

Jihad Al-Kuffar

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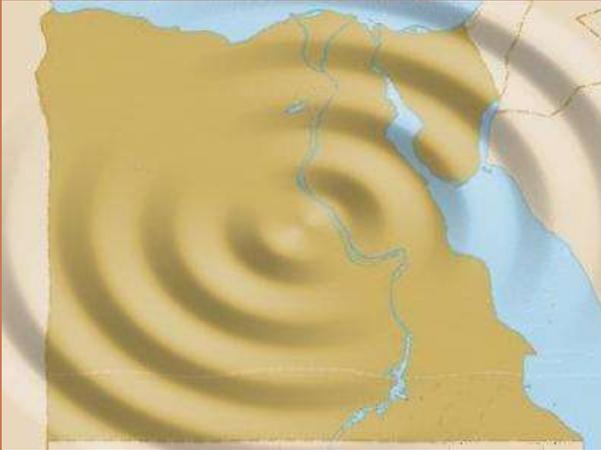
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EGYPT: A DÉJÀ VU EXPERIENCE?



January 29, 2011

There is no need to talk about the recent events in Egypt and the sad fate of so many people who have been living without ever enjoying democracy since their country became a republic in 1952. Even the most distracted reader is well aware of the full story. If you spoke to a businessman in Cairo or a worker in the seaport town of Suez or a tour guide in Luxor, you would probably hear the same words: "We've had enough of the *state of emergency*."

Surely, there would be plenty of reason to complain. As far as I remember the *state of emergency* began in 1981, after the killing of former President Muhammad

Anwar El Sadat. And the *state of emergency* has often been a convenient excuse to deny basic liberties and resort to Gestapo-like tactics (in Egypt and elsewhere).

So, it is not surprising that other countries, such as Algeria, are shattered by violent protests. In fact, Algeria has been in a *state of emergency* since 1992 because of terrorism or, as some prefer to call it, because of "terrorism" (written with quotation marks).

As expected, the free world does not want to remain silent. Heads of state, opinion-makers, common citizens have raised their voices. Here, I just quote the most authoritative statement, which was made by President Barack Obama shortly after the Egyptian leader, Hosni Mubarak, addressed his nation: "I just spoke to him after his speech and told him he has a responsibility to give meaning to those words, to take concrete steps and actions that deliver on that promise. Violence will not address the grievances of the Egyptian people. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away."

[cf. article dated January 29, 2011, posted on the web page

<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/01/28/egypt.protests.u.s..response/index.html?hpt=T2>, still available in October 2011]

Of course, no one will deny that "concrete steps" are necessary and that "violence will not address the grievances of the Egyptian people." However, it is also quite evident that the situation of Egypt (and Algeria, and other countries) is a bit different from what usually happens in Europe or America.

Just to give an example, in 1981 Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman issued a *fatwa* and called for "the robbery and killing of Copts in furtherance of the jihad."

[cf., e.g., article dated January 1, 2011, posted on the web page

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/01/suspected_suicide_bo.php, still available in October 2011]

On that occasion, strong countermeasures were not taken (or, most likely, could hardly be taken in a country filled with radical groups). Sure enough, that *fatwa* did not fall on deaf ears: by now it is crystal clear that being a Copt is not a good way to have an easy life in Egypt.

Again in 1981, President Muhammad Anwar El Sadat was assassinated and a group of rebels took control of the city of Asyut (Upper Egypt) for a few days: in the ensuing fighting, dozens of policemen and soldiers were killed. In 1985, 1990 and 2006 Israeli tourists were killed. In 1993 over one thousand people were murdered in terrorist attacks. In 1997 nine tourists were massacred in Cairo and over sixty in Luxor. In 2004 there was an attack in the Sinai Peninsula (over thirty casualties), in 2005 in Sharm el-Sheikh (about ninety casualties), in 2006 in Dahab (over twenty casualties) and in 2011 in Alexandria (over twenty casualties).

If we move to Algeria, the overall picture is even worse. During the civil war (1992-2002) a large number of civilians were killed by rebels—and terrorist attacks have been hitting the country during the last decade.

It should also be noted that we are not talking of countries where an overwhelming majority of their people firmly stand against terrorism and cooperate with security forces. Unfortunately, we are talking of regions that provide an excellent breeding ground for radical groups. Therefore, "concrete steps"

should always be taken with great caution and should only be encouraged after thoroughly evaluating the worst possible consequences of any *concrete action*. For instance, it would be very dangerous to forget that several terrorist organizations exist in Egypt and Algeria, where they recruit militants and, more importantly, often enjoy the open support of the local population. No doubt, the *Muslim Brotherhood* should be fairly well known—and it comes together with *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* and the *Egyptian Islamic Jihad* and the *Armed Islamic Group* and the *Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat* and the *Islamic Salvation Front*. Last but not least, people like Muhammad el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta or Ayman Muhammad Rabaie al-Zawahiri were born in Egypt!

In *Jihad Al-Kuffar* several pages are concerned with the risk of giving terrorist organizations a free rein in the name of democracy—which happens quite frequently, when noble ideals are so dominant that the vision of reality is completely skewed. Here, I just mention a paragraph in Chapter 7. The main character, a radical militant, is talking about some events in the aftermath of the fall of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the late Shah of Iran:

In those golden days, at the end of the seventies, the Iranian pasdaran could even take American hostages without running into trouble. It was the first enterprise of a ruling class completely devoted to the ayatollahs' jihad, and only a bunch of months had passed since the downfall of the shah, deposed by an Islamic revolution under the protective umbrella of a United States administration that was eager to change the balance of power in the Middle East—maybe eager to punish Israel and its apartheid laws, which did not allow Arab citizens to serve in the army. In a new Iran, buoyed by a wave of anti-Semitic hatred, bold clerics were allowed to lay the foundations of an unprecedented campaign against the Jews; it was a clear symptom of a nationwide effort to wipe the Zionist state off the map, to support Hezbollah, to develop a nuclear program. It was unbelievable, but true. By denying its support to Reza Pahlavi in 1979, America was of great service to the holy war and made a tangible contribution to a possible holocaust. And while we are about it, we cannot forget the United States administration that looked with favor upon the Taliban between 1994 and 1996.

EGYPT & IRAN: THE MAIN DIFFERENCE (WHICH NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT)

February 16, 2011

Most people know that Iran, with an area of over 600,000 square miles, is one of the largest countries in the world (while Egypt's area is less than 400,000). It is also well known that Iran has plenty of oil (while Egypt lacks natural resources)



or that Farsi is the official language in Iran (while Arabic is the official language in Egypt) or that the vast majority of Muslims in Iran are Shiite (while the vast majority of Muslims in Egypt are Sunni). This is all true, but it is absolutely irrelevant to the main issues on the table (as usual, I dare to assume that security policies should be among the “main issues” and priorities of civil society).

For instance, the protests in Cairo and Tehran raise an important point: the impressive difference between the source of information about Egyptian affairs and the source of information about Iranian affairs. Egypt is (and was, even before Hosni Mubarak stepped down) full of foreign reporters and TV crews. Most of the Western media had their own staff scattered across the country and ready to criticize (despise) a *cruel* regime that had been keeping a tight rein on harmless civilians for decades. Incidentally, that *evil* regime had also kept a tight rein on terrorists, but no one will ever thank Mubarak for his contribution to security.

All of us have seen the live coverage from Tahrir Square or the breathtaking footage of the men who charged the protesters riding horses and dromedaries. You will probably remember that some Western journalists were also beaten by angry crowds or, maybe, by the police. Those reporters were there—right on the spot.

Instead, in Iran, everything is filtered. If you browse the IRNA website (English language), you won't find a single article about the protests. No one in Iran is allowed to take silly initiatives and have a chat with the opposition (which, officially, does not exist). No one is allowed to express concern about a leadership that has thrown Iran into the darkest swamps of the Middle Age.

It may well be that some comments on the protests are hidden somewhere in the IRNA website, but (as I went through the headlines) I could only find a sequence of pictures of the funeral of a “martyred student”

[cf. <http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NID=30249727>, available on February 16, 2011].

By the way, I was able to relate the funeral to the protests when I came across independent (non-Iranian) reports. Indeed, according to foreign news agencies, that student, apparently a Sunni Kurd, had been killed in the clashes with the police in Tehran. Interestingly enough, it is still unclear whether he was a member of the Islamist Basij militia (as stated by the regime's media) or a member of the Green Movement (as claimed by the opponents of the government)

[cf., e.g., article dated February 16, 2011, posted on the web page

<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/02/16/137817.html>, still available in October 2011].

However, in my opinion, the most emblematic feature of Iran is not the difference between its way of life and the Egyptian reality. The key issue is the enormous difference between Iran and liberal democracies—the key issue is the overwhelming superiority of Iran over liberal democracies. In fact, while the Western world and its allies (including totalitarian regimes, such as Mubarak's administration) cannot defend themselves and cannot do anything against rogue states (in the name of the highest moral values), the Iranian leadership is free to do everything in its power to crush its enemies. To crush the dissidents. While we continue to express sympathy for any form of protest (as happened in Egypt on January 29, when Mubarak fired his Cabinet and acknowledged the “legitimate demand” for political and economic reforms), the Iranian Parliament proudly calls for the execution of Mousavi and Karroubi. In practice, we let the most dangerous oppressors feel free to oppress, maybe under the pretext of fighting for peace and civilization. Implacably, the most dangerous oppressors continue to challenge the world, showing increasing signs of self-confidence. Inevitably, the most dangerous oppressors are getting more aggressive by the day. Their political pundits do not hesitate to claim that the Islamic Revolution in Iran will “bring more hope to oppressed nations and steadfastly defend the legitimate rights of nations vis-à-vis global arrogance”

[cf. <http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NID=30250616&SRCH=1>, available on February 16, 2011].

