

Das Bruno Kreisky Forum lädt zu folgender Veranstaltung:

Mittwoch, 8. November 2006, 19.00 Uhr:

Tariq Ali
The Clash of Fundamentalisms:
Crusades, Jihads and Modernity

Moderation: **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

(In Zusammenarbeit mit dem *British Council Austria* und *Dialogue Among Civilizations*)

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(in englischer Sprache)

Tariq Ali, writer, journalist and film-maker. Born in Lahore in 1943. He was educated at Oxford University, where he became involved in student politics, in particular with the movement against the war in Vietnam. On graduating he led the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. He owned his own independent television production company, *Bandung*, which produced programmes for Channel 4 in the UK during the 1980s. He is a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio and contributes articles and journalism to magazines and newspapers including *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books*. He is editorial director of London publishers *Verso* and is on the board of the *New Left Review*, for whom he is also an editor. His fiction includes a series of historical novels about Islam: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), *The Book of Saladin* (1998), *The Stone Woman* (2000) and *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005). His non-fiction includes 1968: *Marching in the Streets* (1998), a social history of the 1960s. A book of essays, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, was published in 2002. It was followed by *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonisation of Iraq* (2003), *Rough Music: Blair/Bombs/Baghdad/London/Terror* (2005). His books are published in several languages.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof, journalist and Managing Foreign Editor of *Profil*

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Gertraud Auer

Good evening Mr. Ambassador, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends of the Kreisky Forum, thank you for coming in such a big number. We are very honoured that you came to listen to our distinguished guest, Mr. Tariq Ali. We organized this evening together and with the support of the British Embassy and the British Council and with an Austrian NGO "Dialogue amongst Civilizations". I thank very much Mr. Reinhard Gosch who approached me some months ago if we would be partners in inviting Mr. Tariq Ali to come to Vienna and to talk to us. I will hand over to Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof who is responsible for the foreign desk of the Austrian weekly *Profil*. He will be the moderator tonight.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

The number of people coming today shows that Tariq Ali does not need any introduction. Nevertheless, I will give some personal impressions. It was February 1968, I was a young student at a Vietnam conference in Berlin. It was a big event where the crème de la crème was speaking, with thousands of people at the TU Berlin. There was Ernest Mandel, the Marxist theoretician, leader of the Trotzkytes, there was Alain Krivine, there was, of course, Dutschke. And then there was a young, very brilliant speaker of Pakistan. He had a wonderful Oxfordian English. He was heavily attacking American imperialism in the Vietnam war. This was Tariq Ali. He was the leader of the British student movement, and would become the leader of the British 1968 movement. Tariq Ali was born and raised in Lahore. He studied at the Punjab University. Lahore was a city in British India which later became Pakistan. He organized already there student demonstrations against the military dictatorship in Pakistan. When he was twenty, his parents were fearing for his safety and sent him to Oxford where he studied philosophy, economy, politics. He became president of the Oxford Union Debating Club. In the late 1960's and 1970's he emerged as figurehead of the British new left, an anti-imperialist activist and one of the leaders of British Trotzkyism. In the 1980's he abandoned revolutionary activism and went more to the publishing side. He supported the left socialist Tony Benn in his bid to become deputy leader of Labour. For some years Ali owned his own television production. He contributed regularly

essays and other articles to the main European newspapers and magazines. Ali is on the editorial board of *New Left Review*, the main leftist theoretical magazine in Great Britain. Apart from a lot of political books, like *Bush in Babylon*, about the war in Iraq, and the *Clash of Fundamentalism*, Tariq Ali has written a lot of fictions, historical novels having Islamic background like *The Book of Saladin*, *A Sultan of Palermo*. Four years ago I had an interview with Tariq Ali in London. It was before the war in Iraq. He was speaking about the future, what will happen, and it was exactly what happened since the war started. Please, Tariq, the floor is yours.

Tariq Ali

Thank you very much, Georg, for those nice works and thank you very much to the Kreisky Forum for this invitation to address you. I will explain in the course of my talk why this means a great deal to me and why I am very touched and honoured to speak at a Forum, in the house where Bruno Kreisky lived for most of his life.

What I would like to do today is try and be as hard-headed and realistic as possible in assessing what is going on in the world. Because while the Middle East occupies the center of the world political stage as we all know, Blitz on Afghanistan, sweep through the Westbank, occupation of Iraq, cordon around Iran, re-invasion of Lebanon, and these are, of course, very grave and serious events, nonetheless the discussion which takes place in the academies both of the United States and the rest of the world about this being the beginning of the decline of the American empire is slightly farfetched. I want to try and explain why. Because unless one is capable of forming a sober estimate of the situation in the world it is very difficult to intervene politically or in any other way.

Now, if you look at the world over the last twentyfive years the single most important event in this world, and if we are looking also towards the end of the century, at its beginning now, I would say that the single most important development that has taken place has been the re-emergence or the emergence of China as what we could call the workshop of the world. This is a matter of some significance. And this is not just the growth of an outsized national economy which is the way people who want to put that development down show it, but this is rather, I would argue, a structural alteration in the world market closer to Victorian England and what happened in the 19th century than the baroque concerns of the gilded age. It is a major development and it would be foolish to ignore this. Of course, this development in China is a capitalist development. It is the growth of the most dynamic capitalism that we are seeing and it is transforming economic relations in the globe and will probably sooner or later begin to have its effect on politics. The Chinese development has triggered off a growth once again in Japan after a decade of deflation and stagnation. The Japanese economy is now on the rise again on the back of Chinese demand with a growth rate which exceeds that of Europe. So the two most dynamic sectors of the world today in terms of capitalist economics are China, Japan, and you could add to that the Far East sector. And, of course, if the Koreans pushed off, got a soft re-unification that both the South Korean elite and the North Korean leadership want, you would then have another major economic development: If they don't do it like the Germans did it who did in slightly an exaggerated way and are still paying the price, and the Koreans have learned from the Germans how not to do a re-unification and, I am sure, will do it in a much, much careful and more thought-out way when they get round to it. The point I am making is that the changes we are seeing in the world show a big shift of the economic locus to the Far East. And this is something which is going to have longterm impact.

Then, if you look at what is going on in Russia after a great deal of chaos and semi-anarchy and the breakdown of the society following the collapse of communism we now see Russia stabilized by a neo-authoritarian regime funded by the world commodities boom, much less dependent on the West than Yeltsin was. Putin, precisely because he is less dependent from the West, sees less need to simulate democratic niceties. He can ignore them. He is not dependent at all, but at the same time in real terms a far more solid and dependable partner for both the United States and the European Union. If you look then at India – and why I am talking about these countries is because if we are discussing the state of

the world: 60% of the world's population lives in China, the United States, the European Union, India, and Brazil and 80% from the world's GDP comes from these sectors of the world. Which is why it is important to get some sense of proportion as to what is going on. I will come to the Middle East, I am not going to forget. But I am just trying to put a world in perspective. And, of course, India is part of that. In India you have now the birth of a very large middle class with international, Western consumer and celebrity culture which has taken over that country. Of course, it has numerous problems. Its growth rate is not as high as that of China. It has mass poverty. It has giant social movements. And it has a democratic system which means that the people can sometimes intervene in politics to stop what they don't like. These are niceties the Chinese don't have. Which is what tax and business men sometimes envy when they go to China is that they don't have any problems. They can just make decisions and do what they want. Which is why they explain their capitalism is so dynamic.

