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A View from the Eye of the Storm

Talk delivered by Haim Harari at a meeting of the International Advisory Board of a large multinational corporation, April 2004

As you know, I usually provide the scientific and technological "entertainment" in our meetings, but, on this occasion, our Chairman suggested that I present my own personal view on events in the part of the world from which I come. I have never been and I will never be a Government official and I have no privileged information. My perspective is entirely based on what I see, on what I read and on the fact that my family has lived in this region for almost 200 years. You may regard my views as those of the proverbial taxi driver, which you are supposed to question, when you visit a country.

I could have shared with you some fascinating facts and some personal thoughts about the Israeli-Arab conflict. However, I will touch upon it only in passing. I prefer to devote most of my remarks to the broader picture of the region and its place in world events. I refer to the entire area between Pakistan and Morocco, which is predominantly Arab, predominantly Moslem, but includes many non-Arab and also significant non-Moslem minorities.

Why do I put aside Israel and its own immediate neighborhood? Because Israel and any problems related to it, in spite of what you might read or hear in the world media, is not the central issue, and has never been the central issue in the upheaval in the region. Yes, there is a 100 year-old Israeli-Arab conflict, but it is not where the main show is.

The millions who died in the Iran-Iraq war had nothing to do with Israel.

The mass murder happening right now in Sudan, where the Arab Moslem regime is massacring its black Christian citizens, has nothing to do with Israel.

The frequent reports from Algeria about the murders of hundreds of civilian! in one village or another by other Algerians have nothing to do with Israel.

Saddam Hussein did not invade Kuwait, endangered Saudi Arabia and butchered his own people because of Israel. Egypt did not use poison gas against Yemen in the 60's because of Israel.

Assad the Father did not kill tens of thousands of his own citizens in one week in El Hamma in Syria because of Israel.

The Taliban control of Afghanistan and the civil war there had nothing to do with Israel.

The Libyan blowing up of the Pan-Am flight had nothing to do with Israel, and I could go on and on and on.

The root of the trouble is that this entire Moslem region is totally dysfunctional, by any standard of the word, and would have been so even if Israel would have joined the Arab league and an independent Palestine would have existed for 100 years. The 22 member countries of the Arab league, from

Mauritania to the Gulf States, have a total population of 300 millions, larger than the U.S. and almost as large as the EU before its expansion. They have a land area larger than either the US or all of Europe. These 22 countries, with all their oil and natural resources, have a combined GDP smaller than that of Netherlands plus Belgium and equal to half of the GDP of California alone. Within this meager GDP, the gaps between rich and poor are beyond belief and too many of the rich made their money not by succeeding in business, but by being corrupt rulers. The social status of women is far below what it was in the Western World 150 years ago.

Human rights are below any reasonable standard, in spite of the grotesque fact that Libya was elected Chair of the UN Human Rights commission. According to a report prepared by a committee of Arab intellectuals and published under the auspices of the UN, the number of books translated by the entire Arab world is much smaller than what little Greece alone translates. The total number of scientific publications of 300 million Arabs is less than that of 6 million Israelis. Birth rates in the region are very high, increasing the poverty, the social gaps and the cultural decline. And all of this is happening in a region, which only 30 years ago, was believed to be the next wealthy part of the world, and in a Moslem area, which developed, at some point in history, one of the most advanced cultures in the world.

It is fair to say that this creates an unprecedented breeding ground for cruel dictators, terror networks, fanaticism, incitement, suicide murders and general decline. It is also a fact that almost everybody in the region blames this situation on the United States, on Israel, on Western Civilization, on Judaism and Christianity, on anyone and anything, except themselves.

Do I say all of this with the satisfaction of someone discussing the failings of his enemies? On the contrary, I firmly believe that the world would have been a much better place and my own neighborhood would have been much more pleasant and peaceful, if things were different.

I should also say a word about the millions of decent, honest, good people who are either devout Moslems or are not very religious but grew up in Moslem families. They are double victims of an outside world, which now develops Islamophobia and of their own environment, which breaks their heart by being totally dysfunctional. The problem is that the vast silent majority of these Moslems are not part of the terror and of the incitement but they also do not stand up against it. They become accomplices, by omission, and this applies to political leaders, intellectuals, business people and many others. Many of them can certainly tell right from wrong, but are afraid to express their views.

The events of the last few years have amplified four issues, which have always existed, but have never been as rampant as in the present upheaval in the region. These are the four main pillars of the current World Conflict, or perhaps we should already refer to it as "the undeclared World War III."