And in order to make it clear what the Iranian establishment means when it talks about “legitimate rights of nations”, its lawmakers do not hesitate to shout the slogan “Mousavi, Karroubi must be executed” [cf., e.g., <http://edition.cnn.com/video/?/video/world/2011/02/15/vo.iran.parliament.presstv>, still available in October 2011].

Of course, it is impossible to prove that the Western policy will not bear fruit. Actually, there are excellent reasons to believe that something will change, sooner or later. After all, people like Stalin or Pol-Pot have disappeared without the need of waging a war on the Soviet Union or Cambodia. Why shouldn't it happen to certain Iranian leaders? It might be a good idea to follow the teaching of a famous Chinese saying: “If you have an enemy, sit by the river and wait. Sooner or later your enemy's body will come floating by.”

There is no denying that patience is a great virtue. Nonetheless, I keep wondering if the billions of patient people who fill the world would be so patient if they lived in certain countries. Similarly, I wonder if the millions of people who did not want to challenge Hitler in the thirties would have been so patient if they had been the victims of the Nuremberg Race Laws.

All over the world, everyone talks of peace. Everyone loves peace. Sometimes, however, there is a change of course. Suddenly, the drums of war start to play. My remarks might be a bit cynical, but I think that we can easily understand why some nations suddenly decide to face a war—why some wars even appear to be politically correct. For instance, the Second World War became inevitable when the mass of people who felt DIRECTLY threatened by aggressive countries reached a critical threshold. More importantly, the Second World War is still celebrated as a successful, just war (even though it was the most destructive conflict in the history of mankind), because an astounding number of people could preserve or gain THEIR OWN freedom.

Jihad Al-Kuffar also deals with the subtle difference between ethical wars and wrong wars. Here, however, it would take too long to go into detail and focus on specific cases that are discussed in the book. Hopefully, a few words from Chapter 11 are enough to share some thoughts on this controversial issue:

By now, it should be clear that no one is inclined to care for peace by itself. Peace is welcome when personal interests are not involved.

CONTINUOUS SHOWS OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE LIBYAN PEOPLE: A LOT OF WORDS, BUT WHAT PRACTICAL ACTION?



February 25, 2011

Shocked by the brutal repression of the anti-government protests and by the massacre of innocent civilians in Tripoli, the entire world is giving full support to the legitimate aspiration of the Libyan people. In most Western countries, a large number of angry citizens feel like being in the front line of the fight against any form of injustice. Some of them give vent to their rage against a cruel regime. Others show contempt for their leaders who still hesitate to take an open stand against a mad dog. Everyone is willing to do

something.

Personally, I tend to remain skeptical when I see certain expressions of solidarity and sympathy. In my opinion, it would be much better to acknowledge that nothing serious can be done, owing to practical reasons (and thanks to politically correct traditions that make most Western citizens oppose any military intervention of their countries). In other words, the emotional reaction of so many people seems to be based upon unrealistic utopias rather than positive sentiments. In the worst circumstances, that reaction seems to be due to a good dose of hypocrisy rather than solidarity.

I will try to explain my view by recalling an event that occurred in the past, in a rather different context: the deployment of UN troops in Somalia almost twenty years ago. More precisely, I am going to talk about the *United Nations Operation in Somalia II* (UNOSOM II) in the years 1993-1995. It was a failure—and it could not be anything but a failure. For an obvious reason. When someone goes into a war zone, that someone should realize that a war can only be fought by using weapons and by accepting the risk of killing civilians. This is a must, especially when the enemy makes any effort to hide among the civil population and/or continues to threaten the civil population, maybe with the help of helicopters and aircraft that fire on unarmed demonstrators, as recently happened in Libya. It is true that the Americans made use of weapons in Somalia, on and off, but their military attacks were usually launched in an inefficient way for fear of harming civilians (and at the risk of endangering their own troops). Yet, even this tactic was insufficient to avoid criticism: the US was immediately and severely rebuked by other countries—especially European countries, which were strongly against “brutal methods” and seemed to be particularly fond of diplomatic arts. And when the Yankees pulled back, the Europeans who were still in Somalia could eventually give the best of themselves. Of course, it was another failure. As a matter of fact, the day came when the last Europeans, too, left Somalia—mission unaccomplished.

Since I just mentioned an interesting European contribution in a difficult time, there is another thing that comes to my mind: the most widespread attitude toward Muammar al-Gaddafi. Europe has always had a sympathetic understanding for the “Leader and Guide” of the Libyan Revolution, despite his open support to terrorist activities. For instance, in 1986, after the bombing of a discotheque in Berlin (a place that was frequented by US soldiers), the response of Europe was almost unanimous: with the notable exception of the United Kingdom (from where American warplanes took off for an attack on Tripoli), the US aircraft were not allowed to fly through the European air space. It was April 15, 1986, and the most progressive side of Europe raised its voice to condemn the raid, in a whirlwind of anxiety over the sad fate of Muammar al-Gaddafi.

Next, eighteen years later, on April 27, 2004, in Brussels, a progressive president of the EU Commission was ready to greet Muammar al-Gaddafi with big smiles and clear signs of affection, as shown in the picture above

[cf. web page <http://blog.panorama.it/italia/2011/02/22/venga-avanti-colonnello/7-2/>, still available in October 2011].

No doubt, the response of most governments is pretty much the same—no matter the political system (progressive, liberal, conservative, democratic, totalitarian, socialist, theocratic, revolutionary, and so on). After all, Libya has plenty of oil (*i.e.*, plenty of money) and represents an attractive market with a huge potential. So, why should any Western leader take a stand against Muammar al-Gaddafi before the final battle? The reasoning is simple: if there is a chance that he remains in power, it is safer to keep a low profile, without running risks. Instead, too much passion for democracy might turn into a

boomerang: if the leaders of a country openly support anti-Gaddafi protesters and the rebellion fails, that country is condemned to be locked out of a rich market, when “things go back to normal”. Business is business.

Fortunately, there are also men and women who do not care about business when basic principles are at stake. As I said before, the West is full of people who continue to demand unconditional solidarity with the Libyan protesters. The goal is obviously excellent, but what about the final result? What about the practical way to help the protesters? Do these Western people simply hope for a happy ending to this story? Do they assume that a humble Muammar al-Gaddafi will soon lay down his arms and go to exile? Have they ever thought that the rebellion might turn into a bloodshed (much worse than what we have seen so far)? A good example is given by the massacre of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in 1991, when they tried to oppose Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf War, but did not receive any support from the outside world.

Having said that, I believe that everyone should be ready to defend those “basic principles”. However, I do not share the views of the idealists who behave as if they were living in a completely different world. I do not share the views of the idealists who want to fight for a better tomorrow without fighting. I do not share the views of the idealists who refuse to see that it is impossible to defeat a tyrant at zero cost (without paying in terms of money, hard decisions and human lives).

Of course, it is not easy to apply certain policies even when a country is prepared to pay in terms of money, hard decisions and human lives. In fact, no one can pretend to ignore the international scenario. For instance, it would have been almost impossible to stop Muammar al-Gaddafi in 1969, during the Cold War. Today the world has changed. In principle, China, Russia and the US might agree that they have a great opportunity to give a wonderful example of international cooperation: they just need to take the historical decision to topple the Libyan *rais*, one way or another. However, a decision of this kind might be terribly dangerous. In fact, someone around the world might object that similar actions should be taken against some Chinese leaders. Or someone might wonder why the world was silent in the fifties when Tibet lost its independence. Or someone might start to raise concern over the Chechen question. Incidentally, a well known example of successful military intervention is the war on Nazi-fascism, which took place because many different countries with many different backgrounds decided to get rid of Hitler’s Germany, which was a sort of “global threat”—not because Stalin and his Western allies wanted to overthrow a dictator.

In other words, it is nice to show solidarity, but we must accept the fact that dictators cannot be toppled by means of rhetoric. For instance, people like Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo disappeared at the end of a dramatic war. And yet, wars and rebellions may not be enough. The case of Stalin is significant (since his power rose to unprecedented heights during a horrible war). Similarly, we might remember what happened in Afghanistan at the end of a war and in Iran at the end of a revolution: it is not so obvious that the Kabul regime supported by the Soviet Union was worse than the Taliban and it is not so obvious that Reza Pahlavi was worse than Ruhollah Khomeini. As for Libya, if Muammar al-Gaddafi is really forced to quit, the next leadership still needs to prove itself, before we kick off worldwide celebrations.

In any case, while there is some concern around the world (of course not comparable with the global progressive mobilization in the aftermath of the US air raid on Tripoli in 1986), the Libyan people have fully understood that dialogue and diplomacy are completely useless on certain occasions. Remarkably, most Libyans are at a point of no return. No doubt, they are aware of the sad consequences if something goes wrong. They know very well who is going to pay—while the West, somehow, continues to show solidarity. While the West continues to mix virtual solidarity with real utopias.

In *Jihād Al-Kuffar* there are several comments about the worldwide climate of hostility against (Western) military actions. One aim of the book is to draw attention to the danger of naive policies that give a free hand to tyrants and terrorists. Perhaps more importantly, it is pointed out that the Western world should accept a crude reality: when troops are deployed to a war zone, their security comes first and humanitarian concerns cannot prevail over military objectives.

Jihād Al-Kuffar also mentions the risk of double standards. Indeed, even when the most devoted peace activists express their opinions, a war can suddenly turn into a just, justifiable and positive event. It systematically happens when personal interests or the interests of some communities or the interests of some countries (usually countries that have won that war) come into play. A typical comment about this sort of double standards is found in Chapter 10. It refers to the policy of those progressive groups that are always ready to oppose certain military campaigns (as happened when Saddam Hussein was under attack), but do not complain about the Second World War or the Chinese Civil War. The scene is in Amman, Jordan, and two militants are talking to each other:

“In the Second World War, the spate of bombings and shellings was so violent that Germany and Japan were

reduced to chunks of rubble, but no one made a fuss. At that time, entire nations were inclined to believe that the end justified the means."