The United States is being run by a regime which by and large – what I am going to say may surprise some of you –, with the exception of the Middle East after 9/11, more or less preserved a continuity with the previous Clinton administration. It was not till after 9/11 that there were some breaches in continuity. And these breaches, of course, have cost the Republicans their position in the American House of Representatives and will probably even lose them the Senate. The reason for it is the unpopularity of the war in Iraq and the large scale corruption which was evidenced in the giant scandals symbolized by Enron which people have not forgotten because lots of people lost money in these things. But by and large in the United States you have an elite which has preserved a certain continuity. What we have in the world today, what we see in its early stages is the emergence of a new concert of powers, not unlike the old concert of powers which emerged after the defeat of the French Revolution under Napoleonic wars, with increasing levels of formal and informal coordination to preserve and maintain the stability and status quo of the new order. That is what we are seeing. With one big difference. And this difference is, of course, the fundamental difference. That in the time of Metternich there was, of course, a concert of different powers. They were rivals in some ways but also allies in trying to preserve what they felt needed to be preserved. The big difference today is that the United States as an imperial power enjoys a hegemony over the world that has not been seen before and probably will unlikely be seen since. It is a very unusual situation in global history to have one power which is so dominant in world politics. It has not happened before. And this is something very new which essentially flows from the collapse of communism and the Cold War, that in the vacuum that existed we had the development of a single, unipolar world with the United States militarily, if not economically, and ideologically in total and complete control. You just have to look at the size of the US military budget. It is larger than the next eight military budgets of the countries after it put together. And the increase in the US military budget a year and a half ago was the total size of the Chinese military budget. So the military technology developed by the United States would enable them, if they so desired, which, of course, they won't, to destroy the entire world with this technology. There is no power on earth which is capable of resisting them militarily. I mean in a sense of resisting them of defeating them. Why I say this is because historically new empires have arisen and old empires have fallen in the middle of wars, and conflicts, and world wars. As you know full well, it was the First World War which led to the downfall of the empire which was based in this country, which was based in Istanbul, and which was based in imperial Berlin. The downfall of these empires led to the strength and hegemony of other empires, but it was always in the plural. Even at its peak the British Empire was never alone. It always had its rivals, not as strong as it, but they were there. And that is the big difference in the world today, that the United States is alone and there are no countervailing powers in the world which could resist or stop it when it should be stopped.

The only thing to be said about the European Union is that while it has spread itself and while its integration of the former Warsaw Pact zone quite peacefully into the European Union has been a tremendous gain for European capitalism, at the same time the European project as it was conceived by its founders is floundering. It is an open question whether Europe now in this enlarged form can ever play an effective political role and be a political entity. It can be an economic entity and quite a strong one. But it will not in this shape or form be a political entity. We saw this very clearly in the Iraq war

where there was a divide just between old and new Europe. Britain backed the Iraq war and was, in fact, rather instrumental at an early stage in pushing for certain things in that war. But so did Italy. So did initially Spain. So did Portugal. And, of course, the entire Eastern European bloc which seems to have moved seamlessly from a position of being satellite states of the Soviet Union to becoming satellite states of the United States quite happily, and this time voluntarily. But nonetheless, this is essentially what has happened. So Europe as a political entity is rather weak. I think this is unlikely to be resolved in the near future unless there is some big division. And the idea which was put forward by De Gaulle and Adenauer at an early stage, the logic of that idea was to create a European political entity and then, once that had been created and strengthened and had been given time to play a role in the world, to allow other countries into it on the basis of what had already been agreed. Of course, at the time of the Cold War that could have been probably because there was an independence there which was enjoyed by the European powers even though they were not necessarily politically united. I give you one example. During the Vietnam war not a single European country, member of Nato or not, sent troops to fight in Vietnam. In the case of the Iraq war, several decades later, this was not the case. What happened in the meantime was precisely the change in status of the United States and the removal of all counterveiling powers.

If I can describe these large countries which dominate the world's economy and its population and its gross domestic product as the house of harmony despite odd disagreements amongst them, let us now look at the house of war. This house of war, of course, concerns largely the Middle East and what is taking place there. I start with a part of the world which is rarely discussed now in polite society because people feel embarrassed. In the United States a serious discussion is virtually impossible on this subject. And increasingly in Europe this discussion does not take place which brings me to what I started off saying to you. Which is that Bruno Kreisky was one of the only politicians of his class and of his stature who actually stood up and defended the Palestinians against what was being done to them by the Israeli regime. He did it courageously. He was denounced by the Zionist establishment in Israel time after time, but he did not step back from that. There is not a single political leader in Europe who does that, and who can do that, or has the authority to do that, and the past to do that. But this is a big, big tragedy.

In the United States till now a discussion on US policy in relations with Israel has been virtually impossible. At last there is a small break taking place because two senior establishment academics, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, wrote a very powerful text saying that American foreign policy was being warped by the increasing interdependence with Israel and the strength and power of the Israel lobby inside the United States itself. People talked about this privately, no one had said it publicly. These two academics from the realist school of American foreign policy, from the heart of the old foreign policy establishment, wrote this. The magazine in the United States which had commissioned them to write it, the *Atlantic Monthly*, refused to publish the article when they read it. And finally it was published by the *London Review of Books*, across ten or twelve pages of this magazine. Once it was published in the *London Review of Books*, then it was discussed by the American press and it created a storm. And the storm it should have created was not about what these guys are saying is right or wrong. Instead the storm it created for much of the press was, why did the write this in the first place. And that has been the big problem. Subsequently a discussion thanks to the *London Review of Books* has opened up, including in the American press. Following this article the *New York Review of Books* published a piece by own of its senior journalists, Michael Massing, saying now that Walt/Mearsheimer did not go far enough, and actually publishing the amount of money paid by AIPAC, the Israeli lobby in the United States, to Democratic and Republican candidates and the pressure they exercised on these candidates, etc. Which is why you see in the middle of the current American election campaign, when the former American president Jimmy Carter published a book called *Peace not Apartheid* – and this came out a few weeks ago -, virtually every Democratic leader bent over backwards to say that Carter did not speak for the Democratic Party which I would have thought wasn't a big secret in the United States. But the fact that they felt obliged to say this was to tell the people they knew that this is Carter, who may have been President, but we did not support him on

this question at all. But at least a debate is now opening up. And why this debate is extremely important is for the following reason. That true friends of Israel and the Jewish people owe it to them to tell them the truth. That is why this debate is important, apart from what it means for the Palestinians.

In my opinion there were two solutions possible in Palestine. One was a just Palestinian state, not little shrivelled up Bantustans overlooked by Israeli tanks, with Israeli settlements in the heart of them. That is a debased way of living for anyone. But a proper, just Palestinian state, possibly based on the 1967 frontiers, possibly a bit more, but around that. That would have worked. That the Israelis were not prepared to do. The Oslo Accords were not a return to the 1967 frontiers. They were, as the late Edward Said called them, the Palestinian Versailles. They virtually gave everything up. Then what happens, a new Intifada begins in Palestine, largely against Sharon's provocation when he visited the Al Aksa mosque, but also against what the Oslo Accords did not achieve. And that Intifada was partially also against the corrupt Palestinian leadership of Arafat and his cronies who were getting a lot of money from the European Union and basically pocketing it, and pocketing large amounts of it, and not spending it as it should have been spent on the wellbeing of the Palestinians they had under their protection, schools and hospitals. They said that every time we built something the Israelis came and bombed it which is also true. But that does not mean that you pocket the money and build large big homes for yourself, and amass cars, and all the crappings and paraferalia of a banana republic. That is what he did. So the revolt of the Palestinians was partially against that as well. And the electoral victory of Hamas is a response to that. On the one hand the West goes on to the Arab world about democracy. When they exercise democracy and elect a government the West does not like they say we are going to cut you off money, treating this elected authority as if it was a sort of minute and insignificant NGO, saying if you don't behave we won't pay you any money. So the situation is a complete mess. That was one possibility.

