The West.

The men—all of them—watched with passionate interest as huge swords descended and packs of deformed creatures fondled a demi-heroine’s naked breasts. Sometimes a phenomenally muscled hero saved the girl in a rush of violence, sometimes not (it was, all in all, a rather existential affair). Invariably, an explicit coupling followed the bursts of violence.

The female passengers, Christian in religion but oriental in conditioning, theatrically averted their eyes. Then they hungrily scouted the more shocking bits from their trenches of decorum.

Personally, I found the movie repulsive and dumb. It was pitched at the pimply 12-year-olds whom R and X ratings were created to attract. But even the Western 12-year-old would clearly perceive this as fantasy. The film was, however, perfectly tempered to inspire the absolute worst behavior in the sort of credulous and infantile adult males who are presently slaughtering each other in the Caucasus and elsewhere.

A final note on the unrecognized power of the entertainment media: no contemporary fundamentalist movement, Islamic or otherwise, has attacked the West on grounds of profound religious difference (although they don’t mind massacring sects they view as heretical). The complaints, from Western religious zealots and Iranian theocrats, have consistently been directed against *secular* influences (Mark Twain, women’s rights, and other horrors). They do not attack religious beliefs but encroaching cultural contexts. Neither nationalists nor fundamentalists fear alternative beliefs, religious or secular. They

fear dissident *behavior*, since behavior (certainly not art) is the ultimate manifestation of culture. And the most accessible—and, therefore, insidious—examples of this frightening behavior are provided by the entertainment media. In their appreciation of the threat posed by the proliferation of audio and video technology, the mullahs and reactionaries in the failing regions of the world are far ahead of Western academics—with their quaint, pathetic love of books (the recorded voice cassette is perhaps the most effective propaganda tool employed by Islamic militants). The “battle of behavior” has nothing to do with ideas. It has to do with images: short skirts, not long theories. And with the seductiveness of pop hits that will not leave the ear. The threat doesn’t come from Harvard. It comes from Hollywood.

Perhaps the greatest fallacy (out of so many) in contemporary Western diplomatic belief is the conviction that we can more readily reason with and trust in nationalists than in fundamentalists. In fact, the matter is purely situational, and it may at times be preferable to lie down with the fundamentalist cat (when we must) than the nationalist dog. We might, on a good and lucky day, get up with fewer fleas.

The behavior of *Islamic* fundamentalists in power has generally been deplorable. They torture without remorse, imprison or execute without trial, and restrict basic freedoms to a degree intolerable to Western man. Yet, after all of the gore has been hosed into the sewer, there is a moral center to the greatest of the fundamentalists. It just isn’t our moral center. Many fundamentalist leaders, from Iran to Algeria, may not share our taste for liberal democracy (which we acquired over the better part of a millenium), but they do share many other ideals we profess. The best of the fundamentalists are resolutely against the corruption that has so enervated the failing regions of the world. They are for mass education (although we might not agree with the curriculum and their exclusion of women). They desire to democratize the nation’s wealth, if not its government. They seek to *do* that which socialist demagogues only promised. They have a sense of honor higher than that prevalent in the deathbed societies they seek to revitalize. And their actions have yet to prove anywhere near as belligerent toward other states as their rhetoric.

Nationalists, on the other hand, tend to have a moral center smaller and softer than the inside of a Tootsie Roll Pop. Hitler was a nationalist. Mussolini was a nationalist. The military leadership that steered Japan down the road to Hiroshima was rabidly nationalist. Even Stalin, despite his Georgian antecedents, became a Russian nationalist. Enver Pasha, the butcher of Armenians, was a nationalist, and Mao ultimately proved more nationalist than communist. Today, all the creepy little ex-party bosses with Elvis haircuts who sponsor ethnic cleansing or the suppression of minority rights from Dushanbe to the Danube are nationalists—even when they profess otherwise for reasons

of expedience or intellectual confusion. Nationalists have not been good to our century, and it does not appear that they will be much kinder to the next.

Samuel Johnson, normally a precise fellow with his language, mis-spoke himself on one fateful occasion, declaring “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” He meant to say “Nationalism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” He just didn’t have the vocabulary.

Despite the relative virtues of fundamentalism as currently practiced and promised vis-à-vis nationalism, there is, in the end, not much pleasure in the choice between them. By their essential nature, both nationalism and fundamentalism stand firmly against “us.” We are the necessary Satan, the galvanizing enemy.

If fundamentalism is sometimes marginally less repulsive than nationalism, it is, unfortunately, less able and willing to cooperate or compromise with the West. Fundamentalism is utterly rejectionist, while nationalism is only partially so. Nationalists are more mentally agile—and less scrupulous—and can more easily digest sophisticated techniques and technologies that promise them advantage. Nationalists are also far more flexible when it comes to rationalizing alliances. Finally, nationalists are quicker to welcome foreign assistance, particularly if it is humiliating, threatening, or, best of all, lethal to their neighbors.

But the problems in dealing with nationalists and fundamentalists, whether fighting them or aiding them, are virtually identical:

- If you enter an alliance with them, you must support them without reservation, no matter how heinous their deeds. The moment you introduce moral scruples concerning treatment of the enemy or begin to speak of compromise and just settlements, you have betrayed them and you will become their enemy.

- Both will interpret any offer of a just peace from an enemy as a sign of that enemy’s weakness.

