

## **A Brief Tour through the potent mix of modern and ancient worlds.**

Vladimir Chaloupka  
University of Washington, April 18, 2008  
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This Essay assumes reader's familiarity with the pamphlet "[What Is To Be Done](#)" (by Vladimir Chaloupka, not the one by Vladimir Lenin ...). It is intended to accompany the courses on "Natural Science for an Informed Citizen" and "Science and Society".

Unfortunately, wisdom is not cumulative, but we can help by treasuring bits of wisdom where we find them, rather than trying to rephrase them "in our own words". Therefore, an important part of the essay has the form of an "annotated compilation" of readings that I found interesting and instructive in reference to the Basic Problem.

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### **The Basic Problem, again (as seen by someone else)**

Our Tour starts with excerpts from "The Breaking of Nations" by Robert Cooper:

*The worst times in European history were in the fourteenth century, during and after the Hundred Years War, in the seventeenth century at the time of the Thirty Years War, and in the first half of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century may be worse than any of these. ....*

*The new century risks being overrun by both anarchy and technology. The two great destroyers of history may reinforce each other. And there is enough materiel left over from previous centuries in the shape of national, ideological and religious fanaticisms to provide motives for the destruction.*

*Both the spread of terrorism and that of weapons of mass destruction point to a world in which Western governments are losing control. The spread of the technology of mass destruction represents a potentially massive redistribution of power away from the advanced industrial (and democratic) states towards smaller states that may be less stable and have less of a stake in an orderly world; or, more dramatically still, it may represent a redistribution of power away from the state itself and towards individuals, that is to say terrorists or criminals.*

Note that Cooper only talks about what I consider the smaller part of the Basic Problem ...

## Militant Islam

The militant Islamic fundamentalism is often quoted as the most important and dangerous example of the current religious fanaticism mentioned by Cooper. As always, it is instructive to go to the original sources for better understanding. Here is a treatise on Jihad and martyrdom:

From "Jihad and Shahadat" by the Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani

*The term jihad is always attached to the locution "fi sabil Allah" ("in the way of God"). What is the way of God? Which direction is it? Is it toward the heavens, toward Mecca, or toward Jerusalem? No. The way of God is the very path of the well-being and betterment of human society. It is the way of justice, truth, and human liberty. (It is the building of a world in which) a specific group or class does not dominate over the destiny of the people, in order to stop human intellectual movement or to stop people from utilizing the natural resources that God Almighty has created for the common use of humanity. As God has given natural powers and intellectual capacities to man, as God has created this atmosphere, light, and land for everybody, "sabil Allah" refers to the world in which all the people can develop their human capacities in order to obtain freedom. "Jahidu fi sabil Allah" ("strive in the way of God") is the divine command.*

This sounds idealist, and indeed fundamentalist, but so far so good. Then Ayatullah Taleqani continues:

*For example, if someone grabbed a sword and set off to fight the unbelievers without the intention of doing so for the pleasure of God, he would not be rewarded. If he were killed, he would not be considered a martyr. His act would be wasted as if he had committed suicide. Only one who has such a divine intention can take up arms for jihad and be rewarded by God.*

*When that bare-footed Arab confronted the commander of the Persian army, he was asked, "Did you come to conquer and to loot? Or did you perhaps come because of starvation or nakedness? If so, we will feed you; we will give you money; we will satisfy all of you, commanders and soldiers alike. Return to your land." [Rustam] thought his words had persuaded the man! Make note of what the man answered and how his words have been recorded in history. He said only one sentence, but a very meaningful one: "We have been given the mission of liberating the nations of the world from slavery to human laws and false religions which are for a particular class, and to lead them to the glory of Islam." This is the Islamic jihad. This is the meaning of "jihad."*

*Islam is a religion aimed at reforming humanity. It aims to save humanity from falling into the valley of animalistic passion. Islam has come to straighten man's stature, to direct his attention to God, and to establish justice and equity in the world. It has come to end war for the purpose of looting, murder, and expansionism, to end these wars instigated by world leaders, who use others as their tools in the name of nationalism and such in order to devastate them.*

*.....And if anyone asks you how the world can be reformed, can you tell them that the masses of the world should not fight the tyrants of the world, and push away the hands of*

*those who rape the dignity, life, and rights of humanity? Can you call this a true religion? Nay! If it is a true religion, it must take up the sword and advance. To what point should it advance? To the point that they either submit and say, "We are Muslims," in which case they become your brothers, or they say, "We will retain our own religion and will carry on our own way of worship; but we will follow the public law of Islam." In this case they become dhimmi, the protected minority. In such case, they again have equal rights with Muslims.*

