The widening gyre: reflections on September 11

I t has escaped no one’s understanding that the targets of the terrorist attacks in Washington and New York on Sept. 11 were both real and symbolic. This was a strike against not only the financial epicentre of the world and the hub of US military defence, but against everything these monuments to prosperity and power represent. There could be nothing more real than the terrorists’ other target, civilians: thousands dead and wounded, thousands more bereaved. But a terrorist attack on civilians has a devastating symbolism nonetheless, for it undermines our sense of personal freedom, security and peace. So potent, so resonant, is this effect that other nations have rallied round, declaring themselves to be at attack by implication.

For many people in these first days of outrage and sorrow, any talk of political “reasons” for mass murder is offensive. Few commentators have ventured to reflect on the chronic failure of diplomacy in the Middle East or on how feelings of desperation and of hatred toward the United States could have reached such a catastrophic pitch. Politics, when it is merely politics, can at least be discussed by pundits and negotiators, and amid their talk it is possible to hope that nations will inch toward some sort of understanding. But terror puts an end to talk.

Extremism is the defining social pathology of the modern age. The many political and cultural fanatics of our era have led to genocide, oppression and the erasure of history. They have spawned barbarisms as diverse in their senselessness and enormity as the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children, the gassing of Jews, the massacre of Rwandans, the subjugation of women, the military conscription of children.

Reference