

# GRANTA

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## The Unknown Known

**E**ven as we enter the age of cosmic and perhaps eternal war, it remains remarkable: the nuanced symbiosis between East and West. Here at Strategic Planning, or ‘the “Prism”’, there are three sectors, and these three sectors used to be called, not very imaginatively, Sector Three, Sector Two, and Sector One. Sector Three dealt with daily logistics, Sector Two with long-term missions, and Sector One with conceptual breakthroughs. But now, following certain remarks by the American Secretary of Defence, the three sectors have been renamed as follows: Known Knowns, Known Unknowns, and Unknown Unknowns — a clear improvement. There is of course (this goes without saying) no sector called Unknown Knowns. That would be preposterous and, moreover, a complete waste of time. Only a madman would give the idea any serious thought. There are no such things as Unknown Knowns — though I have to say that I can imagine such a category, such a framework, when I contemplate my physical extinction (which, I admit, I am increasingly inclined to do). I work in Sector One: Unknown Unknowns.

Our camp lies on the Northern Border. Picking up on certain remarks in the Western press, other groups in the region — affiliates, rivals, enemies — have seen fit to call ‘the “Prism”’ a ‘jungle gym’ operation, a mere ‘rope ladder’ or ‘monkey puzzle’ bivouac which the Americans, should they ever find out about it, wouldn’t take the trouble to destroy. According to them, we’re not worth so much as a cruise missile — or even, if you please, a Hellfire warhead from a Predator drone. They call us ‘daydreamers’; they call us ‘sleepwalkers’. Well, all that is about to change. Soon the whole world will whisper it — in the East with tears of pride, in the West with bitterness and horror: ‘*the “Prism”...*’. I refer of course to my own initiative, my ‘baby’ if you will. Its codename is UU: CRs/G,C.

To the right of the drill-yard, the first longhouse: Known Knowns. This is where we all started out. When you think about human society in a certain way — i.e., with the sole objective of hurting it— the entire planet resembles a pulsing bullseye. The continents themselves hang there like great soft underbellies, almost pleading to be strafed and scorched and slashed. True, our activities here in Known Knowns are hands-on and bread-and-butter:

shells, landmines, grenades, petrol bombs. But one's induction will include action in the field: oh yes. And it goes on being dangerous work, what with the frequent gas leaks and accidental fires and the almost daily explosions.

Later, when, with some pomp, you cross the yard and enter the second longhouse, Known Unknowns, you begin to understand that civilization isn't *entirely* defenceless. It is no walk in the park, trolling around North Korea in search of the fabled twenty-five kilograms of uranium; it is no picnic, going from factory to factory in Uzbekistan in search of weapons-grade anthrax or aerosolized asphyxiants. True, doing that is better than actually being in Known Unknowns. In *Bio*, for example, the conditions are far from sanitary. In one stall a comrade tests a sarin compound on a donkey; in the next stall along, another channels a 'mosaic' toxin of smallpox and VX into a garden sprinkler. The regular and lethal epidemics are not always easy to contain. Accordingly the breath of a Sector Two comrade always has a tell-tale tang, that of potent cough-drops, moving about as he does among vats of acids and tubs full of raw pesticides.

Unknown Unknowns is not to be found in a third longhouse. In fact, there isn't a third longhouse. No. For Unknown Unknowns you go behind the wash-huts and over the sheepdip and then you see it, a deceptively modest wooden cabin, called, sinisterly, 'Hut A'. An outsider, putting his head round the door, might find the atmosphere somewhat casual and unfastidious — even somewhat torpid and scurf-blown. But these are the necessary notes and postures of intense concentration. The thinking, here, is pointed-end, cutting-edge. Synergy, maximalization — these are the kind of concepts that are tossed from cushion to floor mat in Unknown Unknowns. Now a comrade argues for the dynamiting of the San Andreas Fault; now another envisages the large-scale introduction of rabies (admixed with smallpox, angel dust, and steroids) to the fauna of Central Park. A pensive silence follows. Sometimes these silences can last for days on end. We sit there and think. All you can hear is the occasional swatting palm-slap, or the crackle of a beetle being ground underfoot.