*.....Now let us see what Islamic jurisprudence instructs concerning the limits of a protected minority. Please pay attention. We want to see to what limit Muslims have a duty to deal with them as protected minorities. This portion is in all our books on jurisprudence, and I have extracted it from Al-Mukhtasar al-Nafi' of Allamah Hilli. He lists five conditions of dhimmah (protection):*

*(1) One has to pay the jizyah. In order for his rights to be protected and in order to be immune from the harm of Muslims, one has to pay a kind of poll-tax to the Muslim bayt al-mal (public treasury).*

*(2) One must not harm the Muslims, must not have any sexual engagement with Muslim women, must not steal the property of Muslims, and must not cooperate with the enemies of Islam.*

*(3) One must not be flagrant with prohibited things, such as intoxication, adultery, and incest.*

*(4) One must not build new churches or temples and must not sound church bells. If they build a new church, it must be destroyed .*

*(5) One must not build a building taller than the buildings of the Muslims. This would be disgraceful to the Muslims.*

So the "true religion" must "take up the sword, and advance". And after the victory, the unbelieving members of the "protected minority" will have "equal right with Muslims" - if they behave, pay up, and don't build any new churches or tall buildings ...

Then the ayatollah goes on to discuss the meaning of martyrdom, in a poem:

*From the inanimate I died and I became vegetation,  
From vegetation I died and I became an animal.  
From an animal I died and I became human.  
I am not afraid of death; death has never made me lesser.  
Once more I shall die as a human being,  
And I shall fly as an angel;  
Then once again I shall fly from the angelic,  
And I will become something unimaginable.  
I will become nothing, nothing, because the harp  
Tells me: "Unto Him we shall return."*

I see great beauty in this poem but it is a ghastly beauty. It helps in understanding how can hundreds of young men and women blow themselves up at the prime of their lives, to fulfill what they see as their sacred duty.

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### Meanwhile, in America:

After this brief trip through the mind of an Islamic fundamentalist, it is interesting to see what a *Christian* fundamentalist has to say: here are extracts from “The Mind Siege” by Tim LaHaye and David Noebel, enumerating the enemy forces:

*The leading authorities of Secular Humanism may be pictured as the starting lineup of a baseball team: pitching is John Dewey;<sup>5</sup> catching is Isaac Asimov; first base is Paul Kurtz; second base is Corliss La-mont;<sup>6</sup> third base is Bertrand Russell; shortstop is Julian Huxley; left fielder is Richard Dawkins; center fielder is Margaret Sanger;<sup>7</sup> right fielder is Carl Rogers; manager is "Christianity is for losers" Ted Turner;<sup>8</sup> designated hitter is Mary Calderone; utility players include the hundreds listed in the back of Humanist Manifesto I and II, including Eugenia C. Scott, Alfred Kinsey, Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm, Rollo May, and Betty Friedan.*

*In the grandstands sit the sponsoring or sustaining organizations, such as the American Humanist Association; the American Ethical Society; the American Ethical Union; Fellowship of Religious Humanists; Society for Humanistic Judaism; Humanist Society of Friends; the Center for Inquiry Institute; the American Civil Liberties Union;<sup>9</sup> the Emergency Civil Liberties Union;<sup>10</sup> the National Academy of Sciences; the National Center for Science Education, Inc.; National Association of Biology Teachers; National Organization of Women; Planned Parenthood; SIECUS; the National Education Association (and all state affiliates);<sup>11</sup> the major television networks, high-profile newspapers, and news magazines; the U.S. State Department; the Department of Education; Ford Foundation; Rockefeller Foundation; Turner Foundation; Carnegie Foundation; Samuel Rubin Foundation;<sup>12</sup> W. Alton Jones Foundation; Ploughshares Foundation; Merck Foundation; Playboy Foundation;<sup>13</sup> Hewlett Foundation; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (and scores more);<sup>14</sup> the League for Industrial Democracy; the United Nations; UNESCO; the World Federalist Association; the Fabian Society of Great Britain; the Frankfurt School; the left wing of the Democratic Party; the Democratic Socialists of America; Harvard University; Yale University; University of Minnesota; University of California (Berkeley); and **two thousand other colleges and universities.***

***No humanist is qualified to hold any governmental office in America—United States senator, congressman, cabinet member, State Department employee, Department of Defense employee, or any other position that requires him to think in the best interest of America. He is a socialist one-worlder first, an American second. Such politicians can be counted on to vote for increasing United States appropriations to the UN, placing American properties under UN control, placing American citizens under World Court jurisdiction, and placing U.S. armed forces under UN command. We forget so soon that every tax increase is a move toward***

*bigger government and more humanist-trained bureaucrats dedicated to dragging us, kicking and screaming, into a New World Order.*

Doubtless the University of Washington is included in those “two thousand other colleges and universities” producing humanists who are not “qualified to hold any governmental office in America” ...

