

International Terrorism as a Nomadic War Machine Reflections on the Collapse of the World Trade Centre and its Aftermath.

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It took a handful of committed young men, motivated by a desire for divine gratification combined with an unhealthy dose of anger and hatred against Americanicity to bring an end to the world as we know it. The collapse of the World Trade Centre is now an oversignified event; generator of countless stories and reflections, emotive as well as critical ones. It has brought the World to a grinding halt, both economically and politically.

Seizing an airplane on a domestic flight in the US proved indeed the easiest bit of the whole operation. The planning and coordination, however, were far more impressive. The idea of transforming a domestic airplane, fully loaded with kerosene (hence all flights were across the continent), into a ballistic missile is itself quite an achievement. To arrange for such take-overs simultaneously is quite astonishing. Indeed, the logistics of 'international terrorism' were embarrassingly superior to those of US 'national security'.

Never before has a 'terrorist' attack been so successful. Of course, the indicator of success is not the death toll. Indeed, if anything, that was the weakest part of the operation as it made the attack unspeakably horrific. The success was instead its impact on the world economy, and more specifically, on the symbolic world economy in which the USA functions as the universal flagship. The ability to tear down the twin towers of the WTC, and subsequently, to generate a level of anxiety and fear amongst the Americans that far outperformed the paranoid neurosis of the Cold War, was the hallmark of this triumph of international terrorism.

Both professional and amateur cameras did the rest. Repeatedly, the collapse of the building was shown around the world. Over and over again evidence was presented that this act was indeed of historic proportions. Everything else paled in comparison. The logic of mass mediation was indeed inevitably predictable. So predictable that the masterminds of this attack must have known what would happen. They made the cameras work for them.

By whipping up the Western world into a frenzy of panic, the coalition between international terrorism and global media generated the next step in this brilliantly designed plan. It provoked a military response. The leaders of the Western world were indeed equally predictable. They too became allies of international terrorism. Their logic was indeed fully anticipated, hence incorporated, into the planning. Operation 'Infinite Justice' as it was first called, with undue hyperbole, was of course fully scripted by the war machine of international terrorism. By being drawn into a War with Afghanistan, the West would quickly lose its global hegemony, which – if only for a moment – it was able to seize on the back of the death toll. Its rhetoric that this is not a war against Islam would become gradually but increasingly void because its acts become indistinguishable from those who attacked the WTC.

At the tuning of the Third Millennium, we are witnessing – for the first time in the history of 'western modernity' - 'the rise of a 'nomadic war machine' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) that is no longer inferior to the state-apparatus. 'International terrorism' is indeed perpetrated by an unholy alliance, or better assemblage, of forces that include the supernatural (but not necessarily a divine power). What makes this machinic assemblage so much more effective than the nomads of the past is that it is able to penetrate and infect the very defensive logic of the modern state apparatus. It appropriates its security concepts, its media-logic, its

universalist rhetoric of nationalist sovereignty (Hardt and Negri, 2001), its military force, its ideology, indeed everything that thus far protected the state apparatus against nomadic attacks. None of these appropriations has weakened the war machine. On the contrary, like a the virus said to cause AIDS, its virulence increases with the attempts of the immune system to eliminate it. If Bin Laden sees himself as an evangelist of a radical anti-western Islamic Jihad, he is now recruiting much more effectively around the world than ever before. And CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS and the BBC are his main PR-agents. This is happening regardless of his alleged involvement in the WTC attacks.

Even if the US manages to destroy the rubble of Afghanistan, it is losing this war. The recent Anthrax attacks are a sign on the wall. Regardless of whether the perpetrators are connected to the Al Quaida network or Iraq, the sheer number of hoaxes already shows that many people in the West are more than happy to play their part in the proliferation of international terrorism. Again, Bin Laden can claim success even if he had nothing to do with it. America is stifled by fear and paranoia, and the media are primarily responsible for activating the succession of panics, even if they cannot help it. Their simple and predictable logic simply drives them to play this tragic role.

After the WTC attack, Saddam Hussain said that America was now reaping from the seeds of evil it had sown. More than ten years ago he also called the Gulf War the mother of all wars. In a strange and perverted sense, Saddam is becoming the visionary prophet of our age. The Gulf War was in many ways a catalyst in the world-wide formation of Al-Quaida. Although the seeds of this evil were indeed sown further back in time, during the unholy alliance between the CIA, the ISI, and the Mujaheddin which sought to overthrow the Afghan government that was held in place by the Soviet Union.

The rise to power of the nomadic war machine of international terrorism should not come as a surprise. Nomadic war machines have always been strong contributors to the collapse of civilizations. Their innovations have always been more powerful than the systems of securing and regulating through which the state-apparatus evolves. Indeed, at nearly all technological lineages, the figure of the nomad appears at the horizon. Nomads are particularly effective in making new combinations, machinic assemblages. State apparatuses in turn, derive their power from consolidating those combinations, imposing a grid of anticipation and control. This is why official history and royal science always favour the state-apparatus. This is also why both generally fail to anticipate the rise of nomadic war machines.

Western modernity has never been completely independent from principles of nomadism. Indeed, the deterritorializing force of capitalism could indeed be seen as a nomadic instinct. This is why seizing control over a domestic airplane was relatively easy. The needs of travel, both in terms of speeds and narrowing margins of profit, simply outweighed the needs for increased security and regulation. The same applies to international finance, which not only supports western businesses but also the nomadic war machine of international terrorism. And we should not forget communications. Mass media have been highly effective disseminators of terrorism, and snail-mail is now a prime vehicle for bio-terrorism.

The nomadic war machine of international terrorism simply uses what is already there, but creates new combinations; a new assemblage of forces. The Western state apparatus, clinging on to a highly contradictory rhetoric of nationalist particularity and rhetorical universalism, unwittingly feeds the virulence of this war machine. Whereas for states such as Israel, Turkey and China, terrorism is a term used to legitimate unrestrained violence against civilian

populations, preferably those of ethnic groups that cannot claim the sovereignty of a nation-state, 'international terrorism' makes a mockery out of such labels. One does not need the legitimacy of a sovereign nation state to fight one.

If all of this sounds like a celebration of violence, I sincerely apologize. However, those who insist that something had to be done should seriously consider whether their preferred alternative, of military action against Afghanistan, is turning out to be such a wise one. Of course, we were told that there is no alternative. This TINA-syndrome is the preferred strategy for all prophets of doom. It is the kind of thinking espoused by Bin Laden and his associates. However, for me it is obvious that as long as the West acts like a state-apparatus, and believes it can crush international terrorism through military action, it will continue to feed the nomadic war machine it seeks to destroy. As long as it is unwilling or unable to do the unexpected, to be unpredictable, to understand anticipation not as something 'we' do to the war machine but as what it is doing to us, it will do exactly what the machine is already anticipating. As long as the west fails to anticipate anticipated its actions will have been anticipated. Then only a God can save us.

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