Every evening, after prayers, I flex my impeccable English, reading aloud our write-ups in *The New York Times* and elsewhere on a faulty and outmoded computer borrowed from *Cyber* in Known Unknowns.

*Next page: The passengers on the fourth plane grasped the new reality, and acted...*

**P**aradigm-shift is what we're in the business of. But paradigm-shift represents a window, and windows will close. The much-ballyhooed operation of September 2001, to take the obvious example, is now unrepeatable. Indeed, the tactic was obsolete by ten o'clock the same morning. Its efficacy lasted for exactly seventy-one minutes: from 8.46, when American 11 hit the North Tower, until 9.57, and the rebellion on United 93. The passengers on the fourth plane grasped the new reality, and acted. They

didn't linger for long in the vanished praxis of the 1970s (and how antique and diffident that now seems!): the four-day siege on the tropical tarmac, the shortages of food and water, the festering toilets, the airing of 'conditions' and 'demands', the phased release of the children and the women — then the surrender, or the clambering commandos. No. They rose up. And United 93 came down on its back at 580 miles per hour, twenty minutes from the Capitol.

For different reasons, UU: CRs/G,C launched but not yet completed, is also unrepeatable. From the outset it relied on something we may never have again: the full resources of a nation state. That's gone, thanks to the biblical, the mountain-flattening rage of the Americans. Indeed, given the heavy price we have had to pay for it, many of us, here in Unknown Unknowns, regard September as almost criminally lax. We would have deployed scores of planes nationwide, and our targeting would have been much more adventurous. Not just the landmarks: we would have sent a message about all the other things we hate — nightclubs, music halls, women's institutes, sports arenas. Think of it. A 767, in the evening glitter, descending like an incensed seraph on Yankee Stadium...

UU: CRs/G,C was launched in July 2001. If everything had gone according to schedule there would have been a second 'September surprise' for the Americans. Now, four years later, my actors are at last on US soil and poised to strike: my CRs are at last homing in on G,C. The difficulties along the way have been unexpectedly numerous. I don't know — twice a day I have attacks of fluttering uncertainty; I mistake the dawn for a sunset, the sunset for a dawn, and a part of my mind involuntarily anticipates failure, if not fiasco. Thereafter it is hardly the work of a moment to refresh my belief that God will smile on UU: CRs/G,C.

On top of all this I am not getting on very well with my wives.

*Next page: Last night I had a visitor: a colleague from Unknown Unknowns...*

**L**ast night I had a visitor: a colleague from Unknown Unknowns. Now might be a good time to explain about our aliases. We in 'Hut A' have, over the years, become theorists and visionaries, but we all started out in Known Knowns, seeing action in various theatres (Chechnya, Thailand, Kashmir), and our aliases are reminders of the way we made our bones on the front line. Again the 'nuanced symbiosis': for these names are taken from our coverage in the Anglophone media, and then lightly transliterated. I cannot exaggerate the ineffable reverence, the tender solemnity, with which we murmur our *noms de guerre*. My visitor, my colleague — *his* name is of the very best: bold, virile, and self-explanatory. Unlike mine. I didn't say anything when they gave it to me, but I have grown increasingly unhappy with it. My name's 'Ayed', and it derives from Improvised Explosive Device. But Ayed's *already* a name. The little Tajik who limps into the village once a month, to

grind the knives, *his* name's Ayed...

'I had a message today, "Ayed",' said my guest, 'from the One Eyed One.'

The tea I was drinking abruptly changed direction and came sneezing out of my nose. 'Continue, "Truqbom",' I said when I was able. As was now my habit, I'd been hoping that the One Eyed One was dead.

'He asks after UU: CRs/G,C. He asks: "When will the great day come? When will it be, this day?"'

'... *July 29!* I always imagined that, when I said those words for the first time, they would echo with geo-historical resonance (this, after all, this was a date that would for ever burn in the soul of the West); but it came out as something of a whinny. It was now July 25, and my CRs were still in a pit near a swamp in East Texas.