And incidentally, just as a footnote to those of us who follow what goes on in Palestine every day, what is happening in Gaza today is an absolute outrage and a disgrace. Civilians, women, children are dying every single day. And the Western liberal conscience is blind to Palestinian suffering. They were not responsible for the Judeocide of the Second World War, but they become the indirect victims of that event. Because of that Judeocide the establishments of the West are reluctant to really take Israel on which it should be. Because if one American government had said, enough is enough, we are not doing anything violent, we will stop all subsidies and impose sanctions unless you pull back to the 1967 frontiers, it would have been done. It could have been done twentyfive, thirty years ago. But it isn't done. In Gaza today it is like a ghetto in every sense. That's what it is. Yes, they fire rockets because they live in a world where life and death don't matter. And a very distinguished Israeli Zionist leader about a year and a half ago published a text in an Israeli newspaper in which he said, the way we treat the Palestinians and what we do to them, are you surprised in the way they react they do, because if we were treated like that we, too, would react like that. So there are very decent people in Israel who know what is going on and attack it much, much more sharply than the apologists of Israel in the West. And for them I have nothing but enormous regard and sympathy. If you look at the website of Ha'aretz which has a Hebrew and an English website you see far more criticism of what is being done by the Israelis to the Palestinians than you do in any Western paper. That is just a fact.

I will now tell you a few more things. When the Israeli refusnik pilots said publicly that they would no longer go and bomb Palestinian villages and issued a statement, saying we will defend Israel's frontiers of 1967, we will not go beyond them because we were recruited to the Israeli airforce, not to the mafia to carry out revenge killings. And these Israeli pilots were sacked and their children were spat upon at schools. They demanded the right to go and address Israeli citizens and were not allowed that right. And a very courageous Israeli journalist did something so provocative that even I couldn't have dreamt it up. This was a journalist called Yehuda Nuriel, a Jew from an Iraqi Jewish family. Nuriel wrote a column in this large newspaper, Ma'ariv, called *In Nuriel's Desert* where he published stuff from all over the world. After the refusnik pilots were insulted in Israel this guy did something quite astonishing. He went into the library and dug out from Hitler's speeches all the attacks on dissidents,

wiping out the context, the frenzied language, put it together into an article and said, this piece arrived on my desk, signed by A. Schicklgruber, and this is attacking the Israeli refusnik pilots, and I thought I would publish it. For three days people were ringing him up to congratulate him. Other magazines began to publish this article. This article was published in Ma'ariv by this guy who no one knew because the Israelis thought that this language was defending them against the refusnik pilots. What happened then? Someone in Jerusalem read it, and rang the newspaper, and said, you crazy sons of so and so, do you know what you have done? So the paper apologized and Nuriel was sacked. And he gave a press conference and said, I knew I have been sacked, but I am really glad I did it. That is the sort of journalist for whom I have enormous respect, because he was angered by that. Or the Israeli colonel who said, if you send us to crush the Palestinian villages we will have to use the same tactics that the Waffen SS has used to crush the Warsaw Ghetto. So there are people who say these things in Israel which is great. It is very important. But the point is that they say them, and it is not said by and large in the West and criticism is very muted.

I was saying that the choice is either a just Palestinian state or, if that is not acceptable, a single state solution. There is not third alternative except misery for both sides, for Israelis and for Palestinians. Recently I was speaking in London. After the talk, a lot of Hamas people and PLO people surrounded me because I said things like this which they don't like either, by the way. They said to me in a very provocative way, well, what would you do in our place then. I said, I would dissolve the Palestinian authority immediately because it is not really an authority. It has no authority at all. I would say publicly, this authority does not exist, we have no real power to do anything, we dissolve it. And we are now at the mercy of the world and the entities that exist here, and we want to be citizens of whatever exists and try to create a situation where violence is ended, and with us citizens of the entity, you then have civil movements and mass movements. That is a possibility. Now, this is a long shot. But it is better than what goes on today. It is much, much better than what goes on today. I don't think there is a third solution of tiny little Palestinian enclaves which are nothing more than protectorates of one sort or the other. That is the situation in Palestine which keeps people worked up and bittered, angry, encourages some young people to become terrorists etc.

The second situation in the Middle East, of course, is Iraq which is a total disaster and was a predictable disaster. Some of us did predict that this would happen. Paul Wolfowitz, one of the architects of this war when he was at the Pentagon, and now president of the World Bank, when he was recently interviewed was asked, why did things go wrong in Iraq. He said, we did not predict the resistance. But the question is, what are your bloody intelligence agencies doing? Of course, some of the people in the American intelligence will say, this is not true, some of us warned them that this was not going to be a walk-over like Kosovo. It is a totally different part of the world and there would be a big resistance, but they ignored us completely. So you now have a total and complete mess in that country. And the interesting thing is that the debate on Iraq is often provoked by military people in the United States and recently in Britain. Those of you who know Britain know that traditionally British military officers rarely speak in public. In the United States they do. And they even join political parties and become presidents of their country. It is a different political tradition from that in Britain. In Britain that is unheard of. At least since the English Civil War and the settlement of 1688 that has not happened. But when the commandeering chief of the British armies, Sir Richard Dannatt, publicly says that we are sliding into a total disaster and it is a chaotic situation he is doing something which opposition politicians and people within the government should be doing, saying this is a disaster. And Richard Dannatt said, people want us to get out which every single opinion poll is showing. So the net result of the Iraq war so far has been the encouragement of inter-ethnic rivalries, the possible break-up of the country. I am still not convinced that this will happen. But one thing that has happened without any doubt – this was certainly not the intension of the United States – is that the strongest regional power in that region will now be Iran, without any doubt at all. An Iraqi government, after the occupation is over, whatever its political complexion, is bound to have a security and trade agreement with Iran. They should have done this ages ago, by the way, but they did not. But that is normal for that part of the world now, and that will happen, which is agitating many of the client states of the United

States in the region. In the Southeast the Gulf shakes and all these people who get very worried by this possibility. But that to my mind is now virtually unavoidable. That is what they have done. That is why, when there was a big of hue and cry over Iran is going to be invaded, I angered many of my colleagues and friends by saying, Iran will never be invaded. It is rocket rattling.

