



Under a photo of the Ambassador with the President, the caption reads: “U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman met Barack Obama well before his election. ‘He really impressed me by what he said but also by what he did not say. He was really himself. He had maturity and quietness. He represented the future.’”

In a separate interview under the heading ‘America Was not Arrogant’ - and with the subheading ‘U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman considers that it is together that the fight against terrorism must be waged’ – Charlotte Vanbever writes: “During more than two years, he helped with the writing of Barack Obama’s speeches and he contributed to raising funds for the campaign. What Howard Gutman did for the Democrats bore fruit. On August 14, 2009, and after a successful career as a lawyer, he arrived at the American Embassy in Brussels. He was an ideal interlocutor to discuss changes, but also fears and hopes, in the United States today, ten years after the 9/11 attacks.

Q: Since you became Ambassador, you have made sure to reach out to all the cultures (in Belgium,) leaving no community on the side...

Ambassador Gutman: ‘building bridges with the Muslim community is one of my priorities. It is another part of the world in which our partnership had seriously suffered. If there is one lesson from 9/11, it is that the world is much smaller than we thought and that we must face problems together, without excluding anyone.’

Q: Where were you when the attacks took place?

Ambassador Gutman: ‘I was in Washington where I lived. I was in my office, five blocks from the White House. I turned the TV on. They announced that a third plane was headed for Washington and they recommended leaving Washington. It created chaos. One could see the smoke coming from the Pentagon. At that moment, it was more confusion than anger. The fear that many were feeling was not irrational but it was not targeted. People needed to target that fear.’

Q: Could a similar attack take place again in the U.S.?

Ambassador Gutman: ‘An attack can take place anywhere, as we have seen these last years. That is why the world must work together more, nations must be closer to fight against terrorism, any kind of terrorism.’

Q: Was the United States too self-confident at the time of the attacks. Did it feel invincible?

Ambassador Gutman: 'I totally reject that statement. I do not see how we were arrogant in our actions and in our diplomacy. But if we can stand up for a just cause, we do it. It is not about leadership. Such attacks take place because of totally mad men. Now, we must be prepared for this type of madness. There are people who have been cultivating an unjustified hatred for the United States for a long time. It does not make sense but we must be ready.'

Q: What significant changes have taken place in U.S. society these last ten years?

Ambassador Gutman: 'Superficial changes, like taking off one's shoes at security checks at airports. There was no fundamental change in what we are but more in how we must behave.'

Q: Has the way other countries see the United States changed?

Ambassador Gutman: 'There is no longer that skepticism. I suspect that if there were an election in Belgium now to elect the U.S. President, Obama would be elected!'