Assuming that the terrorists chose the World Trade Center as a symbolic target, how does globalization and cultural hegemony help create hatred towards America?

This is an extremely convenient belief for Western intellectuals. It absolves them of responsibility for the actions that actually do lie behind the choice of the World Trade Center. Was it bombed in 1993 because of concern over globalization and cultural hegemony? Was Sadat assassinated 20 years ago because of globalization? Is that why the “Afghanis” of the CIA-backed forces fought Russia in Afghanistan, or in Chechnya now?

A few days ago the Wall Street Journal reported attitudes of rich and privileged Egyptians who were at a McDonald’s restaurant wearing stylish American clothes, etc., and who were bitterly critical of the U.S. for objective reasons of policy, which are well-known to those who wish to know: they had a report a few days earlier on attitudes of wealthy and privileged people in the region, all pro-American, and harshly critical of U.S. policies. Is that concern over “globalization,” McDonald’s, and jeans? Attitudes in the street are similar, but far more intense, and have nothing at all to do with these fashionable excuses.

These excuses are convenient for the U.S. and much of the West. To quote the lead analysis in the New York Times (September 16): “the perpetrators acted out of hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage.” U.S. actions are irrelevant, and therefore need not even be mentioned (Serge Schmemann). This is a comforting picture, and the general stance is not unfamiliar in intellectual history; in fact, it is close to the norm. It happens to be completely at variance with everything we know, but has all the merits of self-adulation and uncritical support for power. And it has the flaw that adopting it contributes significantly to the likelihood of further atrocities, including atrocities directed against us, perhaps even more horrendous ones than those of 9-11.

As for the bin Laden network, they have as little concern for globalization and cultural hegemony as they do for the poor and oppressed people of the Middle East who they have been severely harming for years. They tell us what their con-
cerns are loud and clear: they are fighting a Holy War against the corrupt, repressive, and “un-Islamist” regimes of the region, and their supporters, just as they fought a Holy War against the Russians in the 1980s (and are now doing in Chechnya, western China, Egypt—in this case since 1981, when they assassinated Sadat—and elsewhere).

Bin Laden himself has probably never even heard of “globalization.” Those who have interviewed him in depth, like Robert Fisk, report that he knows virtually nothing of the world and doesn’t care to. We can choose to ignore all the facts and wallow in self-indulgent fantasies if we like, but at considerable risk to ourselves, among others. Among other things, we can also ignore, if we choose, the roots of the “Afghanis” such as bin Laden and his associates, also not a secret.

Are the American people educated to see this? Is there an awareness of cause and effect?

Unfortunately not, just as European people are not. What is crucially important to privileged elements in the Middle East region (and even more so on the streets) is scarcely understood here, particularly the most striking example: the contrasting U.S. policies toward Iraq and Israel’s military occupation.

In Iraq, though Westerners prefer a different story, they see that U.S. policy in the past ten years has devastated the civilian society while strengthening Saddam Hussein—who, as they know, the U.S. strongly supported through his worst atrocities, including the gassing of the Kurds in 1988. When bin Laden makes these points in the broadcasts heard throughout the region, his audience understands, even those who despise him, as many do. About the U.S. and Israel, the most important facts are scarcely even reported and are almost universally unknown, to elite intellectuals in particular.

People of the region do not, of course, share the comforting illusions prevalent in the U.S. about the “generous” and “magnanimous” offers at Camp David in summer 2000, let alone other favored myths.

There is extensive material in print on this, well documented from uncontroversial sources, but it is scarcely known.