

## *Five Questions About Terrorism*

Michael Walzer

Leo Casey, Michael Kazin, James Rule,  
and Ann Snitow responding, and Walzer  
responding in turn

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<sup>1</sup> This is not going to be a straightforward and entirely coherent argument. I am still reeling from the attacks of September 11, and I don't have all my responses in order. I will try to answer five questions about terrorism. Whether the answers add up to a "position"—theoretical or practical—I will leave to the reader.

1. What is terrorism?
2. How should we go about explaining it?
3. How is it defended or excused?
4. How should we respond?
5. What will be the signs of a successful response?

1. What is it? It's not hard to recognize; we can safely avoid postmodernist arguments about knowledge and truth. Terrorism is the deliberate killing of innocent people, at random, in order to spread fear through a whole population and force the hand of its political leaders. But this is a definition that best fits the terrorism of a national liberation or revolutionary movement (the Irish Republican Army, the Algerian National Liberation Front [FLN], the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Basque Separatist Movement, and so on). There is also state terrorism, commonly used by authoritarian and totalitarian governments against their own people, to spread fear and make political opposition impossible: the Argentine "disappearances" are a useful example. And, finally, there is war terrorism: the effort to kill civilians in such large numbers that their government is forced to surrender. Hiroshima seems to me the classic case. The common element is the targeting of people who are, in both the military and political senses, noncombatants: not soldiers, not public officials, just ordinary people. And they aren't killed incidentally in the course of actions aimed elsewhere; they are killed intentionally. I don't accept the notion that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." Of course, the use of the term is contested; that's true of many political terms. The use of "democracy" is contested, but we still have, I think, a pretty good idea of what democracy is (and isn't). When communist Bulgaria called itself a "people's democracy," only fools were fooled. The case is the same with terrorism. In the 1960s, when someone from the FLN put a bomb in a café where French teenagers gathered to flirt and dance and called himself a freedom fighter, only fools

were fooled. There were a lot of fools back then, and back then—in the sixties and seventies—was when the culture of excuse and apology was born (but I want to deal with that later).

2. How should we go about explaining terrorism—and particularly the form of terrorism that we face today? The first thing to understand is that terrorism is a choice; it is a political strategy selected from among a range of options. You have to imagine a group of people sitting around a table and arguing about what to do; the moment is hard to reconstruct, but I am sure that it is an actual moment, even if, once the choice is made, the people who opposed terror are commonly killed, and so we never hear their version of how the argument went. Why do the terrorists so often win the argument? What are the political roots of terror? I don't think that a simple materialist explanation works, though there has been a lot of talk in the last couple of months about the human misery, the terrible poverty, the vast global inequalities in which terrorism is "ultimately rooted." Also about the terrible suffering, as someone wrote in one of our weeklies, endured by "people all over the world who have been the victims of American military action—in Vietnam, in Latin America, in Iraq ...." The author of those words doesn't seem to have noticed that there are no terrorists coming from Vietnam and Latin America. Misery and inequality just don't work as explanations for any of the nationalist terrorist movements and certainly not for Islamic terror. A simple thought experiment in comparative politics helps explain why they don't work. Surely it is Africa that reveals the worst consequences of global inequality, and the involvement of the West in the production and reproduction of inequality is nowhere more evident. There is a lot of local involvement too, many African governments are complicitous or directly responsible for the misery of their own people. Still, the role of the West is fairly large. And yet the African diaspora is not a friendly sea in which terrorists swim. And the same thing can be said for Latin America, especially Central America, where U.S. companies have played a significant part in exploiting and sustaining poverty: and yet the Latin diaspora is not a friendly sea. We need another explanation.

We need a combined cultural-religious-political explanation that has to focus, I think, on the creation of an Enemy, a whole people who are ideologically or theologically degraded so that they are available for murder: that's what the IRA did to Irish Protestants, the FLN to French Algerians, the PLO to Israeli Jews. This kind of Enemy is the special creation of nationalist and religious movements, which often aim not only at the defeat but at the removal or elimination of the "others." Wartime propaganda commonly has the same effect, demonizing the other side, even when both sides expect the war to end with a negotiated peace. Once the Enemy

