

One day ...

The storm-cones have been hoisted. The date is 17 March 2003, the time just before yet another speech by President George W. Bush. Stand clear, war is about to begin. Nobody is now going to deprive America of this war. For three days now share prices have been skyrocketing. The uncertainty is over, isn't it? Everyone has made his last move and raised his stake yet again. Over the last few days this metaphor has been catching on in a big way. Global politics is a game, as the choice of words makes abundantly clear. And of course the name of the game is poker. What else? The Americans are playing for high stakes, going for the pot, winner takes all. Of course they have a good hand, but there are no guarantees. Anyone who didn't love gambling would have kept the stakes low. But the promise of the jackpot was too strong. Hegemony, oil and who knows, perhaps even a feeling of security.

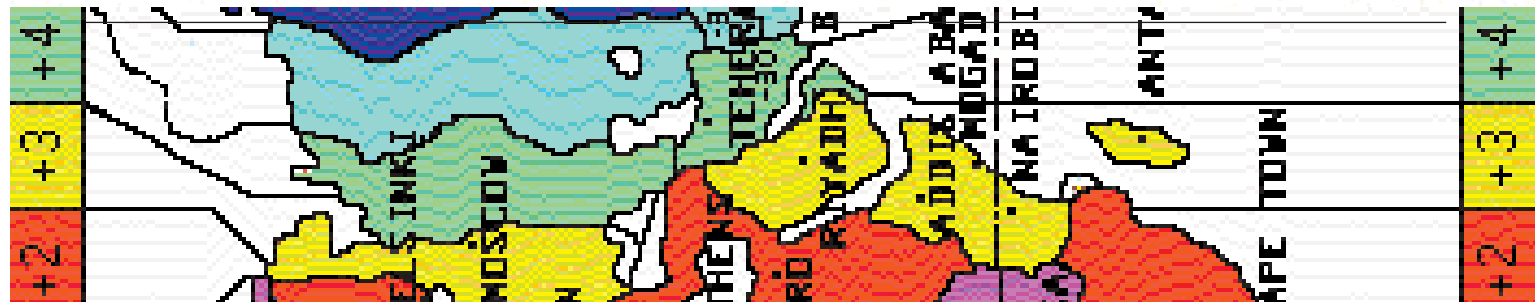
The opponent has a weak hand. He has just destroyed his last serious defensive weapons and is waiting helplessly for whatever is to come. A solitary volunteer might still derive a little self-respect from his coming martyrdom. But this is a disorderly bunch. A busted flush. And that's how it will go, flushed away in an instant down the drain of history.

And there was also a third player, too weak to offer real opposition, but just strong enough to call the bluff of the strongest player and force him to lay his cards on the table. Still, it was a brave effort, Europe, with your three of a kind. But in the end the winner's royal flush turned out to be sufficient. And the winner takes all. So it's off to the bridal suite with a bottle of bourbon (Dom Perignon no longer being acceptable, of course).

The date is 17 March. Somewhere in Houston, Texas, 20,000 CDs are being smashed to smithereens with shovels. These are recordings by the highly popular western girls' group Dixie Chicks. Their lead singer Natalie Maines had dared to say that she was ashamed that the president is from Texas. There is no longer any room for criticism, any more than there is for existential need. Now is the moment of truth, and any opposition will literally be smashed. Radio stations are no longer prepared to play their record 'Home'. Home is not so sweet anymore. Everything is taken literally these days.

The date is 17 March. A day on which anything can happen, because nobody knows where the rule of law ends and the law of the jungle begins. A father and son are picked up in a shopping mall for wearing a T-shirt bearing the subversive text 'give peace a chance'. Lawyers squabble over the question of whether you can house suspects temporarily in foreign prison camps if this would enable torture to be used. Politicians advance the possibility of shortening the time-consuming appeal procedures following the pronouncement of death sentences. A tiny sniff of pepper spray for a troublemaker in a disco leads to fatal mass panic because of a deep-seated fear of a chemical attack. Everyone is suffering from mental exhaustion. The level of warning against international terrorism stands at orange. And so there is a 'new world order': pre-emptive strikes as the best form of defence.

The date is 17 March. Close by the place where the diplomatic endgame is being played out is the place where it all started: the Ground Zero of the Bush doctrine. The new new world order already began here a few weeks ago. Daniel Libeskind emerged the winner of the competition to reconstruct Lower Manhattan. Daniel Libeskind, the architect who suc-



ceeded in turning deconstructivism into a demonstration of omnipotence. In the last ten years few architects have put so much effort into placing architecture at the heart of the bankruptcy of western civilization. His Jewish Museum in Berlin was deliberately designed as a monument to the moral vacuum of Judeo-Christian culture since Auschwitz. Emptiness is the only representation left to us. The broken Star of David is a painful reminder of the Holocaust and a final call to think of the Other as other. A final urgent appeal to listen to the Difference for once, instead of the same old tune. But it is also a reference to the fearlessness of the great Jewish philosophers of the 20th century, Buber, Levinas, Derrida and the rest.

This Libeskind has now donned cowboy boots and has even started to play poker. For months he could be found at one of the many gaming tables of Casino New York. He, better than all the other competitors, understood that this competition was about sentiment. And he had just the right plan. As in Berlin he has designed a void, a lawn as boneyard, ringed by towering office blocks. The dead are no longer dead, but heroes whose names must live for ever. No longer will a melancholy deed be performed here in memory of human failure and the bankruptcy of a civilization. Instead a setting of triumph and heroism will be provided for victims whose death will in a few days be repeated and repeated and repeated in what could well be a worldwide spiral of violence. And above it all towers the highest building in the world, designed by Libeskind to reach a height of 1776 feet. And once again this height has a deep symbolic meaning. 1776 was the year of the American constitution, the first state document of the Enlightenment, a manifesto that embodied the inalienable and universal right to the pursuit of happiness for everyone. The formal vocabulary which symbol-

ized the greatest loss in the history of mankind also turns out to be suitable for its greatest triumph. And for its greatest victor. He who takes himself too literally is unable to retreat. And that at a time when we are so much in need of a true hero, a hero of the retreat.

The date is 17 March. The war is almost over. A war about time. A war full of ultimatums, time needed for inspection, 12 long years of violations, unable to wait in the sandstorms of Kuwait. In recent months practically everything hinged on the question of who was in charge in the realm of time. And, as expected, the short term won out over the long. Act first and only then start thinking about the long term. The American army stationed at the gates of Iraq is close to its expiration date. Haste is needed, lest the options expire without gain. Time presses. This is really the full story. Much has been written recently, in this magazine and elsewhere, about how space organizes itself. But right now it is time that is organizing itself...

It is 8.00 p.m. EST. Hora est.

Ole Bouman