"Nothing could quench their thirst for justice," chortled [the other militant]. "Freedom was the main objective, and there were no moral scruples about indiscriminate killings of innocent civilians or about hasty death sentences, as happened in the case of Mussolini."

WITCH-HUNT IN THE MODERN AGE



April 2, 2011

Leafing through newspapers, listening to the news or browsing websites of media outlets, we have learned about the attack on a UN building in Afghanistan—the highlight of a demonstration against the reported burning of a Koran in Florida. Given the fact that I can hardly see the link between the events in Florida and the “infidels” who were killed in Afghanistan, I wish to make a couple of brief comments.

First, it would be highly provocative to take any action, which might be aimed at forcing the non-Muslim world to refrain from talking about Islam and related subjects. In fact, the underlying message would encourage many fanatics (as radical as other fanatics) to believe that Planet Earth is filled with mad dogs who plague our communities in the name of a religion that only preaches hatred.

Second, it is high time to point out that evil, as a rule, is not inherent in a religion; instead, it is often inherent in people who practice a certain religion and are convinced that they speak (and act) on God’s behalf. Sure enough, this is the belief of the assassins who attacked the UN building in Afghanistan, but it was also the belief of the criminals who persecuted the pagans and the Jews under the guidance of Cyril of Alexandria (fifth century), of the criminals who had a role in the Spanish Inquisition (fifteenth-seventeenth century) and of the criminals who took part in the witch-hunt (again in those centuries).

Quite frankly, I believe that the crime perpetrated in Afghanistan occurred in the same atmosphere that used to surround many women in the past (who were supposed to behave like the fanciful figures portrayed in the picture—a detail of *The Witches’ Sabbath* by Hans Baldung, 1510, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA).

We should never forget that Cyril and his friends, the Spanish inquisitors and the witch-hunters felt inspired by God. Most likely, they also felt inspired by Matthew and Luke: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” [Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23]. Now, should we burn the Gospels because of that? Or should we rather assume that the Gospels, as well as any other sacred texts, should be read, interpreted and put into practice with a considerable dose of good sense? Some (hopefully interesting) remarks on similar subjects can be found on a page of this website [REFERENCES – Koran Verses].

It might also be worth focusing on a couple of statements coming from Florida, where some controversial initiatives were announced. Going through the website of the *Dove World Outreach Center*, we learn that their objective is to “expose Islam for what it is” (“a violent and oppressive religion that is trying to masquerade itself as a religion of peace”). It is also stated that the message “Islam is of the Devil” is “the message of the truth that there is only one way to God, only one way to salvation, and that is through the blood of Jesus”

[cf. web page <http://www.doveworld.org/the-sign>, still available in October 2011].

I will not speculate on whether Islam is “a violent and oppressive religion”. Apparently, this is just a viewpoint (and seems to be presented as a mere viewpoint). More precisely, it is the viewpoint of many people who are influenced by this stereotype because there is a large number of terrorists who are (or claim to be) Muslims and because there are pages of the Koran that seem to support this opinion. Of course, it might be objected that many pages of the Bible can give a distorted vision of Judaism and Christianity, but I do not intend to dwell on this issue. I prefer to draw attention to the fact that a positive interpretation of the Koran is easily found (as shown, e.g., by Sufi scholars).

Instead, the reason behind the words “Islam is of the Devil” is a completely different story. As always happens, I am puzzled when I hear or read statements that aim to convey the truth (the *truth*, not a viewpoint—the *truth* which allows someone to claim that “Islam is of the Devil”): “the truth that there is only one way to God”.

Words of this kind lead to the obvious conclusion that different forms of faith are unacceptable. For instance, they imply that it is definitely wrong to claim that “there is none worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God”.

Well, no matter what I believe, when I consider the words “there is only one way to God, only one way to salvation, and that is through the blood of Jesus” and the words “there is none worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God”, I cannot find anything to prove that one statement is true or the other is wrong. Indeed, if a definite proof were available, everyone would agree on one truth. Everyone would profess the same religion, as well as everyone, all over the world, agrees that $1+2=3$ (once we accept a certain meaning of the characters 1, 2, 3, +, =).

My feeling is that anyone should be free to believe in any truth, should be free to profess his/her truth and should be free to make that truth available to the rest of the world. However, when the time comes to speak to people of different creeds, it would be great if everyone learned to use, at the very least, statements of this kind: “I believe that there is only one way to God and I think that I know the right way”. I would never say: “The incontrovertible truth is that...”

After all, if we want to impose a certain truth, we must accept that other fanatics have a different truth and might even be ready to kill, as happened in Afghanistan yesterday—or in Alexandria, Egypt, at the beginning of the fifth century.

Jihad Al-Kuffar is centered on radical militants who are (or claim to be) Muslims. Therefore, Koran Verses are often quoted, but it is always understood that self-proclaimed Islamic fighters and scholars who justify criminal acts simply give their own interpretation of sacred texts. Instead, I am firmly convinced that Islam, *per se*, has the same features of other doctrines. In other words, if someone is really determined to highlight possible dangers related to intolerance, it should be clear that the Islamic religion is not a *special case*—at least, this is what I feel. Let’s get things straight. In my view, when we focus on what is usually perceived as a negative aspect of the Muslim community, we inevitably come across the same potential of hatred that can be found in other religions.

Of course, any and all opinions are welcome. Each of us is free to decide whether crimes perpetrated in the name of God are actually committed by people who follow the teaching of a certain religion or are rather due to alleged believers who have nothing to do with that faith. However, when we draw our conclusions, we have the moral obligation to apply the same rules—no matter what faith is involved. And in order to explain what I mean, I can give a couple of specific examples. It’s an easy job. In fact, without going back to the Middle Age, we recently had clear evidence of unpleasant experiences in former Yugoslavia or Northern Ireland (and in Northern Ireland, by the way, Islam had nothing to do with well-known religious questions).

Just to get an idea of the approach followed in Jihad Al-Kuffar, you might read a paragraph from Chapter 17. It is about a radical fighter, who is in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and is talking to a brother in arms. He adheres to a certain interpretation of the Koran and goes his way, as well as a large number of non-Muslim believers were (are) inspired by different scriptures and often committed (commit) similar crimes:

Our mission on Earth is well defined. We are called to fight for the faith, fight in the cause of Allah, fight in the way of Allah, fight against the friends of Satan, fight with our goods and persons, fight and slay the pagans wherever we find them, fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, fight until religion becomes Allah’s in its entirety, and fight the unbelievers who are near to us []. These are the orders we were given. And when we follow these instructions to the letter, the infidels have no right to object. They should rather be happy to be attacked, slain, and converted because we have the duty to set new rules of life. They can neither condemn the military operations of mujahideen nor criticize suicide bombers nor disapprove of our thirst for martyrdom. Perhaps more importantly, it is out of the question that no one is allowed to pass our struggle off as terrorism.*

[*] Cf. Koran 8:74, 3:167, 4:76, 9:88, 9:5, 9:29, 8:39, 9:123

BLOOD IN NORWAY (AND A BIT OF MESS IN WASHINGTON D.C.)

July 29, 2011

Although *Jihad Al-Kuffar* mostly deals with terrorists who feel inspired by Islam (and/or claim to be Islamic) the recent events in Norway are surely linked to the main objectives of the book: clear opposition to intolerance and full-scale crackdown on any group of aggressive fanatics.

Therefore, as soon as I heard about the bombing in Oslo and the shooting on the island of Utøya, I immediately started making some notes. However, I waited a few days before posting this thread, because I thought that the



debate in Washington D.C. was totally absorbing the attention of the Internet people. As everybody knows, the debt ceiling problem is not solved yet, but the curtain is going to fall on this story. So, it might be a good occasion to talk for a while about the unexpected path that was followed by an unknown Norwegian youth (of course, “unknown” until last week).

By the way, since I just mentioned Washington D.C. and an “unexpected path”, I ask myself how it could happen that well known, widely respected lawmakers did not refrain from taking a route that is considered to be pretty weird and bizarre by the general public. I do apologize for getting off the subject, but I must confess that I really do not understand something. Given the facts that:

- 1) an (apparently) vast majority of Republicans and Democrats (including the US President) claim that they do not want their nation to default
- 2) the Republicans cannot control the Senate and the Democrats cannot control the House
- 3) the Republicans must acknowledge that the Democrats are inclined to make concessions (as shown by the proposal of the Senate Majority Leader) and the Democrats (including the US President) must acknowledge that the Republicans are inclined to make concessions (as shown by the proposal of the Speaker of the House)
- 4) every lawmaker insists that his/her decision is in the interest of the United States, NOT in the interest (or against the interest) of President Barack Obama, who will run to be re-elected next year

there seemed to be a fairly easy, democratic solution based on a further compromise and a three-stage process.

First stage: the Senators and Representatives who REALLY wanted to avoid default could have voted on a couple of bills that partially satisfied the Republicans and partially satisfied the Democrats (e.g., a bill that essentially accepted the savings put forward by Speaker John Boehner without any further discussion on the debt ceiling until December 2012 and a bill that essentially accepted the savings put forward by Majority Leader Harry Reid, but also planned an up-or-down vote by the end of December 2011); obviously, these Senators and Representatives (and President Barack Obama) should have also agreed that they would eventually pass the bill approved by the majority of the voters

Second stage: the House and Senate could have held a vote on the bill that had been passed at the end of the previous phase

Third stage: the bill could have been signed by the US President without sending shock waves across the globe

Once again, I apologize for this digression—and I definitely go back to the main point.

All of us certainly remember that the criminal attack in Norway, at the very beginning, seemed to be a typical effect of the Islamic/Islamist terrorism. Eventually, it turned out that the killer’s mind was miles away from the spirit of *jihad*. Actually, that gunman considered himself one hundred percent Christian: in his *manifesto* he candidly stated that he was willing to support a “monocultural Christian Europe”.