And in connection with our discussions of evolution in this class, it is interesting to see what LaHaye (whose “Left Behind” books sold over 60 million copies) and Noebel have to say about that:

*The biggest hoax of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that evolution is a scientific fact. Certainly it is a widely accepted theory of man's origin and development, advanced chiefly by those who reject belief in God, but theories are not scientific fact. The hypothesis that traces man's lineage back to spontaneous generation (life from nonlife, man from ooze and amoebas) has never been sustained. Spontaneous generation has not been scientifically proved, and there is mounting evidence to the contrary. A growing number of nontheistic scientists admit to a startling lack of evidence to support the theory of evolution. **Because the universe came into being before any human was around to witness the event, it is impossible to verify what happened except by the witness of God.***

There you have it ...

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### **The real danger ignored**

To change the focus slightly, let us now hear from Mahathir Mohammad, whose 2003 speech met with a universal condemnation in the United States. First an example of how the speech was covered by the New York Times:

#### ***Islamic AntiSemitism***

*Published: October 18, 2003*

*It is hard to know what is more alarming -- a toxic statement of hatred of Jews by the Malaysian prime minister at an Islamic summit meeting this week or the unanimous applause it engendered from the kings, presidents and emirs in the audience. The words uttered by the prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, in a speech to the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference on Thursday were sadly familiar: Jews, he asserted, may be few in number, but they seek to run the world. "The Europeans killed six million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy," he said. "They get others to fight and die for them." Muslims are "up against a people who think," he said, adding that the Jews "invented socialism, communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so that they can enjoy equal rights with others."*

And the venerable NYTimes found the audience reception of the speech incomprehensible:

*..... The Egyptian foreign minister, Ahmed Maher, called the speech "a very, very wise assessment." Even the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, said the speech was "very correct."*

The official US reaction was equally firm: "...State Department spokesman Adam Ereli called Mahathir's remarks offensive and inflammatory. "We view them with the contempt and derision they deserve," he said."

When I found that "our man in Afghanistan" Hamid Karzai called the speech not just "very correct" but "eye opening" I felt the need to read the text of Mahathir's address. Much to my surprise, none of the US papers which printed so categorical denunciations published it in full. But finally I found it, and I understood why Karzai called it "eye opening". The following excerpts are relevant:

*But is it true that we should do and can do nothing for ourselves? Is it true that 1.3 billion people can exert no power to save themselves from the humiliation and oppression inflicted upon them by a much smaller enemy? Can they only lash back blindly in anger? **Is there no other way than to ask our young people to blow themselves up and kill people** and invite the massacre of more of our own people? It cannot be that there is no other way.*

*The early Muslims produced great mathematicians and scientists, scholars, physicians and astronomers etc. and they excelled in all the fields of knowledge of their times, besides studying and practising their own religion of Islam. As a result the Muslims were able to develop and extract wealth from their lands and through their world trade, able to strengthen their defences, protect their people and give them the Islamic way of life, Addin, as prescribed by Islam. At the time the Europeans of the Middle Ages were still superstitious and backward, the enlightened Muslims had already built a great Muslim civilisation, respected and powerful, more than able to compete with the rest of the world and able to protect the ummah from foreign aggression.*

*But halfway through the building of the great Islamic civilisation came new interpreters of Islam who taught that acquisition of knowledge by Muslims meant only the study of Islamic theology. The study of science, medicine etc. was discouraged. Intellectually the Muslims began to regress. With intellectual regression the great Muslim civilisation began to falter and wither. But for the emergence of the Ottoman warriors, Muslim civilisation would have disappeared with the fall of Granada in 1492.*

*The early successes of the Ottomans were not accompanied by an intellectual renaissance. Instead they became more and more preoccupied with minor issues such as whether tight trousers and peak caps were Islamic, whether printing machines should be*

*allowed or electricity used to light mosques. The Industrial Revolution was totally missed by the Muslims.*

*We are enjoined by our religion to prepare for the defence of the ummah. Unfortunately we stress not defence but **the weapons of the time of the Prophet**. Those weapons and horses cannot help to defend us any more. We need guns and rockets, bombs and warplanes, tanks and warships for our defence. But because we discouraged **the learning of science and mathematics** etc. as giving no merit for the akhirat, today we have no capacity to produce our own weapons for our defence. We have to buy our weapons from our detractors and enemies. This is what comes from the superficial interpretation of the Quran, stressing not the substance of the Prophet's sunnah and the Quran's injunctions but rather the form, the manner and the means used in the 1st Century of the Hijrah. And it is the same with the other teachings of Islam. We are more concerned with the forms rather than the substance of the words of Allah and adhering only to the literal interpretation of the traditions of the Prophet.*