Why Iran will never be invaded is a) there is not a force to do it. The American army, the volunteers have completely dried up, and there are not enough mercenaries to do it. The second largest force in Iraq is the mercenaries, the third is the British army. So after the United States, the mercenaries are the second largest force recruited from different parts of the world. The guy who killed Steve Biko, the black African leader in South Africa, finally died in Iraq actually, serving as a mercenary. This is not going to work indefinitely. And there is no way they could invade Iran, just inconceivable. Even if they did a rapid lightning bombing raid on the nuclear reactor the Iranian are very confident. They said, we are not going to fight them in Iran. If they bomb us we fight them in Iraq and Afghanistan and unravel both these occupations within a matter of months. Very few people realize this, but neither the occupation of Iraq or of Afghanistan could have happened without tacit Iranian approval which they gave because it suited their own interests because Saddam and the Taliban were their enemies, too. But that has, in fact, without any doubt strengthened them in that part of the world. So this is the situation in Iraq, I don't think we are going to get out of .

The big question is how did this irrational aberration take place? The sort of normal Pavlovian response is oil. But the United States doesn't need that oil. Secondly, they were already buying Iraqi oil from third parties and even they could have done a deal with Saddam, as they have done many years before, and worked with him. So there is no question that anyone was denying the oil. I think here Mearsheimer/Walt's claim that the Israeli lobby was decisive, I am not even sure of that. Because if they did not want to make the war no one could force them. It is true if they Israelis had said, don't attack Iraq, that will destabilize the region, they probably would not have. But I don't think anyone can compel them to actually go and fight a war. This will be sorted out. And American agencies are busy working on enquiries into this as to why this has happened. Then, once they had gone there, there was a division within the American establishment. After Saddam had been removed Rumsfeld said, we should withdraw immediately. That was his initial gut reaction. Of course, the generals wanted that. Colin Powell went in and said no, we have to do something else. Well, what they have done is, of course, a total disaster. And if they had done that and pulled out, the people in Iraq would have been compelled to work together to reach some solution and settlement. But it is now a complete and utter disaster.

And the third big Middle East crisis which recently erupted was the Lebanon. Let me just say that traditionally Hezbollah and the Israelis fight each other, they also negotiate. There are 9.000 Arab prisoners in Israeli jails. And often the Palestinians capture an Israeli soldier and use him as a trading thing. One Israeli soldier normally gets them twenty prisoners released. And they did it again. But they did not know that an action had been prepared. And it is now very obvious from what is being published in the United States that this war had been prepared. And the aim of the war was to go in and destroy Hezbollah and disarm it. And it is basically from the point of view of those who perpetrated and backed this war it has done the exact opposite. It has made Hezbollah the single largest player in the country, with 60% of the Christian population of Lebanon saying we support what they did. So ironically, Lebanon was a tiny coastal strip taken out of Syria by the French when they left after the Second World War as a sort of puppet state which they could control and which has always been a state in a vacuum. With the removal of the Syrians a new vacuum was created. The Israelis thought they could transform this into a Jordanian style protectorate and they failed. By failing they actually delivered Lebanon to the Hezbollah which is a very strong force. I am not surprised Hezbollah is calling for new elections because it would probably, if not get the majority, become the largest player in the country. But what is shocking about the war is not just that it happened but that after a week, when it became obvious that that objective was not going to be achieved, the west refused to call for a ceasefire. Bush and Blair said publicly, give them another week, see if you can finish the job in another

week. And the infrastructure of this country built really piecemeal after the 1982 civil wars and invasions was destroyed. I was there about six weeks before the war. We were sitting out in the sunshine enjoying Beirut. And we heard big bombings in the south. There was a tiny altercation with the Israelis and people said, this happens all the time, don't worry. But the destruction of that country's social infrastructure was an absolute disgrace. And the west stood by and watched this happening. And then when nothing further could happen and it was obvious Hezbollah was being strengthened and not weakened, then they moved in. Now there is a UN force which hopefully will keep the peace, but can't do very much else. But this was also revealing about the Israeli army which people should take note of that this is not the army which was created in 1948, or the army of 1956, or the army of 1973. These are young kids in Israel, growing up like kids everywhere else, totally globalized kids, playing war games on the internet etc. They are not that ideologically motivated. And when they went to fight a war which they thought they would win, they were shocked that there were people actually standing there and fighting back. And the chaos which has been reported in the Israeli press is very revealing on this front. Which is why I say that it is in Israel's own longterm interests to accept a settlement.

These are the brief points I have made on the state of the world and the horrors in the Middle East. I end just briefly on this, that one of the big problems now certainly in the Middle East is that most of the people resisting imperial occupations whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, or even Lebanon are people who resist militarily which is their right to do, but who have no social vision which liberation movements in the early years of the 20th and late 20th century used to have. And this poses a problem for people in that part of the world.

And here the last part of the world which I have not discussed where there is some elements of social democratic hope being re-created and re-born is in the Latin American continent where you have a whole new rise of social movements. And virtually every single Latin American country without exception is producing a new wave of leaders and politicians who are not promising what Fidel Castro and Che Guevara used to promise, but who are promising that they will try and use the resources they have to improve the living conditions of the poor. The reason Hugo Chávez is so vilified is because he has got the oil to do it and has begun to organize a radical redistribution in Venezuelan society. But if you look at what he is doing, these were the traditional programs of Swedish, Austrian, British social democracy after the Second World War. Spending state money to build schools, hospitals, land reforms, public housing for the poor in that part of the world who have never had it before and who have been completely ignored by the oligarchies that have dominated that world. And this is what has created the excitement. And this is what is worrying the United States. And what we need, really, is many people in the United States who speak up and talk to them. People on their own side, people who actually tell them what the future of their own world is going to be and could be if they carry on making the mistakes they made. Chávez has been elected five times by different means in his country. They tried to topple him once by a military coup backed by the United States and the European Union. The thirdrate businessman crook they found to make president travelled to Madrid and had himself measured for a presidential sash in a Madrid tailor's outfitter shop. It is just a sort of joke. He fell within fortyeight hours because the soldiers mutinied and the people poured out onto the streets.

But I wanted to read something out to you from the 18th century which shows that you can have within imperial regimes real people of vision who can see the future and warn their governments. When Simon Bolivar, the great liberator of Latin America, was sixteen years old he arrived in Madrid, didn't like it because he was partially treated as inferior because he had a trace of bad blood in him, as they used to say, got angry and moved on to France where he met all the French revolutionaries because, of course, this was 1799. But unknown to Bolivar in 1783, just soon after the US Declaration of Independence, a leading Spanish courtier, the Count of Oranda, had written a memorandum warning against trying to hold on to colonies by force and suggesting the following measures to the Spanish King. Bear in mind that this is written in 1783. This is what the Count of Oranda wrote:

“Great possessions cannot be held forever. The present situation is rendered more difficult by the enormous distances which hamper the dispatch of help, by the slowness of the authorities and the selfishness of the government. That pygmy republic” - he is referring to the United States – “which today needs France and Spain to exist at all will one day grow into a colossus, will forget all the benefits it has received at the hands of both powers and will dream only of might. The freedom of conscience, the growth of a huge population in that vast territory, the advantages of the new government will draw workmen and peasants from all countries for men pursue success. And the time will come when we should painfully feel the tyranny of this giant. It will then attempt to get Florida and the Gulf of Mexico into its power, will hamper our trade with New Spain and endeavour to conquer to it since the two countries are strong and adjacent while we shall hardly be able to defend them. These apprehensions, Sire, are only too well founded unless their realization is forestalled by other, yet graver changes in our parts of America. Everything will combine to urge our subjects to fight for their independence at the earliest opportunity. We should therefore give up all our possessions, retaining only Cuba and Puerto Rico in the north and a small part of the south to provide us with ports for our trade. To realize this idea in a way worthy of Spain three infantas should be made kings of Mexico, Peru, and the Costa Fama, your Majesty, of course, receiving the title of Emperor. Trade should be built up on terms of perfect equality. The four nations must feel themselves bound by an alliance, offensive and defensive for their common welfare. Since our industry is unable to provide South America with all necessities France must send them. England on the other hand must be rigorously excluded.”