Immediately, there was a quick reaction. Christian opinion-makers did not hesitate to declare that such

a fierce assassin could not be a Christian (as well as lots of Muslims often claim that people like Osama bin Laden are not Muslims). Here, I do not dare to discuss the religious heritage of Anders Behring Breivik or Osama bin Laden. I will only make two general remarks which, in my view, might give a little contribution to mutual understanding between people of different creeds:

A) Both Anders Behring Breivik and Osama bin Laden were able to find convenient theoretical foundations in the teachings of their religions (or, if you prefer, in the teachings of the religions that they claimed to profess); today, however, you would not see huge masses of Christians (or self-proclaimed Christians) who are eager to rally in support of Anders Behring Breivik, while far too often we hear of huge masses of Muslims (or self-proclaimed Muslims) who take to the streets and pay tribute to Osama bin Laden or similar individuals

B) In the past, when most Christians were quite different but their “theoretical foundations” were exactly the same, many criminal actions were accurately planned and cynically carried out with an enthusiastic participation of huge masses of believers—and still today there are men like Cyril of Alexandria who continue to be honored and celebrated despite clear evidence of their criminal activities

Jihād Al-Kuffar makes an effort to show that religions, *per se*, are not the direct cause of intolerance, but are often based on rules and axioms that are potentially dangerous, depending on the historical period, on the current interpretation of “sacred books” and on the mood of the people who feel the need to hang on the lips of their spiritual guides. For instance, in Chapter 10 there is a dialogue between two radical fighters, who praise some conventional practices of the past that used to be popular with Christian communities, whenever they had to deal with the Jews. A short part of the dialogue is reported below—and it might be noted that the final remark of the second fighter is not complete. Maybe some will be surprised at this choice, but in this context I prefer to ignore his controversial conclusion, which would need further comments and details [incidentally, those of you who have read the book are certainly inclined to think that his “controversial conclusion” will never be unanimously accepted—but probably agree that it will never be unanimously rejected either].

“We’re well aware that the infidels’ policy can be very effective. They know how to cope with the Zionists, as we have learned since the time of Isabel the Catholic, when she established the Inquisition and expelled the Jews from Spain,” said [the first militant], his heart filled with joy.

*“Since the time of Isabel the Catholic?” asked [the other fighter]. “I’m sorry, but you’re absolutely wrong, my friend. Over one thousand years before, Augustine of Hippo had scientifically laid solid foundations for deep hostility toward the Jewish people with his beautiful treatise *Adversus Iudaeos*—‘Against the Jews’—deep hostility, whose seeds had already been sown by Tertullian, Cyprian, and John Chrysostom with similar manuscripts; deep hostility, which became evident with the Good Friday Prayer for the ‘perfidious Jews’ [*] and continued to flourish across Europe.”*

[*] Until the early sixties the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church included a prayer for the “perfidious Jews” during a Holy Week service. Cf., e.g., article dated March 16, 1998, posted on the web page <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/65889.stm>, still available in October 2011.

EXCUSE ME, MR. TERRORIST, WOULD YOU MIND COMING ALONG WITH ME TO A LEGITIMATE AND FAIR COURT OF JUSTICE?



September 12, 2011

I have just read a compelling article by Phyllis Bennis, a Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, The Netherlands [cf. article dated September 12, 2011, posted on the web page <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/09/201119129922211592.htm> I, still available in October 2011].

I quote what appears to be one of the most interesting passages:

“George Bush had a choice on September 11. First, he could have insisted that his pilot land Air Force One in New York City (instead of flying around and landing at obscure refuelling stops ostensibly because of claims of threats to the plane) so he could address the country immediately from what was not yet known as Ground Zero. He could have immediately given a very clear and unequivocal speech to his nation and to the world. A necessary section of the president's address might have gone something like this:

Our people have been the victims of a horrific crime, a crime against humanity. We recognise even at the beginning of this crisis that we cannot answer this crime alone. This was not an act of war, carried out by a country, and we will not turn to war against any country. That will not find the perpetrators or bring them to justice, nor will it prevent future such crimes from occurring. Instead, we need a legal framework that is international in scope and that relies on international law and the United Nations Charter for its legitimacy. We approach this crime internationally because we know that the only sustainable justice is international justice. And justice - not war and not vengeance - is our goal. We will seek the perpetrators and bring them to trial in a legitimate and fair court...”

Here is the reply that can be found in Jihād Al-Kuffar (Chapter 18), even though the book (the alleged diary of a radical militant) was published almost one year ago. The fighter (the alleged writer) is in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, on November 8, 2001. He is talking about the worldwide support that the Taliban receive from peace activists and makes the following remark:

More and more brothers in the Muslim world agree that bin Laden is engaged in a sensational struggle of high, social impact. Meanwhile, European do-gooders demand food for the poor and send a clear message to the world: “Bush and Blair are nothing short of murderers themselves. If they had proof against Osama bin Laden, they should bring him to trial through the international law courts.” Indeed, this is the way to speak. This is what we expect from the broadminded friends of the Afghan jihad, who take care of human rights, who want to keep their hands off Cain, and who are motivated by a real sense of justice. And if bin Laden thinks that the evidence is not good enough, the Americans have no right to limit his freedom. There is no reason why the sheikh should not be allowed to carry on his business [].*

[*] The “message” quoted in the above paragraph was copied from an article dated October 10, 2001, posted on the web page <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/oct2001/prot-o10.shtml>, still available in October 2011.

SHADOWS

September 14, 2011



While I still think that the NATO military intervention against Gaddafi's regime was based on reasonable grounds, there's no denying that some shadows are hanging over Libya or, at the very least, over the Western allies of the Transitional National Council.

Given the fact that Gaddafi was a ruthless dictator, it is not so obvious that Libya's future is going to be as bright as most of the Western people had hoped.

Undoubtedly, lots of Libyans are happy that their homeland is not doomed to be ruled in accordance with Western standards. This is a legitimate and rightful objective. However, it also seems to be legitimate and rightful that some Western observers get puzzled when they start to understand what might happen in the near future—when they ask themselves if it was really worth getting rid of Gaddafi and laying the foundations of a possible minefield in the international scenario.

No matter if you agree or disagree on what I have just said about Gaddafi's downfall, I am sure that the reason for my comment is perfectly clear to those of you who are aware of a recent statement by Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, the leading figure of the National Transitional Council.

For the benefit of the readers who have not heard of his agenda, yet, I wish to quote a paragraph from an article posted on the website of an Arab news network:

Mustafa Abdul-Jalil addressed a crowd of thousands in Martyr's Square in central Tripoli, a site that until recently was famous for pro-Gaddafi rallies. Flanked by a few dozen revolutionary leaders in their largest public gathering since their forces stormed the capital on August 21, he called on Libyans to build a democratic state based on Islamic law

[cf. article dated September 13, 2011, posted on the web page

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/09/2011912214219388500.html>, still available in October 2011]

The article also details the plan of action:

"We strive for a state of the law, for a state of prosperity, for a state that will have Islamic sharia law the basis of legislation," he [Mustafa Abdul-Jalil] said.

Of course, "a state that will have Islamic sharia law the basis of legislation" can certainly be "a democratic state" or "a state of the law" or "a state of prosperity". Nonetheless, the West should clearly understand, once and for all, that the word "democracy" may refer to something completely different when we leave countries like France or Great Britain or Japan or the United States. Just think about religious issues: while most of us agree (at least in principle) that no religion can have special privileges in our "democratic" countries (where secular law is applied), it should be kept in mind that the end result of *sharia* is not exactly the same. And the fact that a state defines itself as "democratic" does not change anything.

For instance, our constitutions explicitly affirm freedom of faith, while this concept appears to be characterized by some notable differences when Islamic law comes into play. Let's make a virtual trip to Tehran or Riyadh—it's easy to realize that the rights of the "believers" are quite different from the rights of the "misbelievers". Remarkably, we might also discover that apostasy is not permitted according to *sharia*.

In view of these facts, I suggest you take some time to read (and possibly re-read over and over again) two articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948:

Article 2 - Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status

Article 18 - Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance

Interestingly enough, countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia are Member States of the United Nations. Of course, as well as countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia are entitled to "forget" the provisions of Articles 2 and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Western world is entitled to "forget" that Libya might "have Islamic sharia law the basis of legislation" in the near future. However, the Western

world (on a future occasion) might try to evaluate all possible scenarios before deploying warships and fighters with the aim of toppling a dictator. And the Western world (on a future occasion) might also try to choose its allies after carefully investigating their feelings (instead of assuming that there will never be any problems).

Now, while waiting for the next steps of the new Libyan leadership, we can just keep our fingers crossed. After all, each country has its own history, its own traditions, its own problems, its own solutions. Therefore, it may well happen that the West will not need to confront a new Islamic Republic of Iran or a new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Sure, this is what we continue to hope. In the meantime, let me quote a sentence taken from *Jihad Al-Kuffar* (Chapter 17):

Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind [...] that the fight for democracy is often a pretext for imposing a different form of absolute power, as happened in Iran.

WHO IS THE TRUE BASHAR AL-ASSAD?

October 4, 2011

Honestly, the title of this thread should have been slightly different. A better choice (a more general, appropriate title) would probably be something like this: **WHICH IS THE TRUE FACE OF A DICTATOR?** Indeed, this post puts emphasis on the figure of Bashar al-Assad because Syria has been one of the hottest regions in the world for several weeks and because some pages of *Jihad Al-Kuffar* are concerned with this particular dictator. However, the purpose of my brief comment is not to discuss the policies of Bashar al-Assad and the violent repression in his country. As I did some time ago when I talked about Gaddafi (February 25, 2011), I simply want to stress that politicians, opinion-makers, spiritual guides, respected gurus, intellectuals and old sages of any kind and any nationality should be extremely careful when they express opinions about absolute rulers. Otherwise, if they accept to be driven by the most fashionable impulses and want to be part of the political mainstream, it is very likely that they leave behind compromising documents. Such documents often include over-generous words of praise (that inevitably cast dark shadows on the apologists when their idols fall into ruin) and servile panegyrics (that become terribly embarrassing after the end of any dictatorship).