*Islam is not just for the 7th Century A.D. Islam is for all times. And times have changed. Whether we like it or not **we have to change**, not by changing our religion but by applying its teachings in the context of a world that is radically different from that of the first century of the Hijrah. Islam is not wrong but the interpretations by our scholars, who are not prophets even though they may be very learned can be wrong.*

*We must build up our strength in every field, not just in armed might. Our countries must be stable and well administered, must be economically and financially strong, industrially competent and technologically advanced. This will take time, but it can be done and it will be time well spent.*

It seems that, unfortunately, our press is not as open, impartial and objective as we would like to believe. After reading the full text rather than the biased extracts published in our media, it turned out to be less of a “toxic hatred” and more as a call for reform. Yes, Mahathir is not a friend of Israel. But anti-Semitism was not the main point of the speech. The main point, an “eye opening” to the many kings and presidents in the audience, was a call for a thorough modernization of Islamic countries, including Islam itself. Paradoxically, from the point of view of the Basic Problem, when the Moslem extremists (and all kinds of other people with grievances) decide to follow Mahathir’s advice, then we are in for a real trouble.

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## **What about Russia?**

It is the central thesis of my current thinking that in the very near future (historically speaking) it will be within reach of small, sub-state groups to inflict severe damage on the United States. Let us now have a look at the mindset of the only country which can do that already now. In connection with the recent presidential elections in Russia, NYTimes published recently an article on Putin’s Russia (which inherited the thousands of nuclear weapons and hundreds of ballistic missiles from the former Soviet Union). Then NYT put the translation of the article on a Russian website. Here are a few excerpts from the article:

**February 24, 2008**  
**KREMLIN RULES**

## **Putin's Iron Grip on Russia Suffocates His Opponents**

By [CLIFFORD J. LEVY](#)

..... *Mr. Putin and his followers have established what is essentially a one-party state.*

... .. *Regional officials were vigilant about developments at local universities, particularly two of the largest, Lobachevsky State and Volga State. Students said they were warned not to join marches sponsored by the Other Russia coalition. And they said that before the elections, administrators issued a threat: if you do not vote for the ruling party, you will be evicted from your dorms. Everyone was frightened, and our group, in full, went and voted, like a line of soldiers marching," said a Volga State student."*

..... *"The ruling elite nowadays has no ideology," Ms. Chelysheva said. "Their only aim is to obtain as much power as possible, to keep this power, by whatever means, and to profiteer off this power. In this respect, these people, who are so cynical, are much more dangerous than was the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R."*

### **And some comments of Russia readers, translated to English by NYTimes:**

*It is true that democracy in Russia is dubious and that the United States has more of it. But what are the results of this? It's not worth giving the masses much freedom. Our lack of democracy nurtures people better than American democracy. The more freedom we have the worse the masses become. Our lack of democracy is our own business. For the whole history of Russia (and then the USSR) we've lacked freedoms, and nothing bad has come of it. [sic]*

*You can probably appreciate how a largely anecdote-driven critical piece written by a foreigner (worse, an American [sic]) would be seen in that light, regardless of its factual accuracy.*

*It is funny to read this from people who, for 10 years have invaded other countries, toppled the stable regimes that ruled and enforced their rules there. Especially funny to read it if you don't forget about prisons and tortures in Guantanamo. And completely funny when you recall how these people hanged the former president of the country they invaded.*

*The idea to set up this whole Kosovo carnival on the eve of the Russian presidential elections is interesting. Now we will surely vote for whomever will take a more hawkish line on strengthening the state, the army and Russia's position of strength in the world.*



*At the beginning of 1990's, the West had a good chance to support Russia. Had it happened, Russia most probably would have been speaking the same language with the United States and Western Europe. Instead, America chose the course to weaken and dismember Russia. This is the result...*

*I have read this garbage and understood why America is hated all over the world. And I realized that I agree with them.*

*Pretty much everything American mainstream press prints about Russia is a complete and total garbage. This article is no exception. Soviet propaganda pales in comparison.*

*Just keep in mind, Russians will never discuss their problems with Americans. Anyone else but not you.*

*Implementation of the Western-style multi-party system brought nothing but civil war and devastation to the Russian people in the 20th century. Putin will prevent the repeat of that scenario in the 21st.*

*Throughout Russian history, in time of hardship, a strong and wise always leader emerged that always saved the country.*

*Oh great! The New York Times has showed up here to pour their lies into our minds. It's impossible to express how happy we are. Perhaps I will write something to your American readers: Yankee go home! The world is tired of your lies and your amoral domination. The world demands freedom. You have practically reached the level of world domination that Hitler dreamed about. Just about every country is under your control, and there are few bold enough to protest. Anyone who opposes the United States is quickly spit on from head to foot. Any government that thinks differently is considered "undemocratic," "authoritarian," "totalitarian," "Axis of Evil." The world, however, demands freedom, and it's impossible to hold it in chains even with the help of military bases, threats, bombings, embargos and lies. In the next 10 to 20 years your hegemony will come to an end and the American empire will fall.*