But Charles III dismissed Oranda as an inveterate pessimist.

It is this sort of thinking that we need in the United States today to tell them that the road that they are heading towards, if they carry on operating like this, will not be able to save them. The reason for that is this: The Americans can suffer military setbacks. People go on about Vietnam which was a big, big setback for them. But who would have dreamt at that time that ten years after that setback the American president would enter Moscow as a conquering hero. And who would have dreamt at that time that American cooperations would be welcomed in Vietnam and the Pentagon would be sending several missions to joint-joint military manoeuvres. One has to think in the longterm. And in the longterm, unless the American people want to change the way they are governed, and how they are governed, and what their government does, it is very difficult to foresee changes. This is why my old sparring partner Samuel Huntington has now come up with a new theory. He has abandoned *The Clash of Civilizations*, thank God, and thank Allah, and thank Yehova for that, and is now saying that the big problem we have to confront in America is the size of the growing Hispanic population. Of course, they are all christians, but they are catholics. And he says that these are people who are threatening the traditional hegemony of our ruling class which, of course, is the white Anglo-Saxon, protestant layer that has governed the country more or less indefinitely since independence. And therefore he said, we have to stop this. And it is being taken seriously. A big barbed wire wall is being constructed to stop Mexicans from coming in. But it is true that you now have a gigantic Hispanic population in the United States. In parts of the United States, Texas, the West Coast, Spanish is the first language. In many other parts it is the second language. Here you have possibilities. These are people still very close to their countries in Latin America. That the social visions if it proceeds well could begin to infiltrate the United States. That is the population that has to be won over and convinced if there is going to be lasting changes and lasting progress towards a better world. Thank you.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

The elections in the United States. What can that produce for the politics in the Middle East. Is there any change possible?

Tariq Ali

The Democratic Party was very careful not to make Iraq a central point of dispute or in some cases a point of dispute with the Republicans. They largely fought the war on domestic issues and corruption in

Washington. According to all the opinion polls 37% of the American population on the other hand said that for them the war in Iraq was a big thing and one of the central factors which would decide their vote. It looks unlikely that this will change too much in the Middle East because on all the central issues there has been a bi-partisan consensus in the United States. However, let's be a bit optimistic and say that possibly some of the Democrats would be more open to pressures from below. Probably what will change is that some of the more plans the neo-cons had for domestic policies will now not take place and that political christianity which is very strong in the United States will probably be kept at bay, because they were playing a very big part in determining American domestic policies. So from that point of view it is a useful development. But in terms of the world the Democrats have had a long time to come up with an alternative and they haven't. The only thing we can say and hope is that if the joint chiefs of the Pentagon go to the Democrats and say, there is nothing else to do, we have got to get out quick, that they might then listen to them. That is a possibility which certainly Bush and his neo-cons haven't. The other thing is, given that they have lost the House, will Bush now sacrifice Rumsfeld, the senior warlord in the United States, particularly in relation to the Middle East, in order to try and create some atmosphere for finding a candidate to try and win the next election. But apart from that I don't foresee too many changes.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

There are a lot of reasons given not to pull out quickly. There could be chaos, even civil war, destabilization of the whole region. What would you say to arguments like that?

Tariq Ali

I would say this is already happening. If the figures of the Johns Hopkins team from Baltimore who went to Iraq and did medical estimates are even tri-quarters correct then we have lost nearly 700,000 Iraqi civilians since the occupation which means that Saddam is not the only one who should be tried by the International Court. The notion that the longer the Western powers stay the more the situation will be stabilized is always said in virtually every occupation. But my view is completely the opposite. It will not be great after they leave. How could it be? It is a real mess. But I think the chance the country has of sticking together will be enhanced by a quick withdrawal. If not, you will have these constant battles, clashes, wars for competing positions. Much better to withdraw as rapidly as possible. I don't think there is really any other alternative. The longer they stay the bigger the mess. US casualties and even British casualties are on the increase. Sometimes you read the media and you think they are only killing each other. That is not the case. The Americans lost sixty soldiers in October, the highest for two and a half years. It is not something which is going to go away.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

The proposition you made for the solution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the one-state solution. That is an old idea. But isn't that a little bit utopian? Who would want that solution? At the moment nobody in Israel would want it. Also the Palestinians would not want it. That is an interesting and old idea. But has that any realism in it?

Tariq Ali

It is an old idea. And it is an idea which was first put forward by a small group of very courageous people in Israel who said, we don't want to live in a state which is totally ethnocized, we would rather live with other people from different cultures. But in any event, you are right. It seems at the moment a utopian idea. It might not seem so utopian in twentyfive years time if this situation carries on. This situation which exists now is absolutely untenable. And it only goes on because the West will do absolutely nothing to restrain Israel. That is the main reason it goes on. This is a situation which destabilizes the Arab world endlessly. And this is what also encourages religious extremism and fundamentalism in the region because no one else seems to act or do anything. All I am saying is that we don't have a third solution. The one solution of an independent Palestinian state in my opinion is long gone and dead in the water. So this is the only solution we have. And I think we have to work towards it, it is not going to happen immediately.

Question

I appreciated so much what you had to say about Israel and Palestine. I think it is very important to say these words in this building. There has been a recent appointment of an extreme right-wing minister in Israel, Lieberman, who has said he wants the Palestinians in Israel and outside of the green line to be surgically removed. Knowing what is going on in Gaza now, a population of 1.400.000 people, how many people have died in the last few months there? Is there going to be something much worse to happen? This is the direction of the Israeli government because this man was appointed. I am wondering really whether there will be a big ethnic cleansing rather than two states or one state, that Israel will be a Jewish state without any Palestinians in it or in the occupied territories.

Question

It is a personal question on the first chapter of your introduction. It is in a statement of you that you have never believed in god. Is it your statement? Do you still believe in god or not?

Tariq Ali

The question on elevation of Avigdor Lieberman to the Israeli cabinet and whether this will lead to ethnic cleansing. One hopes that there would be some elements in the Israeli Labor Party - who have gone along with everything - who would balk at such an ethnic cleansing. But it is discussed in that society. And it is discussed in the usual simplistic way, that all we are doing is getting rid of terrorists and saving ourselves. It would be a very shortsighted thing to do because it would treble and quadruple the bitterness that already exists in that part of the world and it would be counterproductive. It would not be a real solution for them. I think if they begin to implement that there will be trouble in the region and possibly elsewhere in the world. We should not exclude that at all. But we should not let it reach that situation. Here, I think, it is a responsibility of the European Union and those who have any influence on it to try and stop this from happening. As to whether this will then lead to Israel being a totally single ethnic state I don't think that is the case. Leaving aside the Palestinians and the Arabs who live in Israel there is a big debate as to how many Jews there really are there because lots of people claim that most of the Russians who went there are not, strictly speaking, belonging to the faith, but actually went and settled there. This is a debate which goes on. Some people argue that that majority had already disappeared. It would be foolish to make things worse from everyone's point of view. One wants that region to become a region where the different cultures can live together as they did for a long, long time in the past. Particularly Jews and Muslims historically have been much closer to each other, in Islamic Spain, in Arab Sicily, in the Arab world during the crusades. So it is not the case that there is just a big, big rivalry between them. That has been created by a political problem. The displacement of the Palestinians, the destructions of their villages, the creation of Israel. You have got to try and move towards a solution.