has been created, any of "them" can be killed, men, women, or children, combatants and noncombatants, ordinary folk. The hostility is generalized and indiscriminate. In the case of Islamic terrorism, the Enemy is the infidel, whose world leader is the United States and whose local representative is Israel. Islamic terrorists don't call themselves freedom fighters; they have a different mission: to restore the dominance of Islam in the lands of Islam. Osama bin Laden, in the speech he delivered on video shortly before (it was broadcast after) the September 11 attacks, spoke about eighty years of subjection, which takes the story back to the establishment of European protectorates and trusteeships in the Middle East after World War I; the effort to create a Christian state in Lebanon; the effort to set up Western-style constitutional monarchies and parliamentary republics in the Arab world; the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state after the Second World War; and then the long series of military defeats from 1948 to 1991, not only in the Middle East but in East Asia, all of them experienced as terrible humiliations, at the hands of Jews, Hindus, and Americans, who are not supposed to be warrior peoples at all. But the military defeats are part of a larger story of the failure of state building and economic development in most of the Islamic world. The fundamentalist religious response to modernity, which is common across all the major world religions, comes up here against governments that are very far from admirable representatives of modernity: secular governments often, or governments that are ready for accommodation with the West and eager to absorb the latest technologies, but at the same time brutal, repressive, corrupt, authoritarian, unjust . . . and unsuccessful in providing either the symbols or the substance of a decent common life. And some of these governments, in order to maintain their own power, sponsor a kind of ideological and theological scapegoating, directed against external enemies: Israel, America, the West generally, who are blamed for the internal failures. Some of these governments are our allies, Islamic moderates or Arab secularists, but they have yet to take on the extremists in their midst; they have yet to commit themselves to an open struggle against the theological radicalism that inspires the terrorist networks. Jihad is a response not only to modernity but also to the radical failure of the Islamic world to modernize itself. Earlier terrorist campaigns are also explicable, in part, by the internal authoritarianism and weakness of the "liberation movement," in this case, its refusal or inability to mobilize its own people for other kinds of political action. Terrorism, after all, doesn't require mass mobilization; it is the work of a tiny elite of militants, who claim to represent "the people" but who act in the absence of the people (that's why classical Marxism was always hostile to terrorism—the reason, alas, was strategic, not moral). When someone like Gandhi was

able to organize a nonviolent mass movement for national liberation, there was no terrorism.

5 3. How is terrorism defended? In certain extremist Islamic groups today there is a straightforward defense, which is also a denial: there are no innocent Americans, hence attacks like those of September 11 are not terrorist in character. But the arguments that I want to consider are of a different sort: they don't justify the acts that we call terrorism. Instead, they are expressions of what I have already described as a culture of excuse and apology. There are basically two kinds of excuses. The first looks to the desperation of the "oppressed," as they are called (and as they may well be): terror, we are told, is the weapon of the weak, the last resort of subject nations. In fact, terror is commonly the first resort of militants who believe from the beginning that the Enemy should be killed and who are neither interested in nor capable of organizing their own people for any other kind of politics: the FLN and the PLO resorted to terror from the beginning; there was no long series of attempts to find alternatives. And as we have seen, there is at least one alternative—nonviolent mass mobilization—that has proven itself a far more effective "weapon of the weak." The second kind of excuse looks to the guilt of the victims of terrorism. Here is how it works for Americans: we fought the Gulf War, we station troops on the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia, we blockade and bomb Iraq, we support Israel—what do we expect? Of course, the September 11 attacks were wrong; they ought to be condemned; but—a very big "but"—after all, we deserved it; we had it coming. Generally, this argument comes from people who before September 11 wanted us to stop protecting the Kurds in northern Iraq, to stop supporting Israel, and to get out of Saudi Arabia; and now they see a chance to use Islamic terrorism as a kind of "enforcer" for their own political agenda. They attribute their agenda to the terrorists (what else could terrorists have in mind but what Western leftists have always advocated?), and then call for a policy of appeasement in order to avoid further attacks. That is a policy, it seems to me, that would begin with dishonor and end in disaster. But I won't talk about that now; I want simply to deny the moral legitimacy of the excuse. Even if American policies in the Middle East and in East Asia have been or are wrong in many ways, they don't excuse the terrorist attack; they don't even make it morally comprehensible. The murder of innocent people is not excusable.

4. How should we respond? I want to argue for a multilateral response, a "war" against terror that has to be fought on many fronts. But who is the enemy here? Is it the people who planned or sponsored or supported the September 11 attacks or is it any and all other groups that practice a terrorist politics? I suggest that we think in