Of course, it is necessary to be realistic and take *realpolitik* into account. Therefore, I am not saying that the only people of excellence were the ones who refused to come to terms with the worst criminals in the international scenario and dared to speak out against Hitler in Hitler's Germany, against Stalin in Stalin's Russia, against Saddam Hussein in Saddam Hussein's Iraq and so on. Clearly, it is reasonable (sometimes necessary) to interact (and do business) with people like Muammar al-Gaddafi or Bashar al-Assad or Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese President—a wanted man since March 2009, when the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant. After all, we know very well how things keep going. With rare exceptions, if Country A unilaterally refuses to maintain political and economic ties with a rogue state in order to give a consistent example of superior moral standards, Country B will inevitably take advantage of this situation.

That said, I am sure that many people would have done much better if they had remained silent instead of paying tribute to certain leaders—if they had refrained from giving bad examples of political opportunism.

Actually, after the fall of the worst tyrants, it is often quite amusing to find out that many supporters of former dictators suddenly became outspoken critics or even fierce opponents of their policies. At the very least, it is quite amusing to find out that many flatterers of the past suddenly fell silent.

Coming back to Bashar al-Assad, I would like to quote a paragraph taken from *Jihad Al-Kuffar* (Chapter 10). It is about a Syrian patriarch and, again, I am not saying that this patriarch should have followed in the footsteps of the martyrs who had challenged Emperor Nero or Emperor Diocletian hundreds of years before. I just wish to mention the case of an improvised apologist who might have missed a good opportunity to think about something else.

Anyway, if you leaf through Chapter 10 of *Jihad Al-Kuffar*, you will find a radical fighter who is talking to a fellow militant about the sympathy that many people are feeling for Bashar al-Assad, just after the visit of Pope John Paul II to Damascus (May 2001). Here are the words of that fighter:

Did you hear about Patriarch Gregory III Laham (may Allah protect him)? As reported by a Middle East network, few days ago, he talked of Jesus, when he walked along the Syrian Sea of Tiberias and met a youth who was looking for God. Jesus, said the Patriarch, looked at him and loved him, and according to this Gregory, the same story has been repeated. He has just informed us that he's pleased, and that all citizens of Syria are pleased, because they're led by young President Bashar al-Assad, whose heart is full of potentials, which he can devote to serve his country [].*

[*] Words based on an article dated May 8, 2001, posted on the web page

<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010508/2001050812.html>, still available in October 2012.

GOOD NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA, BUT... WHY IS IT KEPT SO SECRET?



October 6, 2011

Jihad Al-Kuffar has little to do with economic issues. However, some events related to the financial world might bear a resemblance to terrorist activities (the key topic of the book). Indeed, in our global environment, severe damage is often caused by wrong practices that depend upon the rules and principles that drive financial strategies. For instance, what we saw in 2008 in world markets was

probably worse than what we had seen in 2001 (again in world markets), after the September 11 attacks. And today, three years later, we still suffer dire consequences. In other words, it is not necessary to deploy suicide bombers in order to affect the lives of millions of people and undermine the development of a civil society.

Following this path of reasoning, I thought that I might dare to say something about the (potentially devastating) effects of credit rating agencies.

Let me put it this way. As well as the war on terror should be considered a legitimate resource to protect the Western world, legal action should be taken against any group and any individual involved in large-scale fraud. Of course, the crooks who make money by selling toxic financial products are the first criminals to be sued and punished. However, the role of their closest friends cannot be underestimated, especially when highly respected institutions come into play—especially when highly respected institutions are unconditionally trusted and the entire planet hangs on their words. I do not mean that they do not deserve attention and recognition, but I have a feeling that they must be called to account when something goes wrong. Definitely, I would not grant immunity to anyone. If needed, I would not hesitate to hit famous companies, such as credit ratings agencies: the most powerful, most fashionable and most celebrated expressions of today's financial world.

Just now, there is good news from Australia, where a legal case against a credit ratings agency went to trial [cf., e.g., article dated October 4, 2011, posted on the web page

<http://www.smh.com.au/business/toxic-rembrandts--ratings-agency-sandbagged-20111004-1l71d.html>]

As pointed out in this article, the case has stunning features. First, twelve local councils in New South Wales apparently lost 90% of their capital after buying a risky financial product that had been given a triple-A rating. Second, there seems to be evidence that an analyst did not mind “bending in front of bankers” and was rebuked by a colleague (“*You rate something AAA, when it is really A-?*”) Last but not least, it is claimed that the bankers “exercised real and substantial influence” over the rating process.

As usual, all that glitters is not gold—in the sense that, for some reason, no publicity has been done. As far as I know, the world's media have shown little or no interest in the trial. However, the last word has not been said. Sooner or later, it may well happen that something serious will be done—also in the United States, where the First Amendment allows ratings agencies to claim that they only express opinions.

Mind you, I have nothing against the First Amendment. Actually, I like it very much and I could have never published a single paragraph of Jihad Al-Kuffar in a country that did not protect freedom of speech. The point is that the First Amendment should not be a tool that allows anyone to say or write anything without clearly stating that an opinion is just an opinion—without clearly stating that an opinion is not the Bible, not the Gospels, not the Koran. [By the way, even the Bible and the Gospels and the Koran, in my view, should be considered with due caution, as often pointed out on this web site]

Now, have I got a suggestion? Yes, I have. Lawmakers, all over the world, could take a lesson from cigarette packs, which give unequivocal messages, such as “Warning: Cigarettes cause stroke and heart disease” or “Smoking kills”. In the end, it would be nice if credit ratings agencies were forced to issue reports and statements which contain appropriate footnotes, such as “Warning: This is just an opinion and might be based on wrong assumptions” or “This rating might kill your savings”. Then, and only then, it would be fair to invoke the First Amendment and claim that ratings are no more than opinions.

As I always did in the past, I will conclude with a sentence taken from Jihad Al-Kuffar (Chapter 9). I must

confess that the comment, in the book, refers to a completely different context. However, I like this remark and I think that it is of general use. More importantly, it appears to be strongly related to the subject of this post. So, here it is:

Brazen lies are often accepted as sheer truths, since many victims of cynical ploy fail to see the huge gap between reassuring statements and the reality on the ground.

THE MUBARAK TYRANNY AND POST-MUBARAK DEMOCRACY

October 12, 2011

- ▶ May 2011: clashes outside a Cairo church which leave a dozen people killed and over two hundred wounded
- ▶ June 2011: clashes in Cairo where the police fire tear gas at demonstrators throwing stones and demanding that trials of former senior government officials proceed more swiftly
- ▶ July 2011: clashes in Cairo after a judge ordered the release of 10 police officers charged with killing protesters during the country's uprising
- ▶ July 2011: clashes in Suez after crowds blocked a key highway to push for faster reform efforts
- ▶ September 2011: clashes outside the Israeli Embassy in Cairo between the police and protesters, who storm the building, torch police vehicles and attack police headquarters
- ▶ October 2011: clashes in Cairo between the police and Christians protesting an attack on a church



Needless to say, this is just a short list of the dramatic events that have rocked Egypt since Hosni Mubarak stepped down.

Can we draw a moral? Probably, the answer is no. We can simply acknowledge that history repeats itself. After a rebellion, there are always gangs of thugs who take advantage of the situation and turn themselves into death squads. The damage they create can be enormous. It obviously depends on their number and the ideology that stands behind—and I want to stress that word, *ideology*, because I am convinced that the worst case occurs when everything is driven by a strong ideology. Of course, it doesn't matter if we are talking of a secular or religious ideology. It doesn't matter if the new leader is Fidel Castro or Ruhollah Khomeini. It doesn't matter if the new masters are called Bolsheviks, as happened in Russia, or Ustashas, as happened in Croatia.

Another lesson that we might learn from history (a hard lesson, very hard, almost impossible to digest) is concerned with democracy. In the Western world, we are used to the rules of democracy (a word which is not a synonym of absolute freedom) and most of us are inclined to believe that democratic reforms can be easily implemented in any country, because a vast majority of citizens is certainly determined to support the development of a westernized state. Alas, this is not the case on many occasions. First, there are still people who unconditionally trust absolute leaders and firmly believe in some form of *enlightened* dictatorship. More importantly, the fall of a dictator implies the fall of a system—a system that gives money and power to people who have nothing to lose if they fight to the bitter end. This is what happened in Egypt (for a relatively short period) and Iraq (for a long time). It is also what is happening right now in Libya, where pro-Gaddafi forces still put up stiff resistance even though they seem to have no chance of winning the last battle.

Frankly speaking, I must say that the Western world itself should use some caution when talking about democracy. After all, the concept of *liberal democracy* is relatively new: it took a long time to achieve the level of freedom we know today—on both sides of the Atlantic.

Now, let's go back to Egypt. Personally, I love this country. In my life, I also met a lot of terrific Egyptian people and I am sure they deserve a great future. So, I do hope for the best. I really look forward to the rise of a modern, democratic, rich, tolerant state, free of Castros and Khomeinis, free of Bolsheviks and Ustashas. However, building a new Egypt is a hard job and the goal is not easy to achieve: dark clouds hang all along the Nile Valley and beyond.

These clouds are due to various disturbances. Some of them (probably the most dangerous ones) are carried by severe winds—winds reinforced by religious animosity. Actually, sectarian violence has been behind the corner for a long time. Now it seems to be spreading across the country. Consequences are unpredictable, but once again, in my opinion, the main cause is not a doctrine. Evil is inherent in the people who thirst for power and try to exploit the religious spirit of their fellow citizens. As well known, it's easy to find new militants and new fighters in certain areas. After all, there are plenty of people who are willing to act in the name of God—plenty of people who tend to believe that some human beings (e.g., Osama bin Laden or Ruhollah Khomeini or Urban II, the Pope of the first crusade) are so special that they know the will of God. In the end, it's a pity that many volunteers are unable to see a blunt truth: strange enough, it often happens that God apparently wants scores of believers to die for an ideal, but provides safe havens for their leaders (and the families of these leaders).

