

The September 11 attacks were a monstrous calling card from a world gone horribly wrong. The message may have been written by Bin Laden (who knows?) and delivered by his couriers, but it could well have been signed by the ghosts of the victims of America's old wars. The millions killed in Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, the 17,500 killed when Israel backed by the US invaded Lebanon in 1982, the 200,000 Iraqis killed in Operation Desert Storm, the thousands of Palestinians who have died fighting Israel's occupation of the West Bank. And the millions who died, in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Haiti, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, at the hands of all the terrorists, dictators and genocidists whom the American government supported, trained, bankrolled and supplied with arms. And this is far from being a comprehensive list.

For a country involved in so much warfare and conflict, the American people have been extremely fortunate. The strikes on September 11 were only the second on American soil in over a century. The first was Pearl Harbour. The reprisal for this took a long route, but ended with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This time the world waits with bated breath for the horrors to come.

Someone recently said that if Osama bin Laden didn't exist, America would have had to invent him. But, in a way, America did invent him. He was among the *ihadis* who moved to Afghanistan in 1979 when the CIA commenced its operations there. Bin Laden has the distinction of being created by the CIA and wanted by the FBI. In the course of a fortnight he has been promoted from suspect to prime suspect and then, despite the lack of any real evidence, straight up the charts to being "wanted dead or alive."

From all accounts, it will be impossible to produce evidence (of the sort that would stand scrutiny in a court of law) to link Bin Laden to the September 11 attacks. So far, it appears that the most incriminating piece of evidence against him is the fact that he has not condemned them.

From what is known about the location of Bin Laden and the living conditions in which he operates, it's entirely possible that he did not personally plan and carry out the attacks, that he is the inspirational figure, the CEO of the 'holding company.' The Taliban's response to US demands for the extradition of Bin Laden has been uncharacteristically reasonable: produce the evidence,

then we'll hand him over. President Bush's response is that the demand is 'non-negotiable.'

(While talks are on for the extradition of CEOs, can India put in a side request for the extradition of Warren Anderson of the US? He was the chairman of Union Carbide, responsible for the Bhopal gas leak that killed 16,000 people in 1984. We have collated the necessary evidence. It's all in the files. Could we have him, please?)

But who is Osama bin Laden really? Let me rephrase that. What is Osama bin Laden? He's America's family secret. He is the American president's dark *doppelganger*. The savage twin of all that purports to be beautiful and civilised. He has been sculpted from the spare rib of a world laid to waste by America's foreign policy: its gunboat diplomacy, its nuclear arsenal, its vulgarly stated policy of 'full-spectrum dominance,' its chilling disregard for non-American lives, its barbarous military interventions, its support for despotic and dictatorial regimes, its merciless economic agenda that has munched through the economies of poor countries like a cloud of locusts. Its marauding multinationals who are taking over the air we breathe, the ground we stand on, the water we drink, the thoughts we think. Now that the family secret has been spilled, the twins are blurring into one another and gradually becoming interchangeable. Their guns, bombs, money and drugs have been going around in the loop for a while. (The Stinger missiles that will greet US helicopters were supplied by the CIA. The heroin used by America's drug addicts comes from Afghanistan. The Bush administration recently gave Afghanistan a dollars 43m subsidy for a war on drugs . . .)

Now Bush and Bin Laden have even begun to borrow each other's rhetoric. Each refers to the other as the "head of the snake." Both invoke God and use the loose millenarian currency of good and evil as their terms of reference. Both are engaged in unequivocal political crimes. Both are dangerously armed—one with the nuclear arsenal of the obscenely powerful, the other with the incandescent, destructive power of the utterly hopeless. The fireball and the ice pick. The bludgeon and the axe. The important thing to keep in mind is that neither is an acceptable alternative to the other.

President Bush's ultimatum to the people of the world "If you're not with us, you're against us" is a piece of presumptuous arrogance. It's not a choice that people want to, need to, or should have to make.

The Guardian (London) September 29, 2001

Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things," won the Booker Prize

FORTRESS AMERICA

Achin Vanaik

On September 11 morning, two hours before we were supposed to land at Washington's Dulles airport, our plane got diverted to Montreal, Canada. Making our way down by land over the next two days into upstate New York, Maryland and Washington, one was able to get an insight into the public mood not just from the international CNN-type broadcasting stations or the major dailies but from a host of local TV stations and local newspapers as well as from the average citizen one met and spoke with. The popular reaction provided sources of both hope and despair. Hope, in that the shared moral outrage expressed across boundaries of race, religion and ethnicity testified to the existence of a universal humanitarian decency. Despair, that this potential for a moral sensitivity that is impartial and universal was stymied by the rapid surfacing of a predominantly nationalist insularity of response to the tragedy.