terms of an analogy with humanitarian intervention. We (the United States, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization of African Unity, and others) intervene, or ought to intervene, against genocide and "ethnic cleansing" wherever they occur. There are, of course, many different political and religious doctrines that inspire genocide and ethnic cleansing, and each intervention is distinct; each one requires its own calculations of morality and prudence. But our commitment should be general. The case is the same with terror: there are many terrorist ideologies and many terrorist organizations. We should oppose them all, but the different engagements will have to be considered one by one. We should imagine the "war" as including many possible engagements. "War" is a metaphor here, but real war is a necessary part of the metaphorical "war." It may be the only part to which the frequently invoked doctrine of "just war" applies; we will have to look for other, though not unrelated, kinds of ethical guidance on the other fronts. The question about justice in the real war is a familiar one, and so is the answer—though the answer is easier in principle than in practice. In fighting against terrorists, we must not aim at innocent people (that's what the terrorists do); ideally we should get close enough to the enemy, or to his supporters, so that we are quite sure not only that we are aiming at them but also that we are hitting them. When we fight from far away, with planes and missiles, we have to get people in, on the ground, to select the targets, or we have to have very good intelligence; we must avoid overestimating the smartness of our smart bombs. Technological hubris isn't, I suppose, a crime, but it can lead to very bad outcomes, so it is better to leave a wide margin for error. And, finally, because even if we do all these things, we will still be imposing serious risks on the civilian population, we must reduce those risks as far as possible—and take risks ourselves in order to do that. This last is the hardest thing I have to say, because I'm not the one who will have to take those risks. The proportionality rule is commonly invoked here: civilian deaths and injuries, euphemistically called "collateral damage," should not be disproportionate to the value of the military victory that is being sought. But because I don't know how to measure the relevant values or how to specify the proportionality, and because I don't think that anyone else knows, I prefer to focus instead on the seriousness of the intention to avoid harming civilians, and that is best measured by the acceptance of risk. Assuming that we correctly identified the terrorist network responsible for the September 11 attacks and that the Taliban government was in fact its patron and protector, the war as a whole is certainly a just one (whether it is a prudent one was a much harder question last fall). The point of the war is prevention above all: to destroy the network and stop the preparation of future attacks. We shouldn't, in my view, think of the war as a "police action," aimed at bringing criminals to justice. We probably don't have the evidence to do that;

and it may well be the case that evidence collected by clandestine means or by armed force in distant countries, evidence that doesn't come from official archives, such as the German records that figured in the Nuremberg trials, but from e-mail intercepts and similar unofficial sources, would not be admissible in an American court—and probably not in international courts either, though I don't know what rules of evidence apply in The Hague. In any case, do we really want trials now, while the terrorists networks are still active? Think of the hostage-takings and bomb threats that would almost certainly accompany them. The use of military courts would avoid these difficulties, because the rules of evidence could be relaxed and the trials held in secret. But then there will be costs to pay in legitimacy: for justice, as the saying goes, must not only be done, it must be seen to be done; it must be seen being done. So ... there may be trials down the road, but we shouldn't focus on them now; the first object of the "war" against terrorism is not backward looking and retributive, but forward looking and preventive. If that's the point, then there is a sense in which Afghanistan is a sideshow, however necessary it is, however much attention the media give it, however focused on it our diplomats and soldiers have to be. The most important battle against terror is being waged right here, and in Britain and Germany and Spain, and other countries of the Arab and Islamic diaspora. If we can prevent further attacks, if we can begin to roll up the terrorist cells, that will be a major victory. And it is very, very important, because "successes" like September 11 have energizing effects; they produce a rush of recruits and probably a new willingness to fund the terrorist networks.

Police work is the first priority, and that raises questions, not about justice, but about civil liberties. Liberals and libertarians leap to the defense of liberty, and they are right to leap; but when they (we) do that, we have to accept a new burden of proof: we have to be able to make the case that the necessary police work can be done, and can be done effectively, within whatever constraints we think are required for the sake of American freedom. If we can't make that case, then we have to be ready to consider modifying the constraints. It isn't a betrayal of liberal or American values to do that; it is in fact the right thing to do, because the first obligation of the state is to protect the lives of its citizens (that's what states are for), and American lives are now visibly and certainly at risk. Again, prevention is crucial. Think of what will happen to our civil liberties if there are more successful terrorist attacks. Covert action is also necessary, and I confess that I don't know what moral rules apply to it. The combatant-noncombatant distinction is crucial to every kind of political and military activity; beyond that it is hard to know. Moral argument requires its cases, and here the cases are, deliberately and presumably rightly, concealed from view. Perhaps I can say a word about assassination, which has been much discussed in recent months. The killing of political leaders is ruled out in international law,

even (or especially) in wartime—and ruled out for good reason—because it is the political leaders of the enemy state with whom we will one day have to negotiate the peace. There are obvious exceptions to this rule—no one, no moral person, would have objected to an allied effort to assassinate Hitler; we were in fact not prepared to negotiate with him—but ordinary political leaders are immune. Diplomats are immune for the same reason: they are potential peacemakers. But military leaders are not immune, however high they stand on the chain of command. We have as much right to shell the enemy army's central headquarters as to shell its frontline positions. With terrorist organizations, this distinction between military and political leaders probably collapses; the two are hard to mark off, and we are not planning on negotiations. At any rate, it would seem odd to say that it is legitimate to attack a group of terrorists-in-training in a camp in Afghanistan, say, but not legitimate to go after the man who is planning the operation for which the others are training. That can't be right. Diplomatic work comes next: right now it is focused on building support for military action in Afghanistan and for some kind of future non-Taliban regime. But over the long run, the critically important task will be to isolate and punish states that support terrorism. The networks look transnational; they exploit the globalist modernity that they so bitterly oppose. But make no mistake: neither the transnational networks, nor most of the more provincial ones, could survive without the physical shelter, the ideological patronage, and the funding provided by such states as Iran, Syria, Libya, and others. We are not going to go to war with those states; there is no *causis belli*, nor should we look for one. But there are many forms of legitimate political and economic pressure short of war, and it seems to me that we have to work hard to bring that kind of pressure to bear. This means that we have to persuade other countries—our allies in many cases, who have closer ties than we do with terrorist states and whose leaders have not been heroes in these matters—to bring pressure of their own to bear and to support disinvestment, embargo, and other sanctions when they are appropriate.

