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## Dawn at the foot of the mountain

Moses Nagata

*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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## Dawn at the foot of the mountain

Mike Nagata

*By definition, [the writer] cannot serve today those who make history; he must serve those who are subject to it.*  
—Albert Camus

On April 9, a United States Marine corporal named Edward Chin draped an American flag over the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square. According to BBC reports, the flag was the very same flag that flew over the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Given this, the gesture seems worthy of scrutiny.

Most obviously, its significance is that of the reprisal. It suggests that the conquest of Iraq is retaliation for the attacks on New York and Washington. If this is the case, then it would be easy enough to point out that no empirical evidence exists linking the Iraqis to the events of September 11. Even the CIA admits as much. But, while it might be necessary to point out that the linking is also a leap, I think that ultimately it and similar acts of logical resistance are insufficient. We would do well to keep in mind Hobbes' famous words, "Force, and Fraud are in warre the two Cardinall vertues." Our censure could easily be taken for praise.

In any case, the act of violence that culminated in the enshrouding of the statue in the heart of Baghdad is not premised on such a link; on the contrary, it *establishes* that link. It is, in other words, a declaration and an example. The regime has minced few words on this point. It has done nothing to dispel the notion that the tanks rolling through the streets of Baghdad also, if only by implication, roll through the streets of Damascus and Tehran, if necessary,

Paris and Berlin. It is a demonstration of the dichotomy into which the regime is sculpting the world.

I am suggesting that the attack on Iraq read through the draping of the flag is a foundational act. Such acts do not require reference or justification outside themselves. They are sovereign. Here, it is worth quoting Carl Schmitt:


Only the actual participants can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence.<sup>1</sup>

The key to the *fait accompli* the regime is presenting the world is exactly that it exists. Through it, the world is separated into mutually exclusive categories, "Americans" and "terrorists". Thusly, our civilization begins to assume the shape given Argentine society by the Generals during the Dirty War, and the infamous statement of General Iberico Manuel Saint-Jean, the then-governor of Buenos Aires province, takes on a prophetic aspect: "First, we are going to kill all of the subversives; then their collaborators; then their sympathizers; then the indifferent; and finally, the timid."

Given this world-creating act that has now, *ex post facto*, split the world into the time before September 11 and the time after, there can be no recourse to, no *faith* in reason alone. As Gunter

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27.

Grass has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> those of us who have to this point survived must steel ourselves, commit ourselves, our whole selves, mind *and* body, once again to the task of *pushing the stone*. 

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<sup>2</sup> Gunter Grass, "The US Betrays Its Core Values," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 2003.