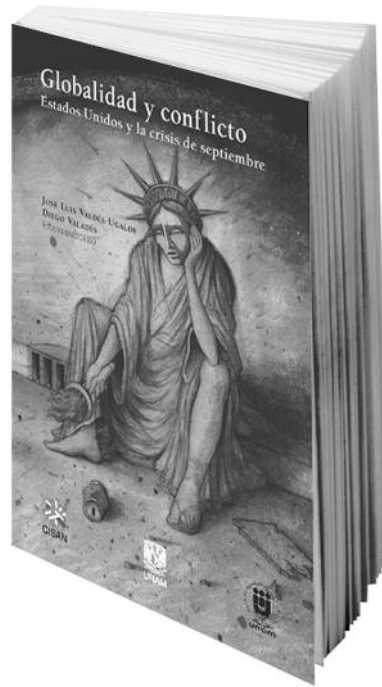


Reviews



Globalidad y conflicto: Estados Unidos y la crisis de septiembre

(Globality and Conflict: The United States and the Crisis of September)

*José Luis Valdés-Ugalde and
Diego Valadés, comps.*

Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte and Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM
Mexico City, 2002, 320 pp.

The terrorist attacks perpetrated in the United States September 11, 2001, were the center of world attention and prompted a complex spectrum of reactions worldwide: surprise, consternation, alarm, indignation, solidarity with U.S. society, a thirst for vengeance and thoughts about the possible causes and consequences of the tragic events. And voices of resentment justifying the attacks without stopping to think about their cowardice and the innocence of the victims also made themselves heard.

Amidst the swirling dust of contradictory feelings, twenty-odd renowned Mexican researchers took up the task of analyzing the impact of the 9/11 attacks in general and

with regard to specific dimensions of the global dynamic, such as security, the standpoint of history, international law and the economy. Their considerations have been brought together in *Globalidad y conflicto* (Globality and Conflict). This book, as José Luis Valdés says, is “a serious, original academic effort and a rigorous collective reflection with an interdisciplinary perspective about the attacks and their resulting crisis, looking at them through the prism of philosophy, political science, sociology, economics and international relations.”

Some of the book’s central theses are: a) 9/11 revealed the vulnerability of the U.S. intelligence and security sys-

tem as well as the advent of a new kind of corporative, transnational terrorism; b) Neutralizing this new terrorism cannot be a task limited exclusively to the states directly affected by it, since it requires close international cooperation; c) 9/11 marks a turning point in global history since it sharpens a conflict, latent throughout the Cold War, between the Western world and the Islamic world, opening up the possibility of a new kind of international polarization; d) 9/11 exacerbated the contradictions and imbalances of the globalized world after the Cold War, making it urgent to build a new world order that can guarantee a minimum global security and certainty.

The book alerts the reader to the risk of responding to one fundamentalism with another, with a theological vision of the conflict as the struggle of good against evil. This vision feeds into demagogic, unilateral reactions that make it impossible to design a strategy with a broad consensus and co-responsibility that would be more effective in fight-

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ing terrorism. A change of vision requires conceptual clarity to distinguish clearly between rebellion and terrorism, between state action in legitimate self-defense and state terrorism.

September 11 put world security at the head of the list of priorities, which in the United States made for a renewal of the doctrine of national security and a substantial increase in the intelligence and defense budget, as well as restrictions on the right of privacy in communications for the U.S. public and xenophobic attitudes toward Arab migrants. It also led to the punitive expedition of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, which deposed the Taliban regime, but brought into question the role the United Nations should play in the process and the human rights of Taliban prisoners.

In the context of these U.S. actions, the book's authors warn about the risks for democracy of the U.S. strategy for fighting terrorism. In that vein, one of the essays points out that the greatest challenge is to achieve a balance between

freedom and security. It also demands a broader perspective about global security, a perspective that would include the growing economic inequality in the world as a factor that promotes instability, conflict and insecurity.

Another of the contributors to the book claims that 9/11 has shown that history has not come to an end, at least in the sense that Francis Fukuyama imagined it, since there is still a great deal to be done to reorganize the world based on a new social contract of human rationality that would result from the dialogue among cultures.

Intercultural dialogue is indispensable for finding alternatives to the tensions in the globalized world. But so is the law. In that sense, the authors take on board the idea of providing a legal basis for the actions against terrorism and strengthening international law, "the only element that can make peaceful co-existence among states possible." In that logic, they present the proposal of advancing the International Criminal Court.

September 11 has also had important repercussions in the U.S. economy. The material losses were considerable, particularly for the city of New York. Commercial aviation had to be bailed out and the increase in military spending has not been enough to reactivate an economy in frank recession. A return to protectionism and selective imports based on political criteria will have negative effects on the global economy, particularly Mexico's. Apropos of this, the author of the book's last essay writes, "For the good of the U.S. economy and others like ours, it is heartily to be wished today that the memory of Keynes had not been lost together with the Twin Towers."

We have not finished assimilating the events of September 11, which are still a wound opened by the worst violence of all: the violence that joins fanaticism to intelligence. The human lives snuffed out by the 9/11 attacks are irreplaceable, but what can be recovered is the hope of finding alternatives to all types of violence through rationality committed to human development, democracy, law and world peace. The essays in *Globality and Conflict* are written on the horizon of these values.

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