War, police work, covert action, and diplomacy: all these are tasks of the state. But there is also ideological work, which can't and shouldn't be directed or organized by the state, which will only be effective if it is carried on freely—and that means in the usual democratically haphazard and disorderly way. I suppose that the state can get involved, with the Voice of America and other media. But what I have in mind is different. Secular and religious intellectuals, scholars, preachers, and publicists, not necessarily in any organized way, but with some sense of shared commitment, have to set about delegitimizing the culture of excuse and apology, probing the religious and nationalist sources of terror, calling upon the best in Islamic civilization against the worst, defending the separation of religion and politics in all civilizations. This

sort of thing is very important; argument is very important. It may sound self-serving for someone who makes his living making arguments to say this, but it is true nonetheless. For all their inner-directedness, their fanatical commitment and literal-minded faith, terrorists do rely on, and the terrorist organizations rely even more on, a friendly environment—and this friendly environment is a cultural/intellectual/political creation. We have to work to transform the environment, so that wherever terrorists go, they will encounter hostility and rejection.

5. What will be the signs of a successful response? How will we know when we have won this "war"? We have already been told by the secretary of defense that we are not going to get the conventional signs: formal surrender, signatures on a peace treaty. The measure of success will be relative: a decline in attacks and in the scope of attacks; the collapse of morale among the terrorists, the appearance of informers and defectors from their ranks; the rallying of opportunists, who have the best nose for who's winning, to our side; the silence of those who once made excuses for terror; a growing sense of safety among ordinary people. None of this is going to come quickly or easily. There is one more measure: our ability to shape our foreign policies, particularly toward the Islamic world, without worrying about the terrorist response. Right now, we have to worry: we cannot do things that would lead someone like bin Laden to claim a victory, to boast that he had forced our hand. We have to walk a fine line: to sustain a defensible policy with regard, say, to the blockade of Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Kashmir dispute, and not to do anything that can plausibly be construed as appeasement. There are American policies (not only in the Islamic world, but globally as well) that should be changed, but in politics one must not only do the right thing, one must do it for the right reasons, the attacks of September 11 are not a good reason for change. One day we will be free of this kind of constraint, and that will be another way of knowing that we have won.

Michael Walzer is co-editor of *Dissent* and author, among many works, of *Just and Unjust Wars*. This article is adapted from a talk given at the *Dissent* editorial board meeting in November 2001. It has been included in his more recent *Arguing About War*.

*Responses by Leo Casey, Michael Kazin, James Rule, and Ann Snitow, Walzer responding*

*Leo Casey*

<sup>10</sup> Viewed from inside "history in the making," a place where Americans now dwell, September 11 appears as a

day that marked a radical change in our world. When we finally went to sleep that night, it seemed that a familiar way of life was irrevocably gone, and that a new one we did not fully comprehend had taken its place. But like many an epoch-defining date, September 11 signifies not the sudden birth of a new world, but the appearance, in dramatic relief, of a gradually emerging new order. The mass murders of that day forced us to recognize the immediacy and gravity of political dangers that we knew existed, but had still largely discounted. Today, we know there is no more urgent matter before us.

Michael Walzer sketches a compelling political perspective on the issues we now face. Our first priority, he and I agree, must be to eliminate the capacity for the Taliban and al Qaeda to sponsor future September 11s. The old injunction of Mother Jones, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living," has particular resonance here. This "war" must be fought on a number of different fronts: diplomatic, economic and financial, domestic security, international public opinion, and military. A sensible and principled course must be steered between a "just say no" antiwar movement opposed to any meaningful use of force against the Taliban and al Qaeda and an "anything goes" jingoism prepared to countenance any military action. By contrast, our support of the use of armed force is made in the context of this broader campaign, as the military option cannot succeed by itself. In addition, it requires that all reasonable precautions be taken to protect innocent life. Finally, Walzer and I agree that intellectuals of the democratic left must challenge what he aptly calls "a culture of excuse and apology" for acts of terror that has arisen in parts of the academic and organizational left.

