

This is not meant as criticism, any more than an adolescent can be criticized for being an adolescent. It is a necessary and inevitable state of development. But the United States is a young culture and as such it is clumsy, direct, at times brutal, and frequently torn by deep internal dissension—its dissidents being united only in the certainty that their values are best. The United States is all of these things, but as with Europe in the sixteenth century, the United States will, for all of its apparent bumbling, be remarkably effective.

EARTHQUAKE

THE U.S.—JIHADIST WAR

The American Age began in December 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving the United States as the only global power in the world. But the twenty-first century truly began on September 11, 2001, ten years later, when planes slammed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. This was the first real test of the American Age. It is debatable whether the United States has actually won the U.S.—jihadist war—but it has certainly achieved its strategic goals. And it is also clear that the war is, as all wars do, moving toward an end of sorts.

People talk about “the long war,” and the idea that the United States and Muslims will be fighting for a century. As is usually the case, what appears permanent is only a passing phase. Consider the twenty-year perspective we have been using. Conflict may continue, but the strategic challenge to American power is coming to an end. Al Qaeda has failed in its goals. The United States has succeeded, not so much in winning the war as in preventing the Islamists from winning, and, from a geopolitical perspective, that is good enough. The twenty-first century has begun with an American success that on the surface looks like not only a defeat but a deep political and moral embarrassment.