'July 29 of this year?'

'Definitely. I virtually guarantee it.'

'He understands, "Ayed" — *we* understand — that there have been setbacks.'

I laughed with unexpected shrillness, and found myself saying, 'It is so, is it not, comrade, that you've never been introduced to my wives?'

And before he could answer I summoned them from the kitchen with a mighty clap of my hands. In they filed. I had spent my lunch hour, that day, sadly gazing into the small pond, or large puddle, under the plane trees behind the wash-huts. And it now seemed to me that my wives resembled four gigantic tadpoles. What would they eventually mutate into?

'Oh, we're very advanced here you know,' I cried. 'Oh yes. My wives quite often "meet". Have some purified water, comrade, cooled in my refrigerator.'

He left at once, naturally, stalking off on that noisy tin leg of his. This afforded me some temporary relief, and then of course I gave the wives the rough edge of my tongue.

All night I sat there on the lumpy hassock with my face in my hands. What extraordinary behaviour: my wives most certainly do *not* 'meet'! And now I have offended the notoriously sensitive and traditionalist 'Truqbom', with his ugly muscles — my patron and my peer.

*Next page: The warrior poet lay half-submerged by the heaped cushions, an imposing figure in his dishdash and his flip-flops...*

**I**t was he, you see, who sponsored my initial audience with the One Eyed One (aka the One with One Eye, the Mullah, the Emir, the Commander of the Faithful) that June: the June that preceded September. There has been much speculation in the press about this — about whether the Mullah actually approved the attack on America. The truth is that he voiced his doubts and, at first, withheld his blessing. And his doubts were not the obvious ones — that he would a) forfeit his country, and b) spend the rest of his life in hiding.

No. What worried him were considerations best described as ‘ideological’ (I quote from *The 9/11 Commission Report*, which, with rather exaggerated nonchalance, we are all passing around). The One Eyed One wanted the autumn initiative ‘to attack Jews’ (ibid.). Already aware of this settled emphasis of the Mullah’s, I mildly exaggerated the anti-Semitic component (at that point non-existent) of UU: CRs/G,C when I came to make my presentation. The prospect of September 11, by the way, did not deter the Mullah from going ahead with, or getting started on, his autumn campaign against the Northern Alliance, solemnly inaugurated on September 10.

Having made the six-day journey to our second city, I joined the queue in the back yard of the One Eyed One’s modest villa. Many of my fellow supplicants were representatives of organizations similar to but much grander than ‘the “Prism”’, and I heard the usual sly remarks about swings and hammocks and treetop dens. My clothes were creased from successive nights on packed buses, and I would have dearly liked a minute alone with a cloth and a faucet. Overall, my confidence was far from high. I had, as it were, auditioned CRs/G,C (it did not yet bear the ‘UU’ imprimatur) before the thinkers of ‘Hut A’, and it was greeted without the slightest sign of enthusiasm, to put it mildly; it was greeted, in fact, with chilled dismay and then outright mockery. I also had an unpleasant suspicion that ‘Truqbom’ had intervened on my behalf in a facetious spirit, to bring upon me not only much trouble and expense but also humiliation and perhaps even punishment. Despite all this, I cherished the hope that the One Eyed One would somehow grasp the wayward, the vaulting genius of CRs/G,C.

Once I got inside it was possible to watch the petitioners as they took their leave of the fabled chamber. You could see them backing away, and then turning towards the open front doors. Some came out looking almost farcically gratified; some (I counted nine) seemed utterly crushed — and two of *them* were promptly marched off by the guards. The overwhelming majority, admittedly, were neither happy nor sad: they were merely caricatures of bafflement. But by this time I had a near-irresistible desire to bolt: I could feel my body trying to do it, trying to burst away from itself and be gone. My turn came and I stumbled in.