Where I dissent from Walzer's formulation is his identification of the enemy as "terrorism." Terrorism is a means to a political end, not a political end in itself. It is possible, although rare, for acts of terror to occur in the name of political causes we would otherwise consider just, such as the firebombing of Dresden and Hamburg and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the struggle against fascism. But the systematic use of and continual reliance upon terror is a distinct feature of totalitarian movements and states, as Hannah Arendt noted in her classic study of the subject. The mass murders of September 11 are the face of a twenty-first century totalitarianism, and it will better suit the protracted struggle to identify the enemy by that name, rather than by a description of the means it employs.

Political clarity on the nature of this enemy is vital. Although it serves a rhetorical purpose to describe the Taliban and al Qaeda as "fascism with an Islamic face," as one commentator did, the totalitarian threat is not secular—as were its fascist and communist antecedents—but theocratic. And it has not arisen exclusively in the Muslim world and among Islamic faith communities, but

is manifest in every part of the world and in every religious faith. It appears in such seemingly unconnected forms as the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo, which killed eleven people in a largely failed attempt to flood the Tokyo subways with sarin nerve gas, and the Lord's Resistance Army, a murderous cult of Christian origins in northern Uganda. Moreover, it is by no means a purely external threat for Americans. The mass murder that resulted from the bombing of a federal office building in Oklahoma City and the campaign of terror that has been conducted against doctors and clinics providing abortions are not the work of Islamic totalitarians.

Over the long term, we must grapple with some difficult questions. Why has a new form of totalitarianism arisen at this historical moment, just when it seemed that fascism and communism were behind us? Why has this totalitarianism taken theocratic forms, becoming ever more extreme in its apocalyptic "propaganda of the deed" and ever more intrusive in the controls it attempts to impose on the daily lives of people? What is the fertile ground on which these movements grow, and what can be done to plow it with salt? To what extent is the expanding global economy part of this ground, and not simply because of its radical economic inequalities, but also because of the loss of embedded meaning and the evisceration of community that accompany it? What must be done to nurture democratic values and practices in the cultures where this new totalitarianism has taken root? Together, we must find the answers to these questions.

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### *Michael Kazin*

- 15 It's never a good idea to refight the last big war. But perhaps one can learn a lesson from it. The atmosphere of American politics since September 11 bears an uncomfortable resemblance to that of the cold war, particularly during such anxious episodes as the Cuban missile crisis, the Tet Offensive, and the conflict over Euromissiles. Once again, grim-faced federal officials vow to defeat totalitarian evil-doers and fret about how to counter the enemy's appeal to poor and angry people in the third world. Once again, leftists point to a long history of U.S. policy blunders and brutalities to explain, if not excuse, the mass sympathy that allows networks of violent men to thrive.

The beliefs of Muslim terrorists who long to reestablish the caliphate obviously clash with those of Leninist revolutionaries who fought for an egalitarian, secular utopia—and even more with those of Brezhnev-era bureaucrats who acted mainly to secure and extend their creaky empire. In fact, if Afghan communists, with Soviet backing, hadn't taken power in Kabul in 1979, Osama bin

Laden might be known, if at all, only as a fierce opponent of the Saudi regime that rules his homeland.

But there's no escaping the irony that the United States is now engaged in a new kind of global struggle against would-be saviors of "the wretched of the earth," who helped speed the demise of the last historical forces to claim that title. And, again, it will be difficult to separate (and foolish to minimize) the battle of ideas from the military confrontations in which Americans mistakenly define victory as the ability to destroy targets and kill soldiers.

Michael Walzer understands this. Toward the end of his argument, he mentions the ideological work to be accomplished, the undermining of the friendly environment that makes cold-blooded murderers appear like "freedom fighters," or at least like symbolic redressers of wounds that never heal. But the main purpose of his piece is to rebut leftists in the United States and other rich nations who seek to shift blame from the stateless bombers of the twin towers and Pentagon to the statesmen who have directed the bombing of Kabul and Kandahar.

Much of the response to the attacks of September 11 on the part of the American and West European left has indeed been myopic and shameful. Nothing the United States has done or failed to do in the world can mitigate, in the slightest, the utter malevolence of that high-speed, well-organized slaughter of innocents. Yet, one does not defeat a political enemy merely by establishing the immorality of his acts. The short-sighted left only repeats, albeit in secular language, a list of grievances against Euro-America and Israel that Arabs and other Muslims have been updating for decades. That critique is, in many particulars, masochistic, bigoted, and one-sided. But, it remains, at root, a critique of imperialism and, as such, is not so different from the arguments hurled by Leninist regimes and militants during the cold war.

<sup>20</sup> How were those forces defeated? The USSR's debacle in Afghanistan notwithstanding, battle losses had remarkably little to do with it. Communists and their allies in the third world proved themselves to be resilient warriors capable of winning the sympathy of first world liberals. And the Soviet military, despite its problems, survived the collapse of the political system it was created to defend.

