The horror of death and destruction of innocents in New York and Washington, the launching of an indefinite ‘war against terrorism’, the harassment and violation of those seen as Muslims and Arabs in America, the opportunistic attempts to equate the September 11 disaster with Israeli experience of terror (but not with that of the Palestinians) or alternatively to divert attention altogether from Israel’s brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by denying it has any connection, the absence of a real debate in our democracy. How to talk of ‘war against evil’ tends to encourage self-righteousness and revenge, of disrepute and hatred. In other words: All terrorists did on September 11. Not every argued, every one of their critics — US government, whether Jewish, Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh — or, for that matter, atheist. The talk in our media is of a war against the evil of ‘Islamic terrorism’. This already seems to me an ideological concession to terrorists, even if we make the ritual qualification by saying that most Muslims are ‘moderate Muslims’. I am reminded of polite anti-Semites talking about ‘good Jews’. The equation of Islam with terrorism is already made in the popular mind and ‘experts’ have leapfrogged to explain or qualify it. We should not be surprised at what is euphemistically called the ‘backlash’. The unfortunate consequences of the talk about terrorism are the promotion of further antagonsm against Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans, as well as further hostility towards Muslims and Arabs worldwide. We are in effect being urged to forget the range of recent non-state terrorisms — in Northern Ireland, Spain, Sri Lanka (even within the US, in Oklahoma and elsewhere) — which have no connection with Muslims. The silence of September 11 is that it was an attack by a group of foreigners against the United States — not against Britain or France or Germany or Japan. That alone makes it an attack ‘against humanity’, giving it a moral and legal status that none of the other cases of terrorism in our contemporary world has ever been given. A respected liberal daily carries an informative Special Report that explores wider questions. It is headed ‘Why Do They Hate Us?’ (Christian Science Monitor, 27 September 2001) and accompanied by numerous photographs of Muslims, people from different walks of life, young and old, men and women. The title represents an unfortunate but not atypical elision. Do ‘They’ (an indeterminate Muslim population) really ‘hate’ (not ‘criticize’ or ‘condemn’ or ‘feel bitterly about’) ‘Us’ (not particular American foreign policies but all Americans)? Intellectuals know the danger of loaded questions that pollsters sometimes employ: ‘Why do you hate us?’ Speak. Tell us what you feel. We (all Americans, government and people alike) are listening. I am sure this was not deliberate on the part of the Monitor, which means that it is part of the unconscious media culture. My own experience is that most people in the Muslim world are not consumed with hatred towards Americans but are deeply critical of the double standards used in foreign policy by US governments. Of course there are many who do express hateful or ignorant views about America and the West. But even among these not many would countenance, let alone do, what the terrorists did on September 11. Not every argued criticism of US policy should be represented as ‘hate’. Not every emotional response should be equated with a readiness to commit acts of terrorism. The connection between what people say (or hear) and what they do is often indirect.

Surely several things are needed to deal with terrorism. First of all: compassion for those who have experienced the horror, the comforting of the relatives and friends of victims, a return as quickly as possible to normality, an alert refusal to allow innocents in America — especially Muslim- and Arab-Americans — to suffer fear, harassment and worse. Secondly: we need greater security at home and the pursuit of the international criminals who have perpetrated this horror, but a pursuit that remains fundamentally within the framework of international law, and that is carried out with a concern that more innocents don’t suffer, and that our liberties aren’t curtailed. Surely, the international character of the struggle against terrorism consists not merely in its being an alliance of several countries to prevent further anti-American injury from abroad. More than America is at stake here. We need to prevent ‘terror’ from becoming a threat to the very conception of a just and secure world. It has recently been asserted that American intellectuals must not allow any justification of the criminal acts of September 11 to go unchallenged. Of course nothing, absolutely nothing, can excuse let alone justify the massacres in New York and Washington. But should that be the only concern of public intellectuals? Must we not also reject the terms in which the terrorists and their sympathizers would have us discuss this crisis? Whatever its origins, ‘terrorism’ is an abomination because it acts ruthlessly in a particular cause, it has contempt for the life of innocents, and it is ready to create and countenance chaos in what is believed to be ‘the enemy’s territory’. We must refuse to enforce such a return as quickly as possible to normality, the spontaneous anger and desire for revenge of those who have directly lost a relative or friend, public demand for retribution, for revenge. In other words: All terrorists did on September 11. Not every argued, every one of their critics — US government, whether Jewish, Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh — or, for that matter, atheist. The talk in our media is of a war against the evil of ‘Islamic terrorism’. This already seems to me an ideological concession to terrorists, even if we make the ritual qualification by saying that most Muslims are ‘moderate Muslims’. I am reminded of polite anti-Semites talking about ‘good Jews’. The equation of Islam with terrorism is already made in the popular mind and ‘experts’ have leapfrogged to explain or qualify it. We should not be surprised at what is euphemistically called the ‘backlash’. The unfortunate consequences of the talk about terrorism are the promotion of further antagonsm against Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans, as well as further hostility towards Muslims and Arabs worldwide. We are in effect being urged to forget the range of recent non-state terrorisms — in Northern Ireland, Spain, Sri Lanka (even within the US, in Oklahoma and elsewhere) — which have no connection with Muslims. The silence of September 11 is that it was an attack by a group of foreigners against the United States — not against Britain or France or Germany or Japan. That alone makes it an attack ‘against humanity’, giving it a moral and legal status that none of the other cases of terrorism in our contemporary world has ever been given. A respected liberal daily carries an informative Special Report that explores wider questions. It is headed ‘Why Do They Hate Us?’ (Christian Science Monitor, 27 September 2001) and accompanied by numerous photographs of Muslims, people from different walks of life, young and old, men and women. The title represents an unfortunate but not atypical elision. Do ‘They’ (an indeterminate Muslim population) really ‘hate’ (not ‘criticize’ or ‘condemn’ or ‘feel bitterly about’) ‘Us’ (not particular American foreign policies but all Americans)? Intellectuals know the danger of loaded questions that pollsters sometimes employ: ‘Why do you hate us?’ Speak. Tell us what you feel. We (all Americans, government and people alike) are listening. I am sure this was not deliberate on the part of the Monitor, which means that it is part of the unconscious media culture. My own experience is that most people in the Muslim world are not consumed with hatred towards Americans but are deeply critical of the double standards used in foreign policy by US governments. Of course there are many who do express hateful or ignorant views about America and the West. But even among these not many would countenance, let alone do, what the terrorists did on September 11. Not every argued criticism of US policy should be represented as ‘hate’. Not every emotional response should be equated with a readiness to commit acts of terrorism. The connection between what people say (or hear) and what they do is often indirect.
An expert's political agenda

Stephen Schwartz, intellectual and journalist, thinks differently. In his widely circulating article entitled ‘Ground Zero and the Saudi Connection’, first printed in The Spectator (22 September 2001), he claims to have discovered the real cause of the crime of September 11: the orthodox tradition of Islam that originated in Arabia called, by outsiders, ‘Wahhabism’, after the 18th-century Najdi reformer Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. In my view the article is typical of much irresponsible literature about ‘fundamentalism’ put out by the many ‘experts’ who eagerly pursue their own political agendas.

Wahhabis have often been likened to Puri
tans by Europeans for their severity in mat- ters of religion, their insistence on simplicity in worship and the equality of all believers, and their strict legalism. They are also now called ‘fundamentalists’ by critics. Schwartz grandly concedes that not all Muslims are ex-
tremists, that terrorism isn’t intrinsically con-

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