As to the person who asked if I believe in god. It is true that I have never been a believer. The only thing that it now shocks people to say this in public. And that is something that worries me. Because it is the case and always has been the case in large parts of the worlds, including the Islamic world, that you have people who are religious, you have people who are non-religious, you have people who are skeptics, you have people who believe, and you have people who don't believe. The problem is no one ever talks about it. And I decided to say this especially after 9/11. I get so many emails on this question from young kids in the Islamic diaspora in Europe and in the rest of the world. Sometimes young Muslim kids come up to me and say, we are very worried, because we really think you are very intelligent, but who could you be if you don't believe in the entity. So I said, well, I could turn that round on you guys and say, if you are how could you believe in something like that. So it is a debate which has to be had and which we should not push aside which is why I say it. It is not done to provoke and it has not had that impact.

Question

You mean, you did not criticize the believer? You are convincing those young people vice versa. You did not have the intent to convince them?

Tariq Ali

Well, I don't know. I hope I did. They have not written and said that to me. But I hope I did shake something.

How do you deal with religious fundamentalism? It is something which you have to contextualize, what it is and how it is grown up. Normally, if you ask anyone in the Western world, have a sort of word association and you say religious fundamentalism, in Europe mainly you say Islam. In the United States it is a bit different. But the fact is that there has been a big, big rise in religious fundamentalism all over the world, including the Islamic world, but not just in that world. The rise in the United States has been sensational which is why it creates such a storm when yet another religious is found to have been doing things which he was preaching every week on his television against doing, such as homosexuality, and then he is found in bed with a young boy. This hypocrisy is constantly being exposed. But it is very strong. When I travel on US campuses which I do a great deal often you find very strong religious born-again Christian student groups who I argue with. Then you have a situation where some religious politics is acceptable, but not others. I give you an example. During the whole Polish uprising against communism Solidarnosc and its leaders were praying every single day on their feet, doing the sign of the cross, the Polish churches were heavily involved in it, there was no problem at all with that. People thought that this was quite a good thing. Then you have in Europe an old tradition which became developed even more after the Second World War of parties which called themselves christian democratic parties. The fact that they don't behave in a particularly christian way is neither here nor there. They call themselves that in Germany and in Italy. They don't call themselves that in this country, but they exist here as well. That is the reality of the situation. And currents exist because of a rise in religion especially since the end of the Cold War, and a big vacuum in this globalized world. You have Islamist currents in the Islamic world, and they are not Al Kaida. You have to ask yourselves how come that Iranian society which has been ruled by clerics since the late 1970's produces some of the most advanced cinema today, which actually, if you look at it purely objectively, is way in advance of anything being produced in Hollywood and even Europe which had a tradition which is gone because they mostly mimic Hollywood now in Europe. But in Iran the production of good films is quite consistently. Despite what exists on the top interesting things emerge. Then you have in Turkey a party which is the ruling party today which is an Islamic equivalent for christian democratic party, socially quite conservative, but not challenging anything, not pushing people into directions they don't want to go in. It has been ruling quite comfortably. I stress these things to say that denying the Egyptians, or the Syrians, or the Saudis the right to elect their own governments on the grounds that they might produce Islamist governments is wrong in my opinion. What the French did in Algeria in intervening to stop an election halfway through created a civil war for four, five years in which tens of thousands of people died as a result. The best way people learn is through their own experiences. They will learn like that in Iran, they will learn like that elsewhere. I am not in favor of any foolish attempt to crush normal political groupings which are religious. It is not the way to proceed. And it won't succeed in any case. Al Kaida is a tiny splinter organization. The whole Muslim world is more or less against it. And different currents within that world, even religious currents, are opposed to it. Argument, debate, discussion, democratic accountability is the way to deal with it. Create atmosphere in which they are forced to listen to counter-arguments.

Question

My question is related to the other question on political Islam or to fundamentalist movements. Actually it seems to me that what is denominated as the war against terrorism, proclaimed after September 11, with the occupation of Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq has been accompanied on the cultural level by the so-called clash of civilizations that you also mentioned earlier. In my opinion the main aspect of this clash of civilizations is the fact that Islam as a religion and Muslim people as

people are being depicted as being the main evil and the main enemy. My question on the political level is whether it wouldn't be necessary for all democratic people to oppose this depiction of Islam and Muslim people as evil? The second question on an analytical level is, how do you analyze political Islam? It seems to me that, unlike to what is said currently, many Islamic movements in Islamic countries are not that much religious movements but more political movements. Also the phenomenon of political Islam is more a political phenomenon than a religious phenomenon.

Question

One point is on the juxtaposition of two states and one state. This does not work in this way. It is too abstract to juxtapose these two concepts. The only bridging idea would be to support any kind of policies which are based on some kind of a bi-national principle. If this leads to two states, fine. If it doesn't that, also fine. But the basic idea should not be a concept of what should be in the future, but what should be pursued now. The second point is, you did not use the word islamophobia. But, of course, we have all the problems especially relating to the Middle East you talked about, the perception of these problems is very much influenced by a kind of demonization of Islam at the moment. Where would you draw the line between legitimate criticism of Islam, or any religion actually, and islamophobia? Do you think that the concept of islamophobia is appropriate or should be re-formulated?

Question

Sharon is not insane and he did not try to go into the Al Aksa mosque. You said, when he was trying to go into the Al Aksa mosque, to do that would have been insane. He was on the Temple Mound. Would you agree on the awfulness of Israeli propaganda and public relations who, for example, haven't even made any point of the fact that Muslims are killings blacks in their thousands in Africa. I am talking about Darfur which you have not mentioned. But Darfur is something decent people don't mention. And finally about Solidarnosc. Can you tell me, when did Solidarnosc put bombs into underground trains, in Warsaw or elsewhere?

Question

You said that you hope and you think that Israel won't do any ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip. But how do you call the things they do now? Not only the killings, but also what they do on the borders? They don't let in the people again, they don't let in the Palestinians and their families again. Those people are waiting outside. They are waiting in Amman, they are waiting in Europe to go back to Palestine. That is ethnic cleansing, isn't it.

Tariq Ali

About political Islam, war against terrorism, Islam as an evil political Islam. As far as the war against terror is concerned we now have a report prepared by the American intelligence agencies which was leaked to the American press, which is one of the more endearing qualities in that country, which actually said the war against terror had succeeded in creating more terrorists which is something some of us had said right at the beginning. That if you decide to deal with this problem there are two ways of dealing with it. One is to deal with the problem as the British did on the Irish question when their mainland was being bombed, and the city of London was being hit, when the IRA came close to wiping out the entire British cabinet and hurt some cabinet ministers. Within six months of that event serious political discussions were taking place to find a political solution. And it is my opinion that the causes of some of these actions which result in senseless carnage are political. And you cannot solve these questions by waging wars. It will not succeed. It has not succeeded in the past. And the Spanish are now following the British example in the Basque country. Zapatero has opened discussions, ignored the right. And mercifully in Britain this was started by the Conservative Party, these negotiations and discussions. And that is the way to deal with it.