The cold war ended only when, to borrow a maxim from Lenin (for a purpose he would have abhorred), communists were no longer able to rule in the old way, and inhabitants of the "socialist world" refused to live in the old way. Inside the Soviet bloc, increased knowledge about capitalist societies that both created wealth and, at least in Western Europe and Canada, guarded social welfare gradually undermined the ideology of sacrifice for a future collective paradise, even among the rulers themselves. In Indochina, party officials who had led a victorious war against the American military were soon courting American business to rescue their economies.

For better and worse, the allure of Western modernity—its commodities, its cultural tolerance, its competitive individualism—reduced the communist alternative to ashes.

Radical Islam may be a more durable opponent. Messianic religious faith has deeper historical roots than does the secular variety and is less amenable to counter-arguments based on material concerns. But an ideology that sanctifies suicide and whose vision of the future is a mythical past is capable only of destroying a society, not of building a stable or prosperous one. The masses of young people from Algeria to Pakistan who lack secure jobs and an adequate education need a vision to live for instead of a cause to die for.

At the same time, martyrdom, whether actual or metaphorical, may remain attractive as long as the United States and its allies make no serious attempt to address the grievances that bin Laden and his supporters have been quite skillful at articulating. Our government and the corporations whose investments it protects *have* propped up corrupt monarchies and single-party autocracies. Most Americans, together with our government, *do* excuse the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that prevents the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, without which no peace in the region is conceivable. There are geopolitical reasons for these policies, of course, but they make it hard to counter the charge that Americans who profess to believe in democracy and self-determination are really just imperial hypocrites.

Michael Walzer may consider my brief critique during just war a form of appeasement. Instead, I see it as a practical response as well as a moral one to the ideological threat posed by an enemy whose popularity in the Muslim world both alarms and confuses us. Despite the best efforts of canny liberals and democratic socialists, it took years before Western regimes learned how to counter the appeal of the totalitarian left. If we hope to avoid another long and brutal war against totalitarian Islam, we had better focus on changing minds as well as dropping bombs and dispatching troops.

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### *James Rule*

<sup>25</sup> The terrorist attack on September 11 evidently had two purposes. First, to inflict on ordinary Americans pain of the sort widely meted out to other civilian populations around the world by those who oppose their governments. Second, to polarize the situation between the elite United States interests and militant Islamicists, eliminating as much as possible any middle ground. Lamentably, the first of these aims succeeded fully and the second, substantially.

The perpetrators of the attack deserve a commensurate response-coercive, deadly, and precisely targeted to those responsible. This is not to say that any and all military action to follow from the United States is warranted. George W. Bush's announcement that the country was at war-without specifying the exact enemy, the form of the combat, or the nature of the victory being sought-was scary. We on the left should know better than to give blanket endorsement to such vague projects. The initial broad support for American retaliation, both here and abroad, will evaporate-and with good reason-if the riposte ends up striking all sorts of innocent figures, while missing the perpetrators.

But we should not be afraid to back a deadly response to those who murder Americans. Michael Walzer is right about one thing: no conceivable changes in American foreign policy could ever satisfy all would-be authors of terrorist actions. There are too many of them, and they come from too many ideological directions. We must never imagine that somehow cleaning up America's domestic or international stance will relieve us of any need to respond to terrorist acts.

Nor should this need cause us to suspend our critical faculties-and our critical stance-regarding America's far-reaching role in the world. That is where Walzer's analysis fails us. When he speaks of terrorism as the world's new scourge, he seems to be thinking only of terrorist activities emanating from one source. In fact, America itself has been and remains a prolific source of terrorist activities-that is, coercive acts against civilian populations as a political tool-all around the world. Perpetrators include Americans themselves, their surrogates, and surrogates of their surrogates. Have we forgotten what American forces did in Vietnam-the killings and other violent intimidations aimed at "drying up the support" among the peasantry for an enemy that we could not defeat in the field? One of the many living participants in such actions against unarmed civilians, Bob Kerrey, now heads a major institution of higher learning in New York. When his actions surfaced in national debate last year, the consensus seemed to be that war is hell, and no one could properly attribute responsibility in such matters who had not experienced the situation first hand. I disagree.

But the Salient case, in today's international context, is America's ally and protégé, Israel-a country whose very creation required violence and intimidation to cleanse its territories of people of the wrong ethnicity. Since then, both the winners and losers in this territorial struggle have imposed suffering on noncombatant civilians, in hopes of altering the calculations of the other side's leaders. The litany of this unholy tit for tat-from extermination of civilians on airliners and in refugee camps to attacks on the homes and lives of persons believed associated with activists from the other side-is too heart-breaking to detail here. The theme never changes: make life intolerable for

the civilians on whom your armed enemies depend, and you will succeed in undermining those at the top. This ghastly logic makes it inevitable that the costs of the activists' ambitions are paid by ordinary people whose only interest may be to keep their heads down.