*Russians have a bit of a persecution complex, which is enthusiastically encouraged by the current Russian government. Official [sic] army recruitment videos portray the United States as a resource-hungry monster which will steal Russia's wealth as soon as it gets an opportunity.*

*And I quote the most worrying comment last:*

*It is necessary to understand, that the majority of commentators of Russian party [comes from] teenagers. That is a part of the population, the most active on the Internet and the most susceptible to official propagation by virtue of youthful maximalism.*

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Yes: if the future generation with its hands on an awesome arsenal of nuclear weapons falls victim of nationalistic propaganda, then we might be in real trouble again, from a different direction than that of Islamic fundamentalism. It would seem that rather than looking into the eyes of Vladimir Putin and finding that “we can do business with him”, a somewhat more sophisticated foreign policy is urgently needed.

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## **And what about China?**

Another country destined to become, very soon, an important if not dominant actor on the worldwide stage is China. It is a received “wisdom” that the freedom loving Chinese people wish nothing else than to be liberated from the oppression by their rulers. However, a recent article describes the events surrounding pro-Tibet demonstrations in the West while the Olympic torch passed through various countries:

**April 17, 2008**

### **Chinese Student in U.S. Is Caught in Confrontation**

By [SHAILA DEWAN](#)

DURHAM, N.C. — *On the day the [Olympic torch](#) was carried through San Francisco last week, Grace Wang, a Chinese freshman at [Duke University](#), came out of her dining hall to find a handful of students gathered for a pro-Tibet vigil facing off with a much larger pro-China counterdemonstration.*

*Ms. Wang, who had friends on both sides, tried to get the two groups to talk, participants said. She began traversing what she called “the middle ground,” asking the groups’ leaders to meet and making bargains. She said she agreed to write “Free Tibet, Save Tibet” on one student’s back only if he would speak with pro-Chinese demonstrators. She pleaded and lectured. In one photo, she is walking toward a phalanx of Chinese flags and banners, her arms overhead in a “timeout” T.*

*But the would-be referee went unheeded. With Chinese anger stoked by disruption of the Olympic torch relays and criticism of government policy toward Tibet, what was once a favorite campus cause — the [Dalai Lama](#)’s people — had become a dangerous flash point, as Ms. Wang was soon to find out.*

*The next day, a photo appeared on an Internet forum for Chinese students with a photo of Ms. Wang and the words “traitor to your country” emblazoned in Chinese across her forehead. Ms. Wang’s Chinese name, identification number and contact information*

*were posted, along with directions to her parents' apartment in Qingdao, a Chinese port city.*

*Salted with ugly rumors and manipulated photographs, the story of the young woman who was said to have taken sides with Tibet spread through China's most popular Web sites, at each stop generating hundreds or thousands of raging, derogatory posts, some even suggesting that Ms. Wang — a slight, rosy 20-year-old — be burned in oil. Someone posted a photo of what was purported to be a bucket of feces emptied on the doorstep of her parents, who had gone into hiding.*

*"If you return to China, your dead corpse will be chopped into 10,000 pieces," one person wrote in an e-mail message to Ms. Wang. "Call the human flesh search engines!" another threatened, using an Internet phrase that implies physical, as opposed to virtual, action. ....*

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## **And the small, suffering Haiti**

And elsewhere: NYTimes report today that – while we debate if in Pennsylvania people really cling to their guns and to their religion, and for what reason – people elsewhere have more pressing concerns:

**April 18, 2008**

**Across Globe, Empty Bellies Bring Rising Anger** By [MARC LACEY](#)

PORT-AU-PRINCE, [Haiti](#) — *Hunger bashed in the front gate of Haiti's presidential palace. Hunger poured onto the streets, burning tires and taking on soldiers and the police. Hunger sent the country's prime minister packing.*

*Haiti's hunger, that burn in the belly that so many here feel, has become fiercer than ever in recent days as global [food prices](#) spiral out of reach, spiking as much as 45 percent since the end of 2006 and turning Haitian staples like beans, corn and rice into closely guarded treasures.*

*Saint Louis Meriska's children ate two spoonfuls of rice apiece as their only meal recently and then went without any food the following day. His eyes downcast, his own*

*stomach empty, the unemployed father said forlornly, “They look at me and say, ‘Papa, I’m hungry,’ and I have to look away. It’s humiliating and it makes you angry.”*

*That anger is palpable across the globe. The food crisis is not only being felt among the poor but is also eroding the gains of the working and middle classes, sowing volatile levels of discontent and putting new pressures on fragile governments.*

.....