My comment about the privileges of the most prominent leaders and their families finds an echo on

several pages of Jihad Al-Kuffar. For instance, in Chapter 6, a radical militant is talking about Palestine. He expresses concern for the peace process, which might give a fatal blow to a long tradition of war against Israel (since 1948, when the new State was established). Peace is against his principles: he lives to fight and nothing shall interfere with his plans. Here are his words during a dialogue that took place in October 2000, according to the story:

Lots of brothers would start to work rather than fight. They would earn money and could buy goods and services, which today are almost unknown, like clothes, perfumes, televisions, cameras, computers, cars, air conditioners, cellular telephones, refrigerators. Tourists would flood our towns and bring more money. Palestinians themselves could move around, maybe for the Pilgrimage to Mecca, or a flying visit to Arafat's family in France. Markets never known before would be open to common people.

“OCCUPY WALL STREET” PROTESTS AND RADICAL MILITANTS

October 16, 2011

Yesterday, on October 15, 2011, during a protest that was part of the “Occupy Wall Street” demonstrations, Rome, the Italian capital, had to suffer the consequences of massive riots. The climax was a heavy battle between gangs of criminal thugs and the police. As clearly shown by a huge number of pictures and video clips, the city center was devastated and several people were injured. Damage amounts to over one million euros.



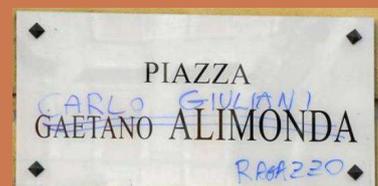
It is worth noting that barbaric acts of violence are not unusual, when certain groups and movements are involved. Quite often, urban warfare appears to be almost inevitable. For instance, the atmosphere was already tense on the eve of the clashes that took place in Rome yesterday. Something similar had happened in early July 2011: everyone was well aware of the tragic events that would hit Genoa (again in Italy) on July 20. Maybe it was not so evident that a protester would lose his life, but there was no question about the intentions of some activists, who had been training to fight street battles.

At that time the pretext was a G8 summit: in the wake of the Seattle protests, the anti-globalization movement took the stage, the city center was rocked by violent riots and eventually a young demonstrator was killed, while he was assaulting a police jeep together with a couple of fellow fighters. Mind you, I am not saying that these “fighters” were armed with heavy weapons. They only had a fire extinguisher (in the hands of the victim), a wooden board (in the hands of a brother in arms) and an iron bar (in the hands of another activist). Definitely, they had nothing to do with Haqqani militants or al-Qaeda operatives. And yet, those “light weapons” were more than enough to attack three men inside the jeep. So, it’s probably not surprising that a policeman grabbed a gun and opened fire. The end result was dramatic: a little difference in the path of the bullet could have saved a life, but that shot was a deadly one—right in the head of the man who was approaching with the fire extinguisher.



No doubt, there was nothing reasonable in the death of a young protester, who had never behaved in a violent and aggressive manner before. However, it cannot be denied that he was shot dead because a policeman reacted while three demonstrators (their faces covered with masks and hoods) were attacking his jeep with a fire extinguisher, a wooden board and an iron bar, as anyone can see looking at the pictures above, which were posted in several websites. It cannot be denied that he was shot dead in an unprovoked act of violence (against the policemen). In my opinion, the obvious consequence is that everyone should have drawn a veil over an unfortunate outburst of uncontrolled rage and frustration. That boy surely deserved to rest in peace, mourned by his relatives and friends—remembered forever for what he had been and what he had done before that cursed day of blood, violence and madness.

Instead, an impressive number of people decided that their icon, their hero, their example of virtue would be a young man who had attacked a police jeep with a fire extinguisher. There was a sort of spontaneous, popular movement, which eventually succeeded in turning that protester into a martyr. Some took the initiative to dedicate the square where the protester had been killed to their new hero (cf. picture on the right),



others opened the official website of an NGO called *Comitato Piazza Carlo Giuliani (Carlo Giuliani Square Committee)*, a political party renamed its presidential office in the Italian Senate after its icon, and so on. Remarkably, the most progressive forces were eager to pay this kind of tribute both in Italy and abroad.

Now, I don't want to bore anyone with a long discussion on political, social and psychological issues related to mass movements, global protests and civil unrest. I will limit myself to a single comment. I firmly believe that anyone should be free to give his viewpoint and take to the streets to express his dissent. This is obvious in a liberal democracy. However, the rights of any protester cannot include the license to destroy public properties, shops, cars and banks. When groups of protesters wreak havoc, they must be stopped—even better, they must be stopped before they wreak havoc. To put it bluntly, they must be stopped by any means.

In order to make this concept clear, I will mention a thread that I posted last month. It was about the war on terror and my brief note was titled *Excuse me, Mr. Terrorist, would you mind coming along with me to a legitimate and fair court of justice?* The meaning is self-evident: you cannot expect a terrorist to give himself up. A different approach is needed, if we don't want to be blackmailed and killed by militants who are allowed to get off scot-free. Similarly, when violence erupts, it's not possible to approach a group of hooligans and kindly ask: *Excuse me, Mr. Vandal, would you mind coming along with me to a legitimate and fair court of justice?*

So, what conclusion? Well, let me suggest that different legislative measures are required in order to tackle the problem. I won't go into detail, but we definitely need an efficient tool to crack down on violence. At the very least, someone must pay when he causes trouble. And the next step should be an extra effort with the aim of preventing any trouble—with the aim of preventing any damage. In other words, it would be great if criminals could be legitimately stopped before they make irreparable mistakes.

I end this note with a few paragraphs taken from Jihād Al-Kuffar, the alleged diary of a radical militant. This guy happens to be in Genoa on July 20, 2001. He is there for a suicide operation, but the plan falls through. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the fighter is forced to cancel his mission. On that gloomy day, in the afternoon, just after the death of a protester, he joins a huge crowd of anti-globalization activists. Here follows a short excerpt (Chapter 14):

"It's high time to say no to so many frivolous pleasures," grumbled a cleric. "The people must be prepared to answer 'no' to the siren call of filthy lucre and material society. We won't be able to heal our souls without changing the scale of values, without discerning what is unnecessary for a life of social progress. Cars, camcorders, cameras, smart dresses, toys, travels, hotels, yachts, mobile phones, computers, high-speed trains—all this stuff is the devil's work. We must have the courage of sacrifice. Should someone affirm that consumerism creates jobs, we need to reply that jobs don't suit us when they lead to discrimination. Jobs, education, and democracy must disappear if they serve the interests of the careerists who want to work, but they give nothing to the youths who prefer a life of strikes, rallies, social studies, and debates on the immanent problems of mankind."

[...]

Suddenly, there was a flurry of phone calls. The first mobile I heard belonged to the cleric at my side. "They've killed a pacifist. The police have murdered a comrade. He was shot in the face while he was trying to assault a jeep. He was armed with a gas cylinder, and the cop responded with a nine-caliber gun. Now, we've got a new martyr, the first martyr of a movement that was formed to make a better world [],"* the cleric mumbled, and the faltering of his voice betrayed a deep sense of bitterness and outrage. *The news spread everywhere in no time. Each telephone call gave new details. Some protesters began to unleash their fury. Others were struck dumb, unable to understand why a fatal accident had cast a black shadow over a wonderful day of chants, peace, love, brotherhood, friendship, ethics, solidarity, fair trade, social commitment, and progressive democracy.*

"It happens all the time," sobbed an activist. "Fate has been pitiless to a good pacifist. I'll tell you what—all his friends have already declared that he was meek and gentle. They insist that he was nonviolent. Why were the cops so mean and base? Did they need a psychiatrist to understand that our comrades were nice guys who just wanted to have fun? Now, that protester is a martyr sacrificed by the rage of the men in uniform []. How could it happen? Anyone with brains would have a good laugh if he were in a car surrounded by jolly pranksters who strike it with bars or extinguishers. It's clear that this kind of thing is no more than an innocent joke in a moment of youthful bravado."*

[*] Cf. *la Repubblica* (July 21, 2001): "Two shots in his face while he was trying to assault a carabinieri

nine-bore gun [...] He is the first victim of a movement that was formed to make a better world.”
[Translated from Italian]

[⁶] Cf. *la Repubblica* (July 21, 2001): “What is called the People of Seattle has a martyr, whom nobody wanted. But he was sacrificed by the violence of a minority and by the rage of the men in uniform...”
[Translated from Italian]

THE HEROES, THE MARTYRS AND THEIR LEADERS

October 20, 2011



When the NATO war machine started to strike Muammar al-Gaddafi's loyalists, most people realized what would happen in the end: his fate was sealed. Despite the huge amount of money poured into the development of an efficient military apparatus, the regime's army could not compete with the technology and air power of its worst enemy. Yes, of its *worst enemy*. This is exactly what I mean: its *worst (and open) enemy*. In my opinion, this is the blunt truth. No matter what I think about the NATO military operations (given the circumstances and the worldwide sympathy toward the insurgents, I believe that air strikes were a natural consequence), I am sure that humanitarian concerns and priorities were just an excuse. As you open fire in a war zone (and, if you go to a war zone, it is within your rights to use weapons), you necessarily side with a group of fighters against a different group of fighters (the *target*).

Maybe I am a bit too harsh, but I think that NATO was the *true (worst) enemy* of Gaddafi and I often found that the statements of its spokesmen were quite laughable. The best of all apparently came when the rebels were still besieging Sirte. As reported by an *Al-Jazeera* article posted on September 25, 2011, while a battle was raging "as close as half a kilometre" from the city center, there was an interesting update about recent air raids:

"NATO, whose warplanes played a vital role in the six-month war that toppled Gaddafi, said its planes had hit a number of targets in Sirte in the previous 24 hours, including an ammunition depot and an anti-aircraft gun.