I have no better name for the present situation. A few more years may pass before everybody acknowledges that it is a World War, but we are already well into it.

The first element is the suicide murder.

Suicide murders are not a new invention but they have been made popular, if I may use this _expression, only lately. Even after September 11, it seems that most of the Western World does not yet understand this weapon. It is a very potent psychological weapon. Its real direct impact is relatively minor. The total number of casualties from hundreds of suicide murders within Israel in the last three years is much smaller than those due to car accidents. September 11 was quantitatively much less lethal than many earthquakes. More people die from AIDS in one day in Africa than all the Russians who died in the hands of Chechnya-based Moslem suicide murderers since that conflict started. Saddam killed every month more people than all those who died from suicide murders since the Coalition occupation of Iraq.

So what is! all the fuss about suicide killings? It creates headlines.

It is spectacular. It is frightening. It is a very cruel death with bodies dismembered and horrible severe lifelong injuries to many of the wounded. It is always shown on television in great detail. One such murder, with the help of hysterical media coverage, can destroy the tourism industry of a country for quite a while, as it did in Bali and in Turkey.

But the real fear comes from the undisputed fact that no defense and no preventive measures can succeed against a determined suicide murderer. This has not yet penetrated the thinking of the Western World. The U.S. and Europe are constantly improving their defense against the last murder, not the next one. We may arrange for the best airport security in the world.

But if you want to murder by suicide, you do not have to board a plane in order to explode yourself and kill many people. Who could stop a suicide murder in the midst of the crowded line waiting to be checked by the airport metal detector? How about the lines to the check-in counters in a busy travel period? Put a metal detector in front of every train station in Spain and the terrorists will get the buses. Protect the buses and they will explode in movie theaters, concert halls, supermarkets, shopping malls, schools and hospitals. Put guards in front of every concert hall and there will always be a line of people to be checked by the guards and this line will be the target, not to speak of killing the guards themselves. You can somewhat reduce your vulnerability by preventive and defensive measures and by strict border controls but not eliminate it and definitely not win the war in a defensive way. And it is a war!

What is behind the suicide murders? Money, power and cold-blooded murderous incitement, nothing else.

It has nothing to do with true fanatic religious beliefs. No Moslem preacher has ever blown himself up. No son of an Arab politician or religious leader has ever blown himself. No relative of anyone influential has done it. Wouldn't you expect some of the religious leaders to do it themselves, or to talk their sons into doing it, if this is truly a supreme act of religious fervor? Aren't they interested in the benefits of going to Heaven? Instead, they send outcast women, naive children, retarded people and young incited hotheads. They promise them the delights, mostly sexual, of the next world, and pay their families handsomely after the supreme act is performed and enough innocent people are dead.

Suicide murders also have nothing to do with poverty and despair. The poorest region in the world, by far, is Africa. It never happens there. There are numerous desperate people in the world, in different cultures, countries and continents. Desperation does not provide anyone with explosives, reconnaissance and transportation. There was certainly more despair in Saddam's Iraq than in Paul Bremmer's Iraq, and no one exploded himself.

A suicide murder is simply a horrible, vicious weapon of cruel, inhuman, cynical, well-funded terrorists, with no regard to human life, including the life of their fellow countrymen, but with very high regard to their own affluent well-being and their hunger for power.

The only way to fight this new "popular" weapon is identical to the only way in which you fight organized crime or pirates on the high seas: the offensive way. Like in the case of organized crime, it is crucial that the forces on the offensive be united and it is crucial to reach the top of the crime pyramid. You cannot eliminate organized crime by arresting the little drug dealer in the street corner. You must go after the head of the "Family."

If part of the public supports it, others tolerate it, many are afraid of it and some try to explain it away by poverty or by a miserable childhood, organized crime will thrive and so will terrorism. The United States understands this now, after September 11. Russia is beginning to understand it. Turkey understands it well.

I am very much afraid that most of Europe still does not understand it. Unfortunately, it seems that Europe will understand it only after suicide murders will arrive in Europe in a big way. In my humble

opinion, this will definitely happen. The Spanish trains and the Istanbul bombings are only the beginning. The unity of the Civilized World in fighting this horror is absolutely indispensable. Until Europe wakes up, this unity will not be achieved.

The second ingredient is words, more precisely lies.