- Neither fundamentalists nor nationalists will honor any form of agreement a moment longer than it suits their needs—unless they are *afraid* to abrogate it.

- Even when they admire your practical prowess, you are despised as a lesser creature.

- Both are dogmatic and thus will behave even more irrationally than other states.

- Both will inevitably commit atrocities that will embarrass any Western state allied with them. In peacetime, they will commit domestic atrocities; in wartime they will mistreat enemy soldiers and the enemy population.

- In war, they will employ all available means to win, no matter the degree of moral censure they receive, unless they clearly understand that they will be punished for their behavior by an external force so powerful that even

the most obstinate fundamentalist or nationalist ruler must recognize his relative impotence. Even then, some of them will ignore the danger of penalties.

- Not all nationalists or fundamentalists will fight to the last man, but their behavior cannot be confidently predicted in advance, and it will vary from culture to culture. Without exception, the best way to make war against them is to deliver an initial blow so comprehensive and powerful it emasculates them militarily and psychologically. Even then, the true believers among them may continue to resist.

- As stated above, nationalists and fundamentalists need enemies. Although nationalists are more apt to carry this *Feindbild* over into active aggression against another state, the quickest way to start or expand a war of aggression by nationalists or fundamentalists is to let them imagine they have your unequivocal support, or that you need theirs.

- No matter the extent of your support or the sincerity of your commitment to nationalists or fundamentalists, it will never be viewed as sufficient.

- You will always be suspect.

- Your interests don't count.

Where nationalist and fundamentalist currents exist in the same nation, they are (perhaps increasingly) symbiotic. Even nationalists who harbor no personal religious beliefs find that traditional religions lend credibility to the nationalist cause—as well as expanding its power base. Conversely, fundamentalist movements, such as the one in Iran, can broaden their acceptance by couching harsh programs in terms of national necessity. This symbiosis thrives in the ruins of Yugoslavia. Prior to the outbreak of the wars of dissolution, religious differences in Yugoslavia pretty much meant that the population failed to go to the church of its choice. Bosnian Muslims were perhaps the least religious of any major Muslim population. The Serbian Orthodox Church slumped upon the shoulders of bent old women, and Croatian Roman Catholics were perhaps more European in their disregard of religion than in any other respect. Yet members of each side in that guilt-rich conflict have attempted to wrap themselves in the armor of a true faith, perceiving essentially defunct religious professions as a perfectly good reason to butcher and rape neighbors who resemble them genetically, behaviorally, and materially.

To an extent, the rediscovery of traditional religion by ethnic groups fired with the nationalist impulse is natural, since religion is an important part of any people's history. Religious establishments, on the other hand, welcome growth opportunities and official protection. Even in countries not ruptured by civil war, populations and governments often have a difficult time determining the proper relationship between religion and nation. Poland is discovering that the Church Triumphant is not entirely without imperfections, while governmental actors in Turkey are assuredly playing with fire when they entertain Islamic fundamentalists and endanger the unique legacy of

Ataturk. Saddam Hussein tried—with limited success, thanks to his sordid past—to play the Islamic card during the Gulf War, while nationalist leaders in India and Pakistan have long recognized the power of appealing to religion whenever party energy threatens to flag. It is impossible to separate religion from nationalism in Israel, and the preservation of Islam's sanctity is perceived by some to be the only moral justification for Saudi statehood.

In an age haunted by cataclysms real and imagined, in this era of disappointment and wracking international failure, men and women will prove increasingly vulnerable to anti-modern, anti-rational explanations for their misfortunes and their inextinguishable impulse to vanity. Even in the United States, many of those least able to keep material, intellectual, and spiritual pace with the demands of modernity turn to primitive or exotic religious forms, from revivalism to New Age God-candy. In the failing regions of the world, such trends can only acquire greater momentum. There are no irreversible physics in the fundamentalism-to-nationalism equation: unsatisfying nationalism can evolve “backward” into theocracy. To paraphrase the most thoughtful soldier who ever learned to write, “Nationalism is merely the continuation of fundamentalism by other means.”

Our century has been one of fragmentation, of devolution that flirts with chaos. Mankind has not experienced so universal a breakdown in the established political order since the shattering of the Roman Empire. Brotherhood-of-man platitudes have been consigned to the “ashheap of history” with even greater certainty than has Marxism-Leninism, but we, convinced of the all-conquering virtue of liberal democracy, still cannot accept the essential realities of human political behavior. The world has cancer, and we are in the denial phase. If you want to see the future, look to Cambodia, to Somalia, to “Kurdistan,” or to Yugoslavia, Angola, Tadjikistan, or Georgia.

We Americans must avoid fantastic schemes to rescue those for whom we bear no responsibility, and we must resist imagining a moral splendor for murderers who better understand media manipulation than the murderers with whom they are in conflict. We must learn *not* to trust our eyes and ears—and, especially, their electronic extensions: the media, forever focusing on the crisis of the moment, almost never understand what they witness. In dealing with nationalism and fundamentalism, we must be willing to let the flames burn themselves out whenever we are not in danger of catching fire ourselves. If we want to avoid needless, thankless deaths among our own countrymen, we must try to learn to watch others die with equanimity.

We won't learn this, of course. We will be moved to action because of our emotional needs, heightened by the nonsense of post-colonial guilt. We will send troops to places where they can do no long-term good. We will be forced to choose which human beasts to back. And we will always pay more than we expected to pay when we began our intervention. □