*In the sprawling slum of Haiti’s Cité Soleil, Placide Simone, 29, offered one of her five offspring to a stranger. “Take one,” she said, cradling a listless baby and motioning toward four rail-thin toddlers, none of whom had eaten that day. “You pick. Just feed them.”*

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## **Our ally, and a nuclear power**

January 9, 2011: To visit another corner of our world, read the NYTimes account of the support, even celebration (rose petals and all) provided by a significant segment of the Pakistani population to the alleged killer of governor Taseer. Recall that Pakistan is a nuclear power.

**Pakistani Lawyers Shower Murder Suspect With Roses** By [ROBERT MACKEY](#)

JANUARY 5, 2011, 6:05 PM 30 Comments

As my colleagues [Waqar Gillani and Carlotta Gall report](#) from Pakistan, a police officer suspected of killing a prominent secular politician on Tuesday was showered with rose petals by Islamist lawyers on his way in to court in Islamabad on Wednesday. Photographs and video show that the suspected assassin, Malik Mumtaz Qadri, was draped in a garland of flowers by supporters before he entered the court, and emerged from the hearing still wearing it.

Immediately after the killing, Mr. Qadri reportedly confessed to fellow police officers that he shot Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab Province, at close range 14 times because of the politician’s [outspoken](#)

[support](#) for a Christian woman convicted of violating Pakistan's strict blasphemy law.

A video report by Lindsey Hilsum of Britain's Channel 4 News [shows](#) that the police officers who led the suspected killer from the court, some of them smiling, allowed him to stand on the rear of an armored vehicle and lead the crowd in a chant of: "In the service of the Prophet, death is acceptable!" Ms. Hilsum's report also includes footage of one young lawyer promising to represent Mr. Qadri for free.

Pakistan's [Express Tribune reported](#) that more than 500 religious leaders from what Reuters called "a relatively moderate school of Islam in Pakistan" issued a statement forbidding their followers from mourning for the murdered governor. "No Muslim should attend the funeral or even try to pray for Salman Taseer or even express any kind of regret or sympathy over the incident," the scholars declared. They added: "We pay rich tributes and salute the bravery, valor and faith of Mumtaz Qadri."

### **Brief stop in the Middle East**

May 13, 2012: And consider the "Arab Spring": could the revolution spearheaded by young, idealistic, mostly secular protesters be hijacked by the Islamists? Could there develop an anti-Israel democracy? How will this play against Israel's firm determination to prevent, at any cost, development of nuclear weapon by Iran?

May 10, 2014: And since we are in the Middle East, think of the many aspects of the developments in Egypt, Syria, Israel vs. Palestinians, ...

March 31, 2015: This starts to read like an extremely depressing diary. Civilization, if it may be called that, needs an urgent medical help. Ominous symptoms appear with increasing frequency. The "managed savagery"<sup>1</sup> of the Islamic State is attractive to young volunteers from the world over. And the NYTimes just brought us a call to arms, or to another version of the managed savagery, by the Honorable John Bolton: "[To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran](#)"

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1 Please see <http://warincontext.org/2014/07/03/isis-and-the-strategy-of-managed-savagery/>

## **And last (for now) but not least: the Putin adventure in Ukraine**

For me, the current development has uncanny similarities to the events in my old country, with Hitler annexation first of the Sudetenland, then of the rest of Czechoslovakia (1938), as well as the brotherly help Soviet Union provided us by invading the country in 1968. And as in the case of Hitler, Putin standing at home improved. Many Russians feel humiliated by the end of the Cold War, as did Germans by their loss in WWI. And Putin promises a rebirth of the Russian glory – as did Hitler for Germany. Reading the [www.pravda.ru](http://www.pravda.ru) (they even have an English edition for azbuka-challenged readers) will give you the picture of the most stalwart Putin supporters, having replaced communist ideology for a mix of Orthodox Christianity, ardent patriotism, and even more ardent hatred of all things Western. To support the latter attitude, they publish anti-American articles contributed by Americans – often this makes for a very difficult reading (see for example [http://english.pravda.ru/world/americas/15-04-2014/127367-washington\\_world\\_war-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/world/americas/15-04-2014/127367-washington_world_war-0/) ).

Anyway, some Russians proudly point out that they are the only country capable of transforming the United States into a “pile of radioactive dust”. And they are right – thanks to many Soviet physicists and other scientists. Some of these later became dissidents, but to my knowledge none has ever expressed pangs of conscience over their contributions to the nuclear arms development they put into the hands of a criminal regime. Now we have to deal with what the new Russia inherited. Despite his past as KGB agent, Putin is no Communist, but please note that Communists did not have a concept of Armageddon. Fundamentalist Christians, fundamentalist Moslems, and deeply aggravated people do.

### **Summary of the Tour so far:**

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To deal with the Basic problem would be difficult under the best possible circumstances. We are not under the best possible circumstances!