The warrior poet lay half-submerged by the heaped cushions, an imposing figure in his dishdash and his flip-flops. I found it difficult to return his one-eyed gaze, and during my presentation I looked elsewhere, at the rugs, the tea tray, the large tin box brimming with US dollars. When I eventually

fell silent and straightened my neck, Mullah Omar said slowly,

‘Answer me this. What should we do with the buggers? Some scholars say they should be thrown from a high roof. Others maintain that these sinners should be buried in a hole and a wall should be toppled on them. Which?’

I said with hesitation, ‘The hole and the wall sounds more unnatural, and thus more pious, my Leader.’

And I saw that he was smiling at me. A strange smile, combining serenity and severity. Perhaps this is the way God smiles.

I returned to the north-east in a two-door Datsun pickup. Brashly I sounded the horn, and watched the unloading of my recent purchases (the water purifier, the battery-operated refrigerator), suitably impressing my wives.

UU: CRs/G,C? It’s simple. We’re going to scour all the prisons and madhouses for every compulsive rapist in the country, and then unleash them on Greeley, Colorado.

*Next page: I was fourteen when my father, a gifted poppy-grower, took me to America...*

**A**h, my wives. As I keep saying to all my temporary wives, ‘My wives don’t understand me.’

And they don’t. For instance, I am of that breed of men which holds that a husband should have sex with his wives every night. Or, to put it slightly more realistically, every twenty-four hours — without fail, except for the usual calendric exemptions. My wives have of course never denied me, but they sometimes show a certain resistance (more by demeanour than by word or deed) to my forthright amatory style. It is fairly clear by now, I think, that what they object to is my invariable use of the ‘RodeoMaMa’.

The ‘RodeoMaMa’ is a Western frippery I picked up, by mail order, during my sojourn in the United States and didn’t have the heart to leave behind. It consists of a ‘weight belt’ and the prow of a leather saddle. You attach it to your wives’ waists, so that the saddle hovers over the lower back. If the ‘RodeoMaMa’ has a fault, it is its unwieldiness, or its bulk. My wives always know when I am off to see one of my temporary wives, because I take my ‘RodeoMaMa’ with me in its ragged old sack.

I was fourteen when my father, a gifted poppy-grower, took me to America. One day I was a contented young student, never happier than when about my tasks of recitation and memorization; the next, I was hurled into the hellhouse of Greeley, Colorado. I arrived in midwinter, which muffled the shock — in several applications of that verb. A mother blimplike in her padded parka, an infant daughter, as rigid as a capital aitch, in hers; and the

snow, seen at first from above, like a flood made of milk, then on the ground like a sugar coating that also imparted silence. The shock was muffled, but it came. Scarcely crediting my senses, I began to notice that there were women motorists, women police officers, women *soldiers*; I felt all this as a multiple, a compound ignominy. Yet nothing prepared me for the spring and the summer.

A thousand times a day I would whisper it ('But her *father*... her *brothers*...'), every time I saw a luminously bronzed *poitrine*, the outline of underwear on a tightly packaged rump, a thin skirt rendered transparent by a low sun, a pair of nipples starkly staring through a pullover, a white bra strap contending with a murky armpit, a stocking top arresting the architecture of an upper thigh, or the very crux of a woman sliced in two by a wedge of denim or dungaree. They strolled in swirly print dresses across the Walkway, indifferent to the fact that anyone standing below, in the thicket of nettles and poison ivy, could see the full scissoring of their legs and their shamelessly brief underpants. And when, in all weathers, I took a late walk along the back gardens, the casual use of a buttress or a drainpipe would soon confront me with the sight of a woman quite openly undressing for bed.

Worst was Drake Square in early July: the students, in the week before summer recess. A slum of bubblegum, sweet drinks, cigarettes, and naked flesh; the girls on towels and blankets, with limbs and midriffs raw to the sun, waiting to be *checked out* (such is the brutal patois) by any man with eyes to see. Sitting on a bench, trying to apply myself to a book, I would despairingly conclude that in the universal war between the flesh and the spirit, the spirit was tasting ruin, its armies crushed and broken-winged. And yet the birds sang, and the grey squirrels bobbed across the green. On the way to Drake Square from the bus stop I would pass, each morning, an inanimate reminder of what a woman ought to look like, cherished, sequestered, exalted: I mean the curve-cornered matt-black postbox (check *that* out) in front of Thurgood Assurance on City Boulevard, which I would often glance at as I sprinted by.

