

We saw this in Vietnam and we see it in Iraq as well. These conflicts are merely isolated episodes in U.S. history, of little lasting importance—except to Vietnamese and Iraqis. The United States is a young and barbaric country. It becomes emotional quickly and lacks a sense of historical perspective. This actually adds to American power by giving the country the emotional resources to overcome adversity. The United States always overreacts. The emotional seems colossally catastrophic at one moment motivates Americans to solve problems decisively. An emerging power overreacts. A mature power finds balance. A declining power loses the ability to recover its balance.

The United States is a very young nation, and is even newer at being a dominant global power. Like a young and powerful adolescent, it tends to become disproportionately emotional about events that are barely remembered a few years later: Lebanon, Panama, Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo all seemed at the time to be extraordinarily important and decisive. The reality is that few people remember them—and when they do, they cannot clearly define what drew the United States into the conflict in the first place. The emotionalism of the moment exhausts itself rapidly.

The crucial flip side to this phenomenon is that the Lebanese, Panamanians, Kuwaitis, Somalis, Haitians, Bosnians, and Kosovars all remember their tangles with American power for a long time. What was a passing event for the United States becomes a defining moment in the other countries' histories. Here we discover the first and crucial asymmetry of the twenty-first century. The United States has global interests and involves itself in a large number of global skirmishes. No one involvement is crucial. For the countries that are the object of American interest, however, any intervention is a transformative event. Frequently the object nation is helpless in the face of the American actions, and that sense of helplessness breeds rage even under the best of circumstances. The rage grows all the more when the object of the rage, the United States, is generally both invulnerable and indifferent. The twenty-first century will see both American indifference to the consequences of its actions and the world's resistance and anger toward America.

## SUMMING UP

As the U.S.-jihadist war slithers to an end, the first line of defense against Islamic radicals will be the Muslim states themselves. They are the ultimate targets of al Qaeda, and whatever their views of Islam or the West, the Muslim states are not about to turn over political power to al Qaeda. Rather, they will use their national power—their intelligence, security, and military capabilities—to crush al Qaeda.

The United States wins as long as al Qaeda loses. An Islamic world in chaos, incapable of uniting, means the United States has achieved its strategic goal. One thing the United States has indisputably done since 2001 is to create chaos in the Islamic world, generating animosity toward America—and perhaps terrorists who will attack it in the future. But the regional earthquake is not coalescing into a regional superpower. In fact, the region is more fragmented than ever, and that is likely to close the book on this era. U.S. defeat or stalemate in Iraq and Afghanistan is the likely outcome, and both wars will appear to have ended badly for the United States. There is no question that American execution of the war in Iraq has been clumsy, graceless, and in many ways unsophisticated. The United States was, indeed, adolescent in its simplification of issues and in its use of power. But on a broader, more strategic level, that does not matter. So long as the Muslims are fighting each other, the United States has won its war.

This does not mean that it would be impossible for a nation-state to emerge in the Islamic world at some point that could develop into a regional power and a challenge to American interests. Turkey is the historic power in the Muslim world, and as we will see in the chapters that lie ahead, it is emerging again. Its rise will be the result not of the chaos caused by the fall of the Soviet Union, but of new dynamics. Anger does not make history. Power does. And power may be supplemented by anger, but it derives from more fundamental realities: geography, demographics, technology, and culture. All of these will define American power, just as American power will define the twenty-first century.