Words can be lethal. They kill people. It is often said that politicians, diplomats and perhaps also lawyers and business people must sometimes lie, as part of their professional life. But the norms of politics and diplomacy are childish, in comparison with the level of incitement and total absolute deliberate fabrications, which have reached new heights in the region we are talking about. An incredible number of people in the Arab world believe that September 11 never happened, or was an American provocation or, even better, a Jewish plot.

You all remember the Iraqi Minister of Information, Mr. Mouhamad Said al-Sahaf and his press conferences when the US forces were already inside Baghdad. Disinformation at time of war is an accepted tactic. But to stand, day after day, and to make such preposterous statements, known to everybody to be lies, without even being ridiculed! in your own milieu, can only happen in this region. Mr. Sahaf eventually became a popular icon as a court jester, but this did not stop some allegedly respectable newspapers from giving him equal time.

It also does not prevent the Western press from giving credence, every day, even now, to similar liars. After all, if you want to be an anti-Semite, there are subtle ways of doing it. You do not have to claim that the Holocaust never happened and that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem never existed. But millions of Moslems are told by their leaders that this is the case.

When these same leaders make other statements, the Western media report them as if they could be true.

It is a daily occurrence that the same people, who finance, arm and dispatch suicide murderers, condemn the act in English in front of western TV cameras, talking to a world audience, which even partly believes them. It is a daily routine to hear the same leader making opposite statements in Arabic to his people and in English to the rest of the world. Incitement by Arab TV, accompanied by horror pictures of mutilated bodies, has become a powerful weapon of those who lie, distort and want to destroy everything.

Little children are raised on deep hatred and on admiration of so-called martyrs, and the Western World does not notice it because its own TV sets are mostly tuned to soap operas and game shows. I recommend to you, even though most of you do not understand Arabic, to watch Al Jazeera, from time to time. You will not believe your own eyes.

But words also work in other ways, more subtle. A demonstration in Berlin, carrying banners supporting Saddam's regime and featuring three-year old babies dressed as suicide murderers, is defined by the press and by political leaders as a "peace demonstration." You may support or oppose the Iraq war, but to refer to fans of Saddam, Arafat or Bin Laden as peace activists is a bit too much. A woman walks into an Israeli restaurant in midday, eats, observes families with old people and children eating their lunch in the adjacent tables and pays the bill. She then blows herself up, killing 20 people, including many children, with heads and arms rolling around in the restaurant. She is called "martyr" by several Arab leaders and "activist" by the European press. Dignitaries condemn the act but visit her bereaved family and the money flows.

There is a new game in town: The actual murderer is called "the military wing," the one who pays him, equips him and sends him is now called "the political wing" and the head of the operation is called the "spiritual leader." There are numerous other examples of such Orwellian nomenclature, used every day not only by terror chiefs but also by Western media.

These words are much more dangerous than many people realize. They provide an emotional infrastructure for atrocities. It was Joseph Goebels who said that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it. He is now being outperformed by his successors.

The third aspect is money.

Huge amounts of money, which could have solved many social problems in this dysfunctional part of the world, are channeled into three concentric spheres supporting death and murder. In the inner circle are the terrorists themselves. The money funds their travel, explosives, hideouts and permanent search for soft vulnerable targets.

They are surrounded by a second wider circle of direct supporters, planners, commanders, preachers, all of whom make a living, usually a very comfortable living, by serving as terror infrastructure. Finally, we find the third circle of so-called religious, educational and welfare organizations, which actually do some good, feed the hungry and provide some schooling, but brainwash a new generation with hatred, lies and ignorance. This circle operates mostly through mosques, madras's and other religious establishments but also through inciting electronic and printed media. It is this circle that makes sure that women remain inferior, that democracy is unthinkable and that exposure to the outside world is minimal. It is also that circle that leads the way in blaming everybody outside the Moslem world, for the miseries of the region.

Figuratively speaking, this outer circle is the guardian, which makes sure that the people look and listen inwards to the inner circle of terror and incitement, rather than to the world outside. Some parts of this same outer circle actually operate as a result of fear from, or blackmail by, the inner circles. The horrifying added factor is the high birth rate. Half of the population of the Arab world is under the age of 20, the most receptive age to incitement, guaranteeing two more generations of blind hatred.

Of the three circles described above, the inner circles are primarily financed by terrorist states like Iran and Syria, until recently also by Iraq and Libya and earlier also by some of the Communist regimes. These states, as well as the Palestinian Authority, are the safe havens of the wholesale murder vendors. The outer circle is largely financed by Saudi Arabia, but also by donations from certain Moslem communities in the United States and Europe and, to a smaller extent, by donations of European Governments to various NGO's and by certain United Nations organizations, whose goals may be noble, but they are infested and exploited by agents of the outer circle.