But there is hope (maybe – if you are not too cynical). At this point, please read the ; a appears (maybe) from Oman, from all places, after the deeply depressing Pew Center survey.

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## The Tour contd.

To continue our Tour, we now go back to Robert Cooper. When contemplating possible ways out of the dilemma outlined in the first part of his book and excerpted at the beginning of this essay, he notes:

*... It may be that modern science, which gave us the weapons, will also give us the means of controlling them. But history suggests that the solution to the problems of technology is better politics rather than better technology. ....*

And being an experienced European diplomat that he is, he concludes by discussing the role of the US power:

*..... the idea of a single country having unrestrained and unrestrainable power is not welcome. However admirable the United States may be - and for many it is the embodiment of freedom and democracy - would those qualities survive a long period of unilateral hegemony? Since no country or combination of countries can take on the United States in a conventional war, a growing number of countries or individuals will decide that, rather than endure a world in which the rules are imposed by an alien power, they will attack the United States by unconventional means - the images of 9/11 will remain a powerful force in the minds of the disaffected. What sort of a world would we find ourselves in if the United States were both the only military power that counted and at the same time subject to continuous terrorist attacks? All-powerful and all-vulnerable? How long would the values that Europe and America share survive?*

As Cooper says, there indeed is “enough materiel left over from previous centuries in the shape of national, ideological and religious fanaticisms to provide motives for the destruction”. On the other hand, modern science and technology is *providing the means* of destruction on previously unimaginable scale. In his masterpiece “The Arrogance of Power” the late, great chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee William J. Fulbright wrote:

*Sooner or later the law of averages will turn against us; an extremist or incompetent will come to power in one major country or another, or a misjudgment will be made [...]. Or things will just get out of hand [...]. None of us, however – professors, bureaucrats, or politicians – has yet undertaken a serious and concerted effort to put the survival of our species on some more solid foundation than an unending series of narrow escapes.”*

I believe that now is the time for all of us, professors, bureaucrats, politicians and everyone else, to undertake that serious and concerted effort. But even if we convince enough people to participate in this great venture, the devil – as usual – is in the “details”: what exactly should we do? Consider, as a fascinating example, the attitude of the undisputed and enthusiastic technoguru Ray Kurzweil. In what seem moments of sanity, he does see the Basic Problem quite clearly. Starting from pointing out the danger of the congruence of freely available information with the possibilities for the misuse of that information, he writes:

Consider these articles we'd rather not see on the web:

[ ] *Impress Your Enemies: How to Build Your Own Atomic Bomb from Readily Available Materials*

[ ] *How to Modify the Influenza Virus in Your College Laboratory*

[ ] *Ten Easy Modifications to the E. coli Virus*

[ ] *How to Modify Smallpox to Counteract the Smallpox Vaccine*

[ ] ...

he then goes on with a very accurate account of the Basic Problem:

*My view is that technology has always been a double-edged sword, bringing us longer and healthier life spans, freedom from physical and mental drudgery, and many new creative possibilities on the one hand, while introducing new and salient dangers on the other. Technology empowers both our creative and our destructive natures..... We benefit from nuclear power, but live today with sufficient nuclear weapons (not all of which appear to be well accounted for) to end all mammalian life on the planet.*

*Bioengineering holds the promise of making enormous strides in reversing disease and aging processes. However, the means and knowledge it has created, which began to exist in the 1980's, will soon enable an ordinary college bioengineering lab to create unfriendly pathogens more dangerous than nuclear weapons.*

Elsewhere, he proposes what seems (even to me) a truly revolutionary approach:

*We spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year on defense, and the danger from abuse of GNR technologies should be a primary target of these expenditures. Specifically, I am proposing that we set up a major program to be administered by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. This new program would have a budget equaling the current budget for NSF and NIH. It would be devoted to developing defensive strategies, technologies, and ethical standards addressed at specific identified dangers associated with the new technologies funded by the conventional NSF and NIH budgets. There are other things we need to do as well, but this would be a practical way of significantly increasing the priority of addressing the dangers of emerging technologies. ....*

*.... Now is the ideal time to be debating these emerging risks. It is also the right time to begin laying the scientific groundwork to develop the actual safeguards and defenses. We urgently need to increase the priority of this effort. That's why I've proposed a specific action item that **for every dollar** we spend on new technologies that can improve our lives, we spend another dollar to protect ourselves from the downsides of those same technologies.*

But then he recovers, and relapses into our usual, and I believe misguided, reliance on technological fixes:

*Bill Joy's Wired treatise is effective because he paints a picture of future dangers as if they were released on today's unprepared world. The reality is that the sophistication*



*and power of our defensive technologies and knowledge will grow along with the dangers. When we have "gray goo" (unrestrained nanobot replication), we will also have "blue goo" ("police" nanobots that combat the "bad" nanobots).*