It said in a statement the air attacks had been mounted to protect civilians from Gaddafi forces inside the town" (because NATO had got rid of "an anti-aircraft gun" that was firing against civilians?!?!?!?!?!?)

[cf. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/09/201192501116332447.html>]

Another gripping article was posted on the *Al-Arabiya* website on September 29, 2011. Here, a captain of the rebels candidly talks of the NATO aircraft, which are supporting the anti-Gaddafi fighters in Sirte. The officer does not hesitate to bring his allies to account: "NATO is here but is not doing enough. They take out the rocket launchers firing at us, but they are immediately replaced. We need more help from NATO"

[cf. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/09/29/169230.html>]

Note that the officer expects "more help from NATO" and is also grumbling about "rocket launchers firing at us" (*i.e.*, firing at armed enemies). He does not complain about rocket launchers firing at innocent civilians.

So, many events and documents tend to prove that NATO did not adopt a neutral position with the only aim of protecting the civil population. It appears quite evident that the North Atlantic Alliance definitely supported the rebels and gave a significant contribution to Gaddafi's defeat. As claimed by several observers, the Libyan revolutionaries did not have a hope in hell of winning their battle without the active help of foreign countries. So, not only was NATO an *open enemy* of Gaddafi and his troops—it was much more: it was the *key enemy*.

However, the gloomy prospect of an inevitable decline was not enough for Gaddafi. He did not give up until the last minute. Or, better, he never gave up his rhetoric. Stubbornly, he continued to claim that he would resist for months or even years (maybe hiding somewhere without running useless risks). He continued to encourage his supporters, asking them to fight until death (on his behalf). He continued to call on Tripoli residents to repel the rats and traitors (in the meantime, giving him time to take refuge in Sirte or another friendly town). He continued to insist that he would turn his country into a volcano of lava and fire (possibly with the noble idea of transforming its most devoted sons into martyrs, while he would remain in a safe haven).

On several occasions, Gaddafi also presented himself as a good Muslim and devout observant of Islam, even though his regime was essentially based on secular ideals. Of course, his words were not surprising. After all, religious issues can be very helpful, especially when a good number of believers are determined to earn a place in Heaven and are convinced that a heroic death will help them achieve their aim.

Despite my ironic comments, I must acknowledge that Muammar al-Gaddafi did not flee Libya (as well as Saddam Hussein did not flee Iraq). He even remained in a town, Sirte, while it was being rocked by

massive air raids. However, when the rebels were going to overwhelm his fighters, he did not accept to die with his men. He tried to save his life. According to several sources, the Leader and Guide of the Revolution of Libya hid in a car and when his convoy was forced to stop, he looked for shelter in a drain—like a rat.

That being said, we can find similarities between Gaddafi and other well-known men of power who were able to fascinate, mesmerize, fool and deceive a huge number of naive supporters. For instance, one of them was Osama bin Laden, who induced thousands of fans to risk their lives in Afghanistan (under the continuous threat of NATO air raids). Many of them were even ready to blow themselves up, while he was relaxing in a comfortable luxury mansion (not in a tribal area that might be hit by drone attacks, but in a safe town with over 100,000 inhabitants—with over 100,000 human shields).

One more example? As I said before, there is also a clear resemblance between the former Libyan despot and the former Iraqi dictator. In fact, Saddam Hussein was another leader who used to praise martyrdom (provided he would not become a martyr himself), continually called for self-sacrifice (of the others), invited all Iraqis to die for his sake, pretended to act in the name of Islam and was eventually cornered like a rat in its hole, instead of dying a hero.

Jihād Al-Kuffar often places emphasis on tyrants who make any effort to live a happy life and do not care a damn about their fellow citizens (usually forced to live in poverty or even treated like cannon fodder). Just to give an idea, I quote part of a dialogue between two radical fighters (Chapter 11). According to the story, they are in the Middle East, in May 2001, and make the following comments:

“It’s good to know that so many brothers and sisters are willing to become martyrs for one reason or another,” observed [the first militant]. “Recently, I spoke to an old, wise imam. He’s convinced that within a couple of years, all good believers will only desire to bring death to our enemies. Every man will look for martyrdom, from the humblest mujahideen to the most representative icons of our struggle, like Saddam Hussein, a staunch fighter, who is encouraging all of us to die for the sake of Allah and certainly hopes to blow himself up among scores of infidels—”

“—possibly in the middle of American troops, if he only gets a chance,” said [the second militant].

MISTAKES OF THE PAST

November 2, 2011

As reported by several sources, including Arab news networks, President Mahmoud Abbas has recently acknowledged that his fellow Palestinians made a mistake when they rejected the UN plan to partition Palestine at the end of the British mandate in 1948.



“It was our mistake. It was an Arab mistake as a whole,” admitted the Palestinian President in an interview to the Israeli media. However, he also asked a question which many people certainly consider to be obvious and legitimate: “But do they (the Israelis) punish us for this mistake after 64 years?” [cf., e.g., <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/10/29/174249.html>—article posted on October 29, 2011]

While I highly respect President Abbas’ opinion and pay tribute to his courage (since it was very hard for him to talk about “an Arab mistake as a whole”, that’s for sure), I feel the need to put emphasis on a few points, which are regularly ignored, not only in the Muslim world, but also amongst the most progressive and politically correct elements of Western society:

- ▶ there are many international parties and institutions that aim to get rid of Israel (Hamas, Hezbollah, Iranian government just to name a few); the consequence is that a Palestinian State can actually pose a serious threat to the existence of Israel
- ▶ most Islamic countries have no diplomatic ties with Israel (even though they apparently tolerate its existence); again, given this scenario, a Palestinian State could undermine the security of Israel, if it is not possible to find an overall solution to the Middle-East problem
- ▶ during the period 1949-1967 East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were under Arab occupation, but no one was willing to create a Palestinian State; incidentally, the only real objective seemed to be a new war on Israel, which actually took place in 1967; perhaps more importantly, a strong motivation behind the refusal to establish a Palestinian State was the firm determination to reject the UN Resolution (approved in 1947) that aimed to give a new country both to the Jews and the Arabs
- ▶ when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, an impressive number of rockets started to fall on Ashkelon and Sderot—and those rockets cannot encourage any Israeli leader to give a free hand to the Palestinians

Several pages of *Jihād Al-Kuffar* are concerned with the Palestinian question. For instance, if you have a look at Chapter 17, you will find some comments that are closely related to the topics addressed in this post :

Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that Arab countries waged war on Israel in 1948, in the hope of completing Hitler's job—the cleansing of the Jews. Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that the Jews were attacked again in 1967, and once again in 1973. Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that Hamas and Hezbollah deny Israel the right to exist. Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that there is a common desire among Muslim communities to destroy Israel. Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that the large majority of Islamic countries still refuse to hold diplomatic ties with Israel. Most Western governments (and most Western media) don't mind that the Arab world used to dream of a new war against Israel between 1949 and 1967, instead of working on the development of a modern Palestinian state.

“STOCKS POP ON BERLUSCONI’S PENDING RESIGNATION”

November 9, 2011

The headline of this post appears within quotation marks because it is copied from the title of an article published on the website of a major news network on November 8, 2011

[cf. http://money.cnn.com/2011/11/08/markets/markets_newyork/index.htm].



As everybody knows, the fate of the Italian Prime Minister has been the main interest of the media all over the world for several days—and his fate seemed to have an enormous influence on the fate of Italy and, possibly, of the global economy.

Now, I am not going to mull over the mistakes and merits of the almost-former Prime Minister, but I will say a few words, which are closely related to some pages of *Jihad Al-Kuffar*, even though the book was published over one year ago and is mostly focused on the terrorist threat.

My first remark is about a simple fact: beyond a certain threshold (*i.e.*, after a certain number of years) a good leader should understand that it is high time to step aside. No matter what he has done, feelings of anger and envy inevitably arise, supported by the animosity of new generations, whose voice, in a global market, is often amplified by the media at a planetary scale. I think this is a reason why the leaders of liberal democracies usually remain in power for a relatively short period. As a rule, US presidents, British prime ministers, German chancellors have their years of glory and tend to step aside (or, at the very least, tend to keep a low profile) when the winds start to change direction. This is typical, as I’ve just said, of liberal democracies—with one notable exception: Italy, where the current Prime Minister has been a leading figure of the political scenario for nearly twenty years. But, mind you, he is far from establishing a record. Other statesmen, including the President of Italy, have an incredible political career, which is much more outstanding.

As usual, I do not believe that certain things and certain events occur by chance. Thus, the long-lived Italian politicians, in my opinion, are the obvious consequence of an old education process that was characterized by different philosophies of life, but also by a common feature of the main actors. As a matter of fact, the Italian culture has been under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church for over fifteen centuries, and of the fascist ideology for two decades, and of the communist fashion for nearly fifty years (notably, the Italian Communist Party, after World War II, was so successful that it became a reliable ally of the Soviet Union in the West and was sponsored by the Moscow government for a long time). So, what’s the “common feature”? The answer is easy: the leader is supposed to maintain his position until he dies.

I repeat, certain things and certain events do not occur by chance. For instance, let’s take the case of Greece. Should we really believe that no mistakes were made by its European partners when the Euro became a working currency in 2002? I would rather believe that there was a general agreement to ignore the problem. Or let’s take the case of the United States. Was it so hard to realize that the debt was rising to dangerous levels? Or let’s take the case of Italy. Are we absolutely sure that its disease is caused by a scandal-plagued prime minister and that a new political course is enough to change the destiny of an entire nation?

I am quite convinced that the answer is *no* and, ironically, I also have a feeling that Silvio Berlusconi had the right recipe to make some significant changes, but unfortunately the disease was endemic and nothing could be done, in practice, to introduce new rules.