As far as the Islam question is concerned, which links to another question asked later on, I will deal with both these together. It is true that there is a lot of ignorant and vile propaganda against Islam and

Islamic culture which does the rounds, especially amongst the low end of the media and regularly on Fox News in the United States of America. It is just unacceptable. It is mainly false. And it tries to vilify a whole culture which it sometimes succeeds in doing. And this has to be resisted. The question is, how do you fight it? In my opinion you fight this, as I have been arguing in other cases, politically, you challenge it, you question it. There is no other way of dealing with it. This is something that we have to deal with. If some of the things being said about Muslims today were transposed and said about Jews there would be absolute horror and a complete outcry. And rightly so. But these are things which should be unacceptable. So the word islamophobia is a useful word because it certainly exists a great deal in parts of Europe and the United States, and has to be dealt with.

Whether political Islam is more political than religious? You are right. It isn't just religious. For instance the element of suicide terrorism which has come up a lot, naturally, in this world. There is an American academic, a very old distinguished professor at the University of Chicago, Robert Pape, who has just spent the last ten years of his life researching a book on suicide terrorism. He studied virtually every single case over the last ten years. He has come to the conclusion that the reasons for this suicide terrorism are 99 times out of a hundred political and not religious. On the other hand, most of these groups, even when they are fighting the United States in Iraq, tend to be very socially conservative in terms of what they offer to do for their own populations. I say this quite dispassionately, even if I was a believer I would say this. I don't think imposing the Sharia to the Muslim world, according to the different interpretations that there exist of it, is necessarily beneficial to that world. Of course, you will never find two different Muslims groups to agree with each other because there are a hundred and one interpretations, because there is no reference to these laws in the single text which the entire faith accepts, which is, of course, the holy Koran. If your politics are totally tied to religion, it ultimately affects your capacity to deliver what you promised to and wanted to deliver for your people. Charity is a very noble impulse which is what the Koran talks about. And obviously it is better than many of the things going on today. But on its own it is not sufficient simply to talk in terms of charity when it comes to a question of running a state.

Related to this question is what is legitimate and what is illegitimate criticism. This ties into the difference between – if I can put it like that – blasphemy and bigotry. I am not saying I accept it, but what is called blasphemy is something which often emerges from within the cultures of the three big religions themselves. Many poets, philosophers were called blasphemous. But they were people who made criticisms from within the framework of their cultures. The great Jewish philosopher Spinoza who was excommunicated in Amsterdam for saying that the Old Testament was a bunch of fairy tales. To my mind today an eminently reasonable thing to say. A great Muslim philosopher who lived in 12th century Cordoba wrote a text moving on from Aristotle in which he said that there is a difference between divine truth and reason. For that his books were burnt by some of the more extreme people in that city. Then came the inquisition which punished everything rather brutally and went beyond burning books to burning people. You have these. But these are traditions which emerge from within those cultures. Then you have bigotry which is what we saw in the massive Judeocide which took place in Europe during the Second World War, one of the worst crimes of the 20th century. Then you see some of the provocations which are being mounted today. When the Pope says what he does say about Islam, what annoys me is that the reaction should be critical, very critical because he is historically inaccurate. You cannot say that of all the religions Islam is the only one that has used force. For heavens sake. You forget the wars of the Reformation which shook this continent for nearly a hundred years. You forget the inquisition, you forget the ethnic cleansing from Jews and Muslims from Andalusia. So every religion by and large has had that aspect to it. But is that sufficient to define your religion? Because a religion is not simply a religion, the great religions are also great cultures. And often these cultures have coexisted. And if you want to make a balance sheet on who ended the coexistence, Islam's record on that is rather good. That is the way these arguments should be dealt with and not by demanding that the person who said them should be killed. I think that sometimes the inability to respond on a similar or even a higher level is a bit sad. I am not saying people shouldn't respond. The Danish cartoons in that right-wing paper were deliberately designed to provoke hatred. The way they portrayed

Muhammad was as a south-Asian migrant worker and that is where you have the largest migrant population in Denmark from. So it was very clear. And even then it has to be said. But it took a year for the provocation to succeed. It took a group of travelling Imams, agitating for one year before there were any protests about that. People have the right to protest against it, but there are different ways of doing so. I would encourage a protest that is effective rather than ineffective. That has always been my philosophy of life.

To return to the two-state, one-state solution. I don't disagree with you. If you put it as sharply as I did people go like this. But obviously this is a process. All I am saying is that the two-state solution is now dead in the water. It will never happen, unlikely to happen. If it happens I would be very pleased. And in some ways, creating a just state for the Palestinians might in fifty years time lead to a single state in that region. Who knows? But that is not happening at the moment. And the mere existence of the Palestinian Authority does not change anything. Rather it proves my case. It is a disaster what goes on there.

On the questions that were raised again about the brutality of everyday life for the bulk of the Palestinians crossing from one side or the other. I write about it all the time. I talk about it. You don't have to convince me. It is true. The question that is posed is, is the elected government of Israel going to push out all the non-Jewish people, all the Arabs from Israel?

Question

Is it an exchange of territories ...

Tariq Ali

You are already justifying it before it has even happened. Wonderful! That's what it would be, an exchange of territory. What territories? When the territories are being occupied by settlements which are eating into what was even agreed at Oslo? So what exchange of territories can there possibly be? The only exchange of territories can begin if the Israelis go back to the 1967 frontiers, divide, possibly accept dual control or UN control, make Jerusalem an international city and the capital of both countries, which would be a good thing. But they are not prepared to do that. And I hope that people like you will not justify ethnic cleansing. Don't even try and apologize for it because you do your own cause a great deal of harm.

I am pleased to hear from you that Sharon is not a lunatic. I never said that he was. I said that it was a provocation. And sometimes very sane, rational, and cold blooded people do carry out provocations. Whether it should have been reacted to like that is another question. But that is what it was. As to what he is today, unfortunately we can't determine because he is still in a state of coma.

As far as Muslims killing blacks are concerned. If you study the situation in Darfur it is not as simple as that because both sides are Muslim. That is what you did not know. Both sides in the Darfur crisis and tragedy that is taking place are Muslim. This is not a Christian versus Muslim thing. It is different tribes in that region fighting for lands and fighting for economic resources that don't exist because of big climactic changes that are taking place. That is a fight which is going on. And this is a fight which does require international help, but not of a military sort, but of a Marshall Plan support which actually sends in lots of help to all the tribes that have been affected. That some tribes or one particular tribe is more vicious than the other is absolutely true. But when you present it as Muslims killing blacks it is completely false. And I am slightly shocked to hear someone of your intelligence saying it.

Question

I apologize in advance for asking these questions by being a little bit critical. You mentioned that the second Intifada in Palestine made it seem as if it was spontaneous which I don't know if it was. You made it seem as if it was against Fatah, it was against Fatah corruption. But it has certainly been proved that Fatah and Arafat supported this Intifada in one way or another to more or less teach Israel a lesson.

You talked about American military hegemony. And you also said at one point that the United States can't be defeated. At the same time you talked about how military defeats such as Vietnam can happen. What has to be looked at is the larger picture. What you also said is, that Iran will not be attacked for reasons of military strategy, that it would be much more difficult to defeat Iran and so forth.