As an antidote to this attitude, here is a quote from Daniel Sarewitz and Edward Woodhouse:

*Neither an automobile nor a conversation nor an emerging technology can be steered properly if it is moving too fast for those nominally in charge to learn and adjust on the basis of feedback. To facilitate the broad public deliberation that will be necessary for wise pursuit and deployment of nanotechnology, there appears to be no reasonable alternative to slowing down certain aspects of research and commercialization.*

This advice can be generalized beyond dealing with just nanotechnology. After my lecture on the Basic Problem at the National Youth Science Camp, a student told me:

*If I understood you well, one might compare our situation to a car driving fast on a curved road at night, with weak headlights. Our current approach is to keep driving faster and faster, and just hope that there is no cow or a fallen tree behind the next curve. Instead we should slow down, and get better headlights.*

Yes, I said. This is what we should do.

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### **A spiritual detour.**

After our previous discussion of the extreme aspects of religion, it seems appropriate to revisit the problem of religion and science, and religion in general. Many scientists – if they are interested in the issue at all – find it impossible to be religious in the “traditional sense”. But curiously, this does not prevent many of them to be highly spiritual. Consider the “scientific poetry” of the Physics Nobel laureate and “philosopher from Brooklyn”, the late Richard Feynman:

*It is a great adventure to contemplate the universe beyond man, to think of what it means without man-as it was for the great part of its long history, and as it is in the great majority of places. When this objective view is finally attained, and the mystery and majesty of matter are appreciated, to then turn the objective eye back on man viewed as matter, to see life as part of the universal mystery of greatest depth, is to sense an experience which is rarely described. It usually ends in laughter, delight in the futility of trying to understand. These scientific views end in awe and mystery, lost at the edge in uncertainty, but they appear to be so deep and so impressive that the theory that it is all arranged simply as a stage for God to watch man's struggle for good and evil seems to be inadequate.*

And what about Einstein's “Cosmic Religion”, so beautifully and forcefully expressed by Carl Sagan:

*"In some respects, science has far surpassed religion in delivering awe. How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded: 'This is better than what we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant. God must be even greater than we dreamed.' ...*

*A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.'*

Even the infamously militant atheist Richard Dawkins gets spiritual, in a sense, in his eulogy of Sagan:

*Was Carl Sagan a religious man? He was so much more. He left behind the petty, parochial, medieval world of the conventionally religious, left the theologians, priests and mullahs wallowing in their small-minded spiritual poverty. He left them behind, because he had so much more to be religious about. They have their bronze age myths, medieval superstitions and childish wishful thinking. He had the universe.*

And contemplate the wisdom of the Hungarian polymath Arthur Koestler:

*I liked to spin out this metaphor. The captain of a ship sets out with a sealed order in his pocket which he is only permitted to open on the high seas. He looks forward to that moment which will end all uncertainty; but when the moment arrives and he tears the envelope open, he finds only an invisible text which defies all attempts at chemical treatment. Now and then a word becomes visible, or a figure denoting a meridian; then it fades again. He will never know the exact wording of the order; nor whether he has complied with it or failed in his mission. But his awareness of the order in his pocket, even though it cannot be deciphered, makes him think and act differently from the captain of a pleasure -cruiser or of a pirate ship.*

*I also liked to think that the founders of religions, prophets, saints and seers had at moments been able to read a fragment of the invisible text; after which they had so much padded, dramatized and ornamented it, that they themselves could no longer tell what parts of it were authentic...."*

These quotes were from "amateur philosophers". Here is one from a professional - the great philosopher Alfred North Whitehead:

*"Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes comprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something that is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest."*

All this may sound very interesting and deeply spiritual. But the question is: would such an abstract, intellectual and "reasonable" religion fill mosques and megachurches? I believe that our future very much depends on the answer to this question, as it transcends

the issue of religion, and goes to the heart of human spiritual needs and, in fact, to the heart of the human condition in general.

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### **A sendoff, in anticipation of the Grand Finale.**

For me, a suitable conclusion of a wide-ranging tour of the ancient and modern world is to turn to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. In his most abstract works, especially in the *Art of Fugue*, he went much beyond Music – he reflected and meditated, and makes us reflect and meditate, on the inner wisdom of the Heavens and Earth. Somewhat quixotically perhaps, I believe that practicing the ‘*Art of Listening to a Fugue*’ can help us in obtaining the proper balance of Exuberance and Humility, and thus help achieving a salutary and hopeful, if not optimistic, attitude towards the difficult problems we are facing.

But then again: I can only speak for myself. I am afraid that to be realistic, the words “somewhat” and “perhaps” should be omitted from the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The hope is very indirect: I hope that the species that is able to write and listens to fugues, discover quantum mechanics and deciphers its own genome will find enough wisdom to survive.