The Saudi regime, of course, will be the next victim of major terror, when the inner circle will explode into the outer circle. The Saudis are beginning to understand it, but they fight the inner circles, while still financing the infrastructure at the outer circle.

Some of the leaders of these various circles live very comfortably on their loot. You meet their children in the best private schools in Europe, not in the training camps of suicide murderers. The Jihad "soldiers" join packaged death tours to Iraq and other hotspots, while some of their leaders ski in Switzerland. Mrs. Arafat, who lives in Paris with her daughter, receives tens of thousands Dollars per month from the allegedly bankrupt Palestinian Authority while a typical local ringleader of the Al-Aksa brigade, reporting to Arafat, receives only a cash payment of a couple of hundred dollars, for performing murders at the retail level.

The fourth element of the current world conflict is the total breaking of all laws.

The civilized world believes in democracy, the rule of law, including international law, human rights, free speech and free press, among other liberties. There are naive old-fashioned habits such as respecting religious sites and symbols, not using ambulances and hospitals for acts of war, avoiding the mutilation of dead bodies and not using children as human shields or human bombs.

Never in history, not even in the Nazi period, was there such total disregard of all of the above as we

observe now.

Every student of political science debates how you prevent an antidemocratic force from winning a democratic election and abolishing democracy. Other aspects of a civilized society must also have limitations.

Can a policeman open fire on someone trying to kill him?
Can a government listen to phone conversations of terrorists and drug dealers?
Does free speech protect you when you shout "fire" in a crowded theater?
Should there be death penalty, for deliberate multiple murders?

These are the old-fashioned dilemmas. But now we have an entire new set.

Do you raid a mosque, which serves as a terrorist ammunition storage?

Do you return fire, if you are attacked from a hospital?

Do you storm a church taken over by terrorists who took the priests hostages?

Do you search every ambulance after a few suicide murderers use ambulances to reach their targets?

Do you strip every woman because one pretended to be pregnant and carried a suicide bomb on her belly?

Do you shoot back at someone trying to kill you, standing deliberately behind a group of children?

Do you raid terrorist headquarters, hidden in a mental hospital?

Do you shoot an arch-murderer who deliberately moves from one location to another, always surrounded by children?

All of these happen daily in Iraq and in the Palestinian areas. What do you do? Well, you do not want to face the dilemma. But it cannot be avoided.

Suppose, for the sake of discussion, that someone would openly stay in a well-known address in Teheran, hosted by the Iranian Government and financed by it, executing one atrocity after another in Spain or in France, killing hundreds of innocent people, accepting responsibility for the crimes, promising in public TV interviews to do more of the same, while the Government of Iran issues public condemnations of his acts but continues to host him, invite him to official functions and treat him as a great dignitary. I leave it to you as homework to figure out what Spain or France would have done, in such a situation.

The problem is that the civilized world is still having illusions about the rule of law in a totally lawless environment. It is trying to play ice hockey by sending a ballerina ice-skater into the rink or to knock out a heavyweight boxer by a chess player. In the same way that no country has a law against cannibals eating its prime minister, because such an act is unthinkable, international law does not address killers shooting from hospitals, mosques and ambulances, while being protected by their Government or society.

International law does not know how to handle someone who sends children to throw stones, stands behind them and shoot with immunity and cannot be arrested because he is sheltered by a Government. International law does not know how to deal with a leader of murderers who is royally and comfortably hosted by a country, which pretends to condemn his acts or just claims to be too weak to arrest him. The amazing thing is that all of these crooks demand protection under international law and define all those

who attack them as war criminals, with some Western media repeating the allegations.

The good news is that all of this is temporary, because the evolution of international law has always adapted itself to reality. The punishment for suicide murder should be death or arrest before the murder, not during and not after. After every world war, the rules of international law have changed and the same will happen after the present one. But during the twilight zone, a lot of harm can be done.

The picture I described here is not pretty. What can we do about it?

In the short run, only fight and win. In the long run only educate the next generation and open it to the world. The inner circles can and must be destroyed by force. The outer circle cannot be eliminated by force. Here we need financial starvation of the organizing elite, more power to women, more education, counter propaganda, boycott whenever feasible and access to Western media, Internet and the international scene. Above all, we need a total absolute unity and determination of the civilized world against all three circles of evil.