The main question that preoccupied Americans was not why did this happen but how could it happen? Or rather, insofar as the why question was posed it was quickly disposed of to most people's satisfaction. The perpetrators are mindless terrorists or religious fanatics who hate America and what it stands for, which is decency, democracy, freedom, etc. Rare were the voices (mostly religiously inspired pacifists or uncompromisingly liberal elements) who were prepared to say that the U.S. must not seek revenge by waging war on Afghanistan or engage in activities that would itself amount to terrorism, i.e. killing the civilians of other countries. Rarer still were the voices of those who were prepared to point out, even as they expressed their pain and outrage against the attacks on New York and Washington, that the U.S. Government's actions abroad have helped create the breeding ground from which sub-state and combat group terrorists have emerged.

Wholly admirable was the way in which people across the country united to support and offer help in carrying out the necessary relief measures. Similarly, there was a perceptive and sensitive discourse in the media on what the efforts to avoid such attacks in the future might portend regarding restriction of civil liberties, thereby weakening the freedoms and decencies of American society. Barring the fringe, most public political figures opposed attacks on Americans of Arab, South Asian origin or on ordinary Muslims in the country. That would be a betrayal of the values that the U.S. is supposed to stand for. Even rightwing Republican leaders made it a point to say that this was not a war between the West and Islam but between the rest of the world and terrorism.

Largely absent, however, was any recognition of the problems caused by American foreign policy. The record here is simply awesome, both in numbers and scale. It includes the nuclear

bombing of civilians in Hiroshima/Nagasaki, the use of chemical weapons in Vietnam where over two million civilians were killed, the use of sanctions since the Gulf War which have led to the deaths of 1.2 million Iraqis of whom 500,000 were children. Instead of any media self-introspection on these grounds, there was an even stronger display of self-righteousness than usual. Civilisation, best represented and led by the U.S., was under attack. Therefore, all those (whether countries, groups or individuals) who might refuse to support what the U.S. Government intended to do in retaliation were effectively enemies of not just the U.S. but of all civilised values.

Given such a mood, it was hardly surprising that two leaders of Israel should try and seize the opportunity to harden the attitudes of the American Government and public towards the plight of the Palestinians. The former Israeli Premier, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, called for the destruction of the Palestinian Authority as a terrorist outfit while Mr. Ariel Sharon called Mr. Yasser Arafat another Osama bin Laden. They were supported by numerous prominent American personalities declaring in print and TV/radio that now America knew what Israel has been suffering all along. Matters were not helped by repeated broadcastings of film clips of Palestinians celebrating the attacks. Mr. Arafat's act of donating blood was not an effective counter in the public relations battle being waged by the American right and Israel at this juncture.

One thing is quite clear. Even if the evidence the U.S. Government is accumulating is not sufficient to establish a legally defensible case about an accused or suspect (Osama bin Laden in this case), it simply could not afford to admit as much. The public desire for revenge is so strong that it has to act. There are several historical precedents for this, the most recent being after the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in East Africa. The U.S. bombed a pharmaceutical complex in Sudan which suffered unknown "collateral damage" (i.e. civilian deaths) and has ever since blocked an independent U.N. investigation into its claim that it was justified in doing so because it was part of Osama bin Laden's network of activities.

Of course, the U.S. Government is not simply responding to domestic pressure. The speed with which 'long range thinking', was put into place was also remarkable. It is clear that it wishes to seize this opportunity to launch something like an 8-10 year campaign to attack (on all continents) all armed sub-state groups (and selected regimes) which are considered to be unacceptable to American interests. So the issue is not just Osama bin Laden and his network but the overthrow of the Taliban regime itself, followed by other targets to be highlighted as and when Washington chooses.

This is not a war against terrorism but an effort to establish maximum freedom of military-political activity (of a kind and scale never before envisioned) for the U.S. throughout the world.

Returning to India after the Washington trip, one was again shaken by much of the public and media response. After initial expressions of horror, the main preoccupation seems to be how India can obtain enough foreign policy benefit, i.e. swing the U.S. Government over to 'our' side against Pakistan and its sponsorship of terrorism in Kashmir. The overall result is that only a small minority (though bigger than the even smaller minority in the U.S.) of publicly articulated opinion declares that in the fight against international terrorism, it is not just sub-state actors/combat groups (whether or not supported/sponsored by states) that are the culprits but that states themselves are guilty of directing/executing terrorism.