Even more ironically, the main problems of Italy (and the main problems raised by the European Union) are the heritage of those political entities, which were the most determined enemies of the current Prime Minister. Key elements of that heritage include

- about one thousand lawmakers in a country of sixty million people (while, for instance, the US has one hundred senators and four hundred and thirty-five representatives who serve over three hundred million inhabitants)

- absurd benefits for lawmakers, while they serve their nation and when they quit
- absurd benefits for other categories of workers (or alleged workers); a most impressive case is concerned with union activists—starting in the fifties, a statement issued by a trade union was enough to allow their friends and sympathizers to draw a pension after paying ridiculous amounts of money; the estimated burden for taxpayers is about ten billion euros per year (roughly, fourteen billion dollars)
- a pension scheme that (until some time ago) allowed a huge number of people to retire when they were less than forty years old (during the period 1973-1992); clearly, lots of people who retired in those days are still alive and, before they pass away, many of them will receive an unjustifiable amount of money
- an unsustainable social security system, which is even more unsustainable when we think of the costs due to uncontrolled immigration (a major conquest of left-wing parties and organizations)
- a crazy policy in the energy sector that gave the best of itself in the eighties, when a nuclear power plant was dismissed after a few years of activity (just five); consequences are obvious: enormous costs for the development, huge costs to dismiss it, incredible costs to buy energy from France (of course, including energy produced by nuclear plants) and a dramatic loss of Italian energy
- a wild spread of state-sponsored universities, which continue to claim excessive expenses for non-essential services
- inefficient law enforcement against tax evasion (especially in view of the tricks that are available to several categories of workers, professionals, companies and institutions)

I don't think there's much more to be said. I can just laugh as I think of what might happen in the future: if left-wing parties win the next elections, they will probably be forced to introduce new measures in an attempt to demolish the welfare state that was mostly built by the Left during fifty years of naive enthusiasm. In a sense, it's exactly what happened in Greece, where the European Union made the Socialists explain to their former supporters that a truly socialist state is doomed to fail.

As we leaf through the pages of *Jihad Al-Kuffar*, we find that the topic of the welfare state comes up on several occasions. Here, I will mention a short comment in Chapter 9:

The Earth is full of fashion victims who believe that the wealth of a country does not depend on hard work but on the amount of money that a government decides to give in terms of salaries, pensions, and unemployment benefits. Nobody wonders where this money will come from.

PS

By the way, "Berlusconi's pending resignation" doesn't really have a great effect. Right now it is 10 pm (GMT) on Wednesday, November 9. Berlusconi's resignation is still pending (almost 100% sure) and here is a list of today's "gains" of some popular indexes: Dow Jones: -3.20%, Nasdaq: -3.88%; S&P: -3.67%; FTSE 100: -1.92%; Bovespa: -2.50%; Cac 40: -2.17%; Dax: -2.21%. And tomorrow will be another day. *Che sarà, sarà* (Whatever will be, will be). Over and out.

THE DEBT CUTS AND THE SUPER COMMITTEE'S FAILURE



November 22, 2011

I do not intend to elaborate on the (possible) reasons that did not allow the Super Committee in Washington D.C. to strike a deal on the debt cuts. Neither do I mean to discuss technical details. I will only limit myself to an obvious comment: both parties were highly influenced by the forthcoming presidential elections and tried to work out the best strategy (the best strategy for next year, without worrying too much about the actual consequences of their behavior).

No doubt, the Republicans are likely to take advantage from a situation in which President Barack Obama is virtually unable to develop any plan to address the economic challenges in the US and overseas. Similarly, it's easy for them to blame the current Administration for the improper use of taxpayers' money (*cf.*, *e.g.*, the *Solyndra affair*) and claim that increased taxes on the wealthy are doomed to have a negative effect on investments, since higher taxation would put obstacles in the way of the businessmen who are more likely to have the capacity to create jobs.

However, I have a feeling that the Republicans should carefully consider both sides of the issues and realize that most of the voters are not the richest people in the country. Then, and only then, a good number of conservative lawmakers might come to the conclusion that several Americans would welcome more taxes on the better off (especially in a period of harsh policies that severely hit the mid-lower classes).

So, I can probably repeat something that I wrote in a post after the Mid-Term Elections last year. As you can immediately check if you have a look at the [ARCHIVE](#) (posts published in 2010), last November I pointed out that the Democrats' defeat looked like a warning to the White House. In the end, it seemed quite natural to write these words: "Good luck, Mr. President". Now, in view of the latest events, I feel like sending a message of hope to the Right: "Good luck, Grand Old Party." Indeed, it would probably be a mistake to downplay the Democrats' attacks on the Republicans who "refused to bend in their defense of tax cuts for the wealthy during debt talks" (*cf.* statement by the US President, as reported, *e.g.*, in an article dated November 21, 2011 and posted on the web page <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/11/21/clock-ticks-down-to-super-committee-failure/#ixzz1eQxfkyxc>).

Mind you, I am not claiming that the Republicans are right or wrong. I am just trying to point out a possible risk. And I can put more emphasis on my opinion by quoting a comment from Jihād Al-Kuffar (Chapter 9):

There's plenty of citizens who are tempted by siren songs and don't even think that the most stimulating slogans are straight from the mouths of wealthy politicians who pretend to champion the cause of the poor just because the percentage of needy families is pretty high. And it's easier to win their votes by using the words they want to hear. As a rule of thumb, the higher the benefit expected from false promises, the higher the level of demagogic opportunism—and brazen lies are often accepted as sheer truths, since many victims of cynical ploy fail to see the huge gap between reassuring statements and the reality on the ground. They simply hang onto the lips of charismatic statesmen who go yachting, wear cashmere jumpers, live in luxury flats sold off by state agencies, insist on social issues, and exploit emotional feelings for the sake of their careers or the sake of their friends.

These words clearly show that I do not want to encourage demagogic and populist policies. However, it seems reasonable to proceed with caution, especially while many families are living moments of great suffering. Thus, I simply suggest that the new cuts, which necessarily involve less jobs in the public sector, should come together with proper measures. No matter how tough they are, these measures should be unequivocally based on equity and shared sacrifices. Actually, it is pretty dangerous to defend "tax cuts for the wealthy" (or whatever can be easily interpreted as "tax cuts for the wealthy") without giving evidence of popular initiatives (plans that clearly aim to improve the living conditions of the less fortunate). Otherwise, we cannot rule out the possibility that the majority of the Americans will eventually prefer not to explore new experiences, even though (in principle) they are interested in a change.

35% UNSOLD !!!!!

November 24, 2011

Yesterday, November 23, over one-third of German bonds were left unsold. The reaction of the world markets was immediate. Most of the people were surprised. Shocked. And yet, in my view, that sense of surprise was based on no grounds. After all, if I have a very reliable friend (say *Johann*) who has promised to give me 1,000 Euros in exchange for a service and a reliable friend (say *Jean* or *John*) who has promised to give me 1,100 Euros in exchange for the same service, what would I do? I might even prefer a less reliable friend, say *Giovanni*, who (all things considered) is not too naughty and has promised 1,250 Euros for that service. Or, perhaps, I might decide to strike a deal with an old friend, say *Ιωάννης*, who has offered 1,500 Euros, even though I haven't seen him for ages—and I am not one hundred percent sure that he will eventually be able to pay every single penny.

I think that the message is clear.



November Today, November 24, there was another message, which was much clearer and definitely had a great impact: someone does not like the idea of the so-called *Eurobonds* or *Stability Bonds*. Again, the reaction was strong, immediate and unanimous, as shown by the graphs, which are reported here.

Despite my comments, I don't have a strong opinion about the *Stability Bonds* and their possible effect on governments that seem to be attracted by relaxed financial rules. However, I am sure that the so-called *virtuous countries* should recognize the benefits they

received from the European Union and the *Eurozone*: for instance, the Euro-Mark rate and the Euro-Lira rate played in favor of Germany (and against Italy).

As for strict rules, there is no doubt that the way of life in Athens and Rome cannot be too different from the way of life in Berlin, but several sensible people might also wonder why no one (fifteen years ago) carefully examined the Greek balance sheets or made inquiries about the pension system in Italy. Others, might also wonder why Italy and Greece appear to be so rich that they still allow the main local religious institutions not to pay reasonable taxes on real estate. Frankly speaking, I have a feeling that certain events do not happen by chance. Thus, I tend to believe that many politicians preferred to ignore these problems rather than run the risk of selling less cars in the Mediterranean area (including the extremely spectacular car used by the Pope).

I have nothing to add, with the exception of a short sentence, which is taken from Jihad Al-Kuffar (Chapter 6) and seems to be appropriate, even if (in the book) it refers to a completely different context:

Guided by self-interest, heads of state are often inclined to choose the smoothest way to success.

So, what conclusion? For the leaders of rich European countries it is probably easy and convenient to turn to their voters with these words: "Dear fellow citizens, we've been working hard for years and today there's no reason to use our money to save some lazy countries that beg for our help." However, these leaders might also look at the problem from a different perspective and say: "Dear fellow citizens, it's quite clear that we're much more virtuous than other nations. Nonetheless, we made a serious mistake when we accepted to share a common destiny without carefully examining the benefits (new market opportunities) and the drawbacks (poor financial performance of our partners). From the very beginning, we should have realized that it was impossible to have those market opportunities at zero cost. Today, however, the situation is so bad for all of us, that we should try to work together to obtain an important result: at last, we can force our partners to adopt tough rules and we can set the foundations for a new Eurozone, which is really based on common principles. This choice would imply an extra cost for our taxpayers, but will also grant a better future for the whole continent, including our country, which will maintain (and hopefully improve) its market share. After all, if we have a look at the United States, we realize that there's an enormous difference between Massachusetts and Alabama. And yet, they've succeeded in living together for centuries, under the same federal rules."

It's the old story of the two-way commitment: a rule that should also be applied when the Third World comes into play, because the main objective of international solidarity, quite often, is a huge number of jobs for friends and friends of friends in the state machine of rich (and fairly rich) countries. So, a different approach is needed, especially in times of hardship. But that's another story...