Question

You were talking about the state of the world. It is difficult not accepting most if not all of the elements of reality whether socio-economic, political, military that you listed as a dimension of current affairs which is taking place day by day on the surface of the globe, and the scope and the scale of power, and the concentration of power. I am very interested to seek your views on other dimensions of the movement which is going on parallel to this reality. Underneath this visible surface and concentration of power I think there is another movement going on, perhaps unorganized. But it is there, it is happening. One can see this dynamic development moving. I don't want to label it because everything which is labelled might not be correct. A kind of post-ideology, post-human-centric subjective approach in resolving problems in dispute or finding the solution whether political, economical, or even organized religion. There are clear signs that all organized ideological movements in different forms are losing at the same time their authority, resulting in that you use more power in order to replace authority that you are losing. For that reason you see that the role model is disappearing, either in the form of leadership or the kind of role model that you can look into and move towards it. I would like to know your views of this different movements.

Question

I was once listening to a lecture by a very well learned gentleman on Islam. He said that in the 11th, 12th, and 13th century the highest level of European culture took place in the south of Spain, and actually from there the treasures of the antique and the wisdom came into Europe. We all know that. Before the reconquista Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived there together in a glad culture. He then said that the Muslim clerics realized that this kind of enlightenment would diminish their power, and they managed to stop it. And from that point of time onwards the Maghreb and the rest of the Islam culture atrophied. Of course, the Catholic Church tried to do the same thing at the beginning of the Renaissance, burning scientists at the stake. But fortunately they did not succeed. The renaissance became the Aufklärung, and from then on plain sailing into modern times. Do you think there is a point in this?

Tariq Ali

On the first question on the second Intifada. I didn't mean that it was literally a rebellion against Arafat. But I meant that many people who participated in it were fed up with what the Palestinian Authority has not succeeded in doing and felt that they had gone too far at Oslo. Of course, this does not mean that you didn't have PLO people involved in it as well. But you also had many others who were critical. One of the reasons there was a big resentment was, that people felt that after the first Intifada the Israelis had deliberately gone and negotiated with the PLO leaders who were sitting in Tunis and who were not the leadership of the first Intifada. Because the interesting thing about the first Intifada was that it arose from within Israel, it produced an autonomous group of very intelligent modernist Palestinian leaders of which Hanan Ashrawi was one. But there were many others. And many people felt if they had negotiated with these people it would have been much better for everyone concerned. Instead they negotiated with Arafat who set up the parody of a normal Arab state on Palestinian territory which was really quite depressing. And then the Israelis, of course, punished him which somewhat revived his popularity, when they cut off electricity to Arafat's house, and he was filmed with candles looking like a Rembrandt selfportrait. That naturally excited a great deal of sympathy. But it did not solve the problem. That is the point I was making. I did not say that it was an organized rebellion against the PLO. No. But many people felt that. By the way, Mustafa Barghuti has written some very interesting stuff about all this recently in his book.

The question on Iran. I don't think the United States will attack Iran for either military or political reasons. There is no real current inside the US establishment apart from a tiny group of neo-con ideologues. Basically they are putting pressure on Iran on the nuclear question. And a much better way of putting this pressure would be to say, let's have a disarmament in the whole region. Iran is now surrounded by countries which are nuclear powers. You have Israel, you have Pakistan, you have India, you have nuclear warships patrolling the zone. I am not saying the Iranians will build these weapons. They have not said they will. But if they do who has the right to enforce this monopoly any more? That is the only point I was making. And the United States are not going to war over that. Even if the Israelis want something it is not going to happen. Because it is not in the interest of the United States to do this in this particular way. Even in the case of North Korea which is a totally different regime, a parody of a regime, and they can't even deal with that except for negotiations. This guy puts up a rocket, the dear leader, which goes up and falls down again, and it is not serious. But they will not attack the North Koreans because the South Koreans will not let them. They don't even want to. I have not read a single serious article in the American press by an important figure who actually justifies taking out Iran. It is pressure politics and rattling. Of course, some people sometimes ask me, but you make them too rational, after all they went to war in Iraq which was irrational. True. But precisely because of that they are not going to repeat that mistake again. Because Iraq had been depleted after years of sanctions. The Iranian army is actually pretty strong, and the population will be mobilized. Even Shirin Ebadi who won the Nobel Peace Prize came out and said, I defend my government. So it will be a wonderful way of uniting the entire population behind the clerics if they decide to do it. So I am pretty sure, as sure as one can be in this world, that this is not going to happen.

As to the remarks about post-ideology and new movements arising. There is an element of truth in this, of course. In my new book on Latin America I try to explain what is going on in this continent where some hope is being reborn not through religion, not through violence, but through democratically elected governments trying to push through social democratic reforms. It used to be mainstream in the rest of the world till very recently. There are these movements even in the United States. It is a very contradictory country which is why I hate it when people call me anti-American because I am genuinely not. I am totally hostile to American foreign policy and what they are up to. I travelled to that country more than almost anywhere else because I take it very seriously. You have weird things happening. Hugo Chávez goes to the UN General Assembly, makes a ferocious attack on Bush, going a bit over the top. But then he stops and says, I have just been reading this very important book by Noam Chomsky on US hegemony and containment, and I think American citizens should read it. And within fortyeight hours this book is the top bestseller on the amazon.com list, within five days it is number five on the New York Times bestseller list. When a hostile president comes and tells the American population to do this and they rush to do it, there is some hope left.

The question about the peak of Islamic civilization. I think most historians agree that the peak of this civilization was from the 9th to the 11th centuries. What made it that was that it was the historic bridge from the world of antiquity to the renaissance, and it was a very crucial bridge. And the culture of the old world was, of course, largely preserved in the texts that were translated into Arabic from the ancient languages. And this was then translated in many cases from Arabic into Latin. As to why that world collapsed is a long debate. There is no single reason for it. The great historian of the ancient world, Moses Finley, who was Professor of Ancient History at Cambridge, once wrote a book on the ancient world. In this book he argued that the big problem with Islam was that it was a religion that came to political power very fast before it had time to totally mature and develop its own political philosophy. So a lot of thinking was done on the hoof literally in this case. But at the same time it was never capable of transcending the early tribal structure. So you had lots of factional wars and rivalries. Finley said that if the leaders of Islam had succeeded in uniting their people and their armies we might not have just lost Constantinople, we came very close to losing Rome where Muslim armies were camped on the Tiber. He said they could have taken the whole thing. The great English earlier historian Gibbon in a counterfactual in his great history on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire muses about what might have happened if this had taken place and says, would many have complained if instead of by

church bells the colleges in Oxford and Cambridge had been called to prayer by the sound of the muezzin. Well, who knows. These are interesting debates. But I don't think you can say it fell simply because of a counter-reformation trend within Islam. The Spanish civilization collapsed for a variety of reasons. The principle one was the war waged by the reconquista. The Catholic Church decided it was going to take these lands back and they were unified. And the Muslims were not unified, either in Spain, or in Sicily, or in the Arab world. If you read the accounts of the crusades, Saladin complains bitterly that, uniting this world to get rid of the crusaders from Jerusalem is one of the most difficult tasks of his life, and he doesn't envy anyone else who is forced to do that task. And the echoes of that history remain with us today.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

Tariq Ali, thank you very much and thank all of you very much for coming tonight.