- <sup>30</sup> Amos Elon, in a despairing commentary, describes the mode of Israel's attacks: "when missiles from the latest-model jet planes, tanks and helicopter gun ships hit Palestinians, indiscriminately, in frequent, grossly excessive punitive raids"; he then goes on to detail similarly horrific actions against civilians from the other side. No need to state the source of the Israeli firepower involved. At last count, the "second Intifada" has reaped a harvest of at least 602 Palestinian and 169 Israeli deaths. Can any reasonable person maintain that even a majority of either group of victims represented a deadly threat?

Israeli reliance on terrorism ought to disturb us particularly, but not because it's worse than other terrorism. It's not. It should disturb us because we American citizens are paying for it, via our tax dollars. As in Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia-and I fear, many other places-America has bankrolled and encouraged forces relying on violence and intimidation against civilians. The United States could have pulled the plug on terrorism in these places. It still can, where it continues. But it doesn't.

So let us by all means seek to eradicate terror wherever we find it-especially when we or those depending on us are the perpetrators. The United States should convincingly and dramatically renounce terror as an instrument of national policy everywhere and anywhere. If America were seen decisively to cut off support to forces relying on terrorism throughout the world, one result might just be to make such actions less attractive to other players. But the hope of such results should not be the reason for taking such a step. The reason should be that terror is an intolerable instrument for political action-wherever it occurs.

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### *Ann Snitow*

Here are five tangential responses to Michael Walzer.

(1) Remember, in 1989, the left's hope that the end of the cold war might bring a "peace dividend," an economy less dependent on war? Those hopes died in Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda. And the left-like everyone else-began bickering about *which* wars we should fight. In this atmosphere, conservative politicians faced little opposition in constituting the United States as a benevolent world policeman. In the panic of the moment, it's easy to lose sight of antimilitarism as one of the left's long-term values. But, after September 11, a nascent peace movement is growing among a wide constituency

of alarmed U.S. citizens. Some of them are repeating ritualistic gestures of the past and aren't able to orient themselves to the changes since 1989, but others are actively groping for new ideas. I think we should join in their search for a new internationalism, more reasoned and productive than constant threats of war. We should stand with those people afraid of stray nuclear devices, afraid of our continued reliance on rogue states as our front-line fighters, guilty about the deaths that are usually so far away, and depressed by how each war seems to create the next one. We can, and should, be critical of how these new movements evolve. However, let's not give any comfort to those who would dismiss an antiwar position as necessarily utopian, naive, anti-American, traitorous, too late, or beside the point. Let's not assume that calls for other than military solutions are capitulation to terrorism. Terrorists don't want peace. To them, our pumped-up public panic, our new, exaggerated feelings of powerlessness, and the consecration of what at times seems like the entire U.S. budget to security are all proofs of their success. Isn't "Peace with Justice" (a call that just now sounds abstract and hopeless) still an idea worth elaborating on and imagining as a thinkable goal?

<sup>35</sup> (2) Let's insist on a just and immediate Israeli/Palestinian peace. It disturbs me that insisting on the continued urgency of this could be seen as appeasement. If we can't urge the right thing now because it will *look* as if we're doing it for the wrong reason, we are merely accepting another excuse for delay. The urgency of a Middle East compromise is one of the things we should consider as *not* having changed since September 11. (Another variation on this theme: Imagine if we were to dismiss President Bush's newfound interest in the rights of Afghani women as merely cynical and manipulative, a right policy adopted for a wrong reason in reaction to terrorism, and therefore not worth endorsing and pushing further.)

(3) In all conflicts, there's a hidden temptation to marry the enemy, to meet him, in this case literally, on his own ground. They say good sons go happily to their deaths. We agree, arguing that good sons (and now daughters) must accept the risk of death if our nation is to act morally. The enemy uses reductive categories, so we do, too, as if we fear that zero tolerance for terrorism can't be maintained if we seek to understand the other's pain or reasons. In a strange slide, trying to understand the complexity of our situation and to imagine the social reality of the enemy leads to "the culture of excuse." In this unshaded mental universe, each side believes in its own inherent goodness. Each is the light, the opposite of the other's darkness. I suggest a divorce from the enemy: the best resistance to repressive fundamentalism and to the false universals of jihad is an active resistance to a monoculture of consent to war.

(4) Blaming U.S. foreign policy for September 11 is not only morally obnoxious but also a dangerous simplification of the new difficulties facing a realigning,

post-1989 world. Zero tolerance, while necessary, must include zero tolerance for state terrorism and for acts of war with terrorist effects, the displacement and starvation of mass populations. Zero tolerance for terrorism is right, and the logical principle stretches out to include a general critique of most of the wars fought since World War II.