Allow me, for a moment, to depart from my alleged role as a taxi driver and return to science. When you have a malignant tumor, you may remove the tumor itself surgically. You may also starve it by preventing new blood from reaching it from other parts of the body, thereby preventing new "supplies" from expanding the tumor. If you want to be sure, it is best to do both.

But before you fight and win, by force or otherwise, you have to realize that you are in a war, and this may take Europe a few more years. In order to win, it is necessary to first eliminate the terrorist regimes, so that no Government in the world will serve as a safe haven for these people. I do not want to comment here on whether the American-led attack on Iraq was justified from the point of view of weapons of mass destruction or any other prewar argument, but I can look at the postwar map of Western Asia.

Now that Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are out, two and a half terrorist states remain: Iran, Syria and Lebanon, the latter being a Syrian colony. Perhaps Sudan should be added to the list. As a result of the conquest of Afghanistan and Iraq, both Iran and Syria are now totally surrounded by territories unfriendly to them. Iran is encircled by Afghanistan, by the Gulf States, Iraq and the Moslem republics of the former Soviet Union. Syria is surrounded by Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Israel. This is a significant strategic change and it applies strong pressure on the terrorist countries.

It is not surprising that Iran is so active in trying to incite a Shiite uprising in Iraq. I do not know if the American plan was actually to encircle both Iran and Syria, but that is the resulting situation.

In my humble opinion, the number one danger to the world today is Iran and its regime. It definitely has ambitions to rule vast areas and to expand in all directions. It has an ideology, which claims supremacy over Western culture.

It is ruthless.

It has proven that it can execute elaborate terrorist acts without leaving too many traces, using Iranian Embassies. It is clearly trying to develop Nuclear Weapons. Its so-called moderates and conservatives play their own virtuoso version of the "good-cop versus bad-cop" game. Iran sponsors Syrian terrorism, it is certainly behind much of the action in Iraq, it is fully funding the Hezbollah and, through it, the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, it performed acts of terror at least in Europe and in South America and probably also in Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia and it truly leads a multinational terror consortium, which includes, as minor players, Syria, Lebanon and certain Shiite elements in Iraq. Nevertheless, most European countries still trade with Iran, try to appease it and refuse to read the clear signals.

In order to win the war it is also necessary to dry the financial resources of the terror conglomerate. It is pointless to try to understand the subtle differences between the Sunni terror of Al Qaeda and Hamas and the Shiite terror of Hezbollah, Sadr and other Iranian inspired enterprises. When it serves their business needs, all of them collaborate beautifully.

It is crucial to stop Saudi and other financial support of the outer circle, which is the fertile breeding ground of terror. It is important to monitor all donations from the Western World to Islamic organizations, to monitor the finances of international relief organizations and to react with forceful economic measures to any small sign of financial aid to any of the three circles of terrorism. It is also important to act decisively against the campaign of lies and fabrications and to monitor those Western media who collaborate with it out of naiveté, financial interests or ignorance.

Above all, never surrender to terror.

No one will ever know whether the recent elections in Spain would have yielded a different result, if not for the train bombings a few days earlier. But it really does not matter. What matters is that the terrorists believe that they caused the result and that they won by driving Spain out of Iraq. The Spanish story will surely end up being extremely costly to other European countries, including France, who is now expelling inciting preachers and forbidding veils and including others who sent troops to Iraq. In the long run, Spain itself will pay even more.

Is the solution a democratic Arab world? If by democracy we mean free elections but also free press, free speech, a functioning judicial system, civil liberties, equality to women, free international travel, exposure to international media and ideas, laws against racial incitement and against defamation, and avoidance of lawless behavior regarding hospitals, places of worship and children, then yes, democracy is the solution.

If democracy is just free elections, it is likely that the most fanatic regime will be elected, the one whose incitement and fabrications are the most inflammatory. We have seen it already in Algeria and, to a certain extent, in Turkey. It will happen again, if the ground is not prepared very carefully. On the other hand, a certain transition democracy, as in Jordan, may be a better temporary solution, paving the way for the real thing, perhaps in the same way that an immediate sudden democracy did not work in Russia and would not have worked in China.

I have no doubt that the civilized world will prevail. But the longer it takes us to understand the new landscape of this war, the more costly and painful the victory will be. Europe, more than any other region, is the key. Its understandable recoil from wars, following the horrors of World War II, may cost thousands of additional innocent lives, before the tide will turn.

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