It was at this time, too, that I received a cruel blow to my self-esteem. Back home, every little boy, at the age of five or six, experiences that lovely warm glow of pride when he realizes that his sisters are, in one important respect, just like his mother: *they* can't read or write either. Well, that pride was painfully retracted in Greeley, Colorado; and there were other familial developments that caused enormous suffering for me and for my brothers — and for my poor father. What can you do when your daughters start consorting with *kaffirs*, with *koofs*? You can't live with them, and you can't kill them (not in America); so the women stayed, and the men came home.

**Next page: *Will there one day be a book called The 7/29 Commission Report?***

**I**wonder. Will there one day be a book called *The 7/29 Commission Report*, running to 567 pages, including 118 pages of notes? I still believe there

will. And what a tortuous tale it will tell.

The One Eyed One, the One with One Eye, referred me to another one with one eye, his Justice Minister, who referred me to his Justice Minister (another one with one eye). The initial scouring of all the country's prisons and madhouses yielded 423 CRs. It was a hazardous journey they faced (there would be attrition), so I authorized a second sweep with a different kind of inmate in mind: compulsive paedophiles. This realized an additional 62. The 485 compulsives were corralled in a barracks near the capital and prepared for departure with heroin and straitjackets. As a further refinement, those who didn't have it already were infected with syphilis D.

When I went to America, I went there by plane. But I hardly needed telling that the unscheduled arrival of a jumbo jet crammed with scrofulous sociopaths would have raised some eyebrows at US Immigration. The first leg of the compulsives' journey, then, was a 900-mile drive in the trunks of old taxis. When we performed a 'test run', using a dozen assorted criminals and lunatics, the fatality rate turned out to be one hundred per cent, so we were careful, next time, to poke a few more holes in the back panelling, and we reluctantly reduced each load from four to two. This meant that the drivers had to come back for a second batch while the first took its ease in holding kennels at the port. Although I was inflexibly resolved to lead UU: CRs/G,C myself, a sudden indisposition forced me to stand down; so all authority in the field devolved upon the ferocious figure of Colonel Gul, commander of the First Mechanised Battalion. On August 3, 2001, chained to the hold of a disused container ship, my compulsives boldly set sail for Somalia.

*NOTE: At which point (for reasons I will later mention) I abandoned this skeletal typescript of 'The Unknown Known'. The much fuller manuscript version followed the compulsives on their sanguinary journey to Greeley, Colorado (Greeley, after all, is the cradle of Islamism: it was there that Sayyid Qutb's Milestones, known as the Islamists' Mein Kampf, was decisively shaped). The disused container ship is hijacked by Filipino pirates; the surviving compulsives spend two years in a punishment block in Mogadishu; they are then deathmarched across Ethiopia into Sudan, where they encounter a host of some 30,000 janjaweed, who kill all the compulsives under thirty 'as a warning'; the remainder (now consisting entirely of paedophiles, plus the implacable Colonel Gul) continue west by bus and on foot; they are severely mauled by a child militia in Congo, armed with pangas... And so on. Finally, one CR makes it to Greeley, Colorado, where, half-dead with syphilis D, he is found weeping in a cinema car park. Meanwhile, Ayed's marriages decline to the point where he retools his RodeoMaMa in the outhouse called Known Knowns, and resolves on a paradigm shift, an Unknown Unknown, which is sure to succeed: a suicide operation in his own home. The unknown known of the title is of course God.*

*I abandoned the story for many reasons, all of them strictly extraneous. As I have said, Islamism is a total system, and like all such it is eerily amenable*



*to satire. But in the end I felt that the piece was premature, and therefore a hostage to fortune; certain future events might make it impossible to defend. If I live to be very old, I may one day pull it out of my desk — at the other end of the Long War.*