(5) I used to think that it would be good to start forgetting World War II. All those fiftieth anniversaries signaled that the great, just war was receding into the past, the war whose existence has complicated all subsequent efforts to build movements for disarmament. In any discussion of peace, someone evokes the need to be ready for another Hitler. Indeed, movements toward demilitarization must include an account of security, of how a state will perform what Walzer says is its most basic function, protection. But protection of quality of life can never be merely military protection; the left has always wanted more, including safeguards against untrammelled state power. I'd hoped that, as the memory of heroic militarism dimmed, "protection" might come to mean other things, for example taking action against the kinds of disparities in wealth that are the most likely reasons for future violence. Now, though, I want World War II back again as a heuristic device. One reason the cold war was possible was that cold warriors remembered Stalingrad and Normandy, the blitz and Dresden. They had the good sense to be afraid of the bombs they had just seen go off in Japan. The rigid structures of the cold war held because World War II was a mass trauma. Americans, too, suffered. No one was willing to indulge in such widespread devastation again. As we go to press, our dangerous allies, the Northern Alliance, have just entered Kabul in triumph. If our attack on Afghanistan turns out to be another of our little wars (Grenada, Belgrade) followed by the public relations claim of success without much loss, then to remember the devastations of more than fifty years ago will have been pointless. The United States will get away with the war in the court of U.S. public opinion. Once more our might and sense of superiority will seem justified. Once again we will have watched terrible suffering through the wrong end of a telescope. But if this war in Afghanistan is the beginning of our next long-term engagement with a complex and wide-ranging "evil empire," then we have to ask, does the U.S. have the cultural and economic vitality to survive this time around as a democracy? Can our institutions be sustained through those years of proxy wars among client states, the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction, the ever more efficient domestic surveillance? We don't fear war enough; we should fear war more. Fear is neither cowardice nor capitulation. It arises from a mature assessment of new dangers we hardly yet understand: terrorism, with its reasons, its many different faces, its disturbing instabilities. In this situation, military restraint—along with an urgent quest for other means of engagement—is both strategically sound and morally right.

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*Michael Walzer*

I have no serious disagreements with Leo Casey or Michael Kazin. Casey's description of religious totalitarianism as the real enemy is persuasive. I will continue to argue for the condemnation of terrorism, whoever uses it, and for a general "war" against it. But we do have to focus first on the primary users, whom he has, I think, correctly identified. Kazin's argument for policy changes by the United States does not strike me as an argument for appeasement; I will say something about the specific case of Israel and Palestine in a moment.

<sup>40</sup> Ann Snitow stops too soon; I disagree with her comments more because of what she doesn't say than because of what she does. She wants military restraint and an "urgent quest for other means of engagement." But she offers no description of, not even a suggestion about those other means, hardly a clue, in fact, as to what they might be. I fear she is on one of those mythical quests. I agree that it's not, or not necessarily, "capitulation" to call for "other than military solutions," but there is no call here for anything that resembles a solution. Our country faces real dangers, frightening dangers, and if we on the left claim to be politically serious, we have to look for ways of dealing with them. Making it impossible to train terrorists and to plan future attacks in Afghanistan is a plausible beginning. It's not the most important thing we have to do, and maybe we are not doing it as well as we might. But what are the alternatives? Understanding the pain of the others, resisting a coercive monoculture, taking action against disparities of wealth: that is a political program of a sort, I suppose (the last two points have been central to *Dissent's* politics from the beginning), but it doesn't have anything to do with terrorism; it doesn't come close to the strategy of prevention that we urgently need. Snitow writes as someone who can't imagine taking responsibility for the lives of fellow citizens, but (however far we are from actual responsibility) that is exactly what we must imagine now.

James Rule seems to believe that the world's primary problem is Israeli wickedness. Not only don't I believe that; it doesn't seem to me even remotely plausible (note that Rule has to redefine terrorism as coercion rather than murder even to begin his argument). But Snitow gets to peace-in-the-Middle-East in her second "tangential thought" and Kazin gets there too, at the end of his comment. So I must attempt a general response. The United States had good reasons for pressing Israelis and Palestinians toward a compromise settlement before September 11. Bill Clinton's proposals and the agreement that seemed so close at the end of 2000 suggest clearly enough what such a settlement would look like. Resuming the process, increasing the pressure: that would constitute

the "defensible" policy that I pointed to at the end of my talk. But it seems to me delusory to think that this policy would make any difference to Islamic radicals. Their goal is the end of Jewish sovereignty in what they take to be Muslim and Arab territory. I suspect that Yasir Arafat and some significant part of the PLO elite want the same thing. Still, we should try to find out. A just settlement would require roughly equal pressure on both sides; it would not constitute appeasement of bin Laden and al Qaeda. Indeed, since success would require Arab recognition of Jewish sovereignty, it would only further enrage them. So, again, this isn't a strategy for coping with the dangers we face; the demand to "do something" about the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is more likely, it seems to me, to function as an excuse for not acknowledging what those dangers really are.