Terrorism, Evil and Democracy

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Since the nineteenth century, terrorists have used the bomb as a ballot; thus, for the Russian populists in the 1880s, attacks were supposed to lead to democracy. Later, for the *fin de siècle* anarchists of *Action directe* , violence was supposed to reveal the illusion of bourgeois democracy to the oppressed: it was propaganda by act. In other cases, violence was supposed to answer the violence of the colonial state that denied any representation to the legitimate people - that's what a number of liberation movements asserted. However, up until recently, kamikazes ready to die rather than allow their fellow citizens to vote were few, and examples of elections forbidden by clandestine terrorist groups, even more exceptional. The political violence of these minorities competed with the political process, it didn't replace it.

On every continent, for every sort of reason, for decades now, activists have planted bombs, killed heads of state and civilians, plunged provinces into chaos, occupied the front pages of newspapers. Yet for all that, terrorism did not "make" history: it accelerated or slowed it down. No one went to "war" against it. No regime has been overthrown on the strength of dynamite or the dagger alone, no territory has been abandoned by its conquerors or colonizers solely out of fear of bombs. Unless it became a mass movement, a liberation army, a guerrilla movement occupying territories, or an acknowledged political force - i.e., unless it changed its nature - a terrorist group could only do one thing, trigger reactions: disorder, confrontation, repression, coalition.

Those reactions were beyond its control and often ran counter to its hopes. There could be a terrorist phase in a victorious political fight, but it was neither the final nor the principal phase. And nothing proved that it was indispensable for the achievement of its objectives.

When the Jordanian al-Zarkawi recently condemned to death any Iraqi elector who would vote - both because he would be collaborating with the invader and because wanting to establish the law of men would contradict that of God - was such a threat credible? Could a foreign group, responsible for some attacks, including some spectacular ones, of the hundreds that have taken place in Iraq, deflect the hyper-power, its 150,000 soldiers - more than 1% of the voters - not counting the

coalition and Iraqi security forces? It's too easy after the fact to answer no.

Did the Iraqis who voted - from whom voting demanded courage, at least in certain regions - do it, as President Bush suggested just after the closing of the polls, because they "firmly rejected the anti-democratic ideology" and "to free themselves from fear and intimidation?" There's more than one nuance between voting against Zarkawi and voting in spite of Zarkawi. And voting for Sistani may have a slightly different meaning for this "rejection."

Must we deduce that "democracy" has conquered "terror," pay more attention to the phenomenon of voting than to its content, conflate the boycott praised by certain Sunnis with the threats of salafist jihad, and interpret the whole affair as a confrontation between Bush and Zarkawi?

The president of the United States sees a stimulation of that trust in the "power of the ideal" that inspired his second inaugural discourse. He envisaged the Iraqi election as an example destined to be diffused throughout the Middle East and an illustration of the slogan "our road begins in Baghdad." He had already clarified his thinking during a January 26th press conference: simply holding elections already constituted a victory. That would contribute to a "long-term objective:" "to put an end to tyranny in the world." To disseminate freedom here and now would be the only lasting way to fight hatred and resentment, "recruiting grounds for those who have a vision of the world exactly opposite to our own," and thus to win the "global war against terror."

This is the "Logic of the Three T's" discovered after September 11: terrorism, tyrannies (terror regimes) and terror technology (weapons of mass destruction) as the faces of an essential moral Evil, hatred of freedom, and a perverse value system. "Nine-Eleven" revealed it in its totality. The attacks were at once an incommensurable crime (from the obviously symbolic character of September 11, which makes certain Neo-conservatives contend that it is comparable only to the Holocaust) and an inaugural act: the true twenty-first century and the associated awakening of the true America began with it. Hence also his mission: by fighting al-Qaeda yesterday in Afghanistan, by overthrowing the tyranny in Iraq today, even by striking the "proliferating" Iran tomorrow, but also in fighting "for the hearts and minds of men," he would realize a sole and same intention.

George W. Bush is certainly not the first Head of State to assert that his cause is that of God or of freedom and that his adversary incarnates Evil. Neither is he the first to occupy a country to liberate its inhabitants (didn't the Soviets intervene in Afghanistan to abolish "feudalism?"). On

the other hand, he is the first to conduct his main fight against a danger that does not reside in the power of the adversary empire, but in the moral perversity of an invisible group.

The "Evil Empire" Reagan targeted had a capital, an address to send missiles to, and a government to be overthrown by the people. Now, for the present president of the United States, it's no longer a question of forcing the enemy to retreat by a parallel demonstration to public opinion that the adversary's cause is unjust and condemned by History. Now, Bush puts war in the service of persuasion and demonstration. His objective is to abolish down to its roots that hostility in the minds of those who "hate freedom," all the while reassuring those who aspire to it. Recourse to arms no longer functions to break an adversary's will, but to serve as an example, to combat passions, and to dissuade any weak desire to take them out on the United States, i.e. on democracy.

A strategy of model and threat on the American side, a strategy of punishment and provocation on the other. In comparison, the advantage of classical wars was that even their players ended up understanding whether they were winning or losing.

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