Indeed, that the sustainability, diversity of forms, and sheer scale of state terrorist acts and campaigns is qualitatively greater and more dangerous than that of sub-state actors. Moreover, among the culpable states is not just Pakistan and its behaviour in Kashmir and Afghanistan but India (in Kashmir and the Northeast), Russia

(in Chechnya), China (in Tibet), Israel, and a host of numerous other states with, of course, the U.S. itself as far and away the worst offender.

To any morally impartial view which seeks to fight international terrorism no matter who is responsible for it, the idea of establishing a concert of nations led by the U.S. as the main international mechanism (regardless of its getting a manipulated sanction from the U.N.) through which one must fight terrorism, is utterly unacceptable. One cannot legitimise as the main correctors/policers of international terrorism those who are themselves guilty of terrorisms which then not only goes unpunished or unrecognised but is made unrecognisable. The double standards involved here are not just morally shameful but politically counter-productive because they will lead to more widespread bitterness and alienation reinforcing the appeal of those who claim that sub-state terrorism is the only form of retribution to the strong to whom the principles of justice do not apply. It is time to stand up and oppose the U.S.-led coalition which will wage war on Afghanistan and to call on India not to join it.

The Hindu, Wednesday, September 26, 2001.

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TIME FOR SERENITY

Fidel Castro

No one can deny that terrorism is today a dangerous and ethically indefensible phenomenon, which should be eradicated regardless of its deep origins, the economic and political factors that brought it to life and those responsible for it. The unanimous irritation caused by the human and psychological damage brought on the American people by the unexpected and shocking death of thousands of innocent people whose images have shaken the world is perfectly understandable. But who have profited? The extreme right, the most backward and right-wing forces, those in favor of crushing the growing world rebellion and sweeping away everything progressive that is still left on the planet. It was an enormous error, a huge injustice and a great crime whomever they are who organized or are responsible for such action. However, the tragedy should not be used to recklessly start a war that could actually unleash an endless carnage of innocent people and all of this on behalf of justice and under the peculiar and bizarre name of "Infinite Justice." In the last few days we have seen the hasty establishment of the basis, the concept, the true purposes, the spirit and the conditions for such a war. No one would be able to affirm that it was not something thought out well in advance, something that was just waiting for its chance to materialize. Those who, after the so-called end of the cold war, continued a military build-up and the development of the most sophisticated means to kill and exterminate human beings were aware that the large military investments would give them the

privilege to impose an absolute and complete dominance over the other peoples of the world. The ideologists of the imperialist system knew very well what they were doing and why they were doing it. After the shock and sincere sorrow felt by every people on Earth for the atrocious and insane terrorist attack that targeted the American people, the most extremist ideologists and the most belligerent hawks, already set in privileged power positions, have taken command of the most powerful country in the world whose military and technological capabilities would seem infinite.

Actually, its capacity to destroy and kill is enormous while its inclination towards equanimity, serenity, thoughtfulness and restraint is minimal. The combination of elements—including complicity and the common enjoyment of privileges—the prevailing opportunism, confusion and panic make it almost impossible to avoid a bloody and unpredictable outcome. The first victims of whatever military actions are undertaken will be the billions of people living in the poor and underdeveloped world with their unbelievable economic and social problems, their unpayable debts and the ruinous prices of their basic commodities; their growing natural and ecological catastrophes, their hunger and misery, the massive undernourishment of their children, teenagers and adults; their terrible AIDS epidemic, their malaria, their tuberculosis and their infectious diseases that threaten whole nations with extermination. The grave economic world crisis was

already a real and irrefutable fact affecting absolutely every one of the big economic power centers. Such crisis will inevitably grow deeper under the new circumstances and when it becomes unbearable for the overwhelming majority of the peoples, it will bring chaos, rebellion and the impossibility to govern. But the price will also be unpayable for the rich countries. For years to come it would be impossible to speak strongly enough about the environment and the ecology, or about ideas and research done and tested, or about projects for the protection of nature because that space and possibility would be taken by military actions, war and crimes as infinite as "Infinite Justice," that is, the name given to the war operation to be unleashed. Can there be any hope left after having listened, hardly 36 hours ago, to the speech made the President before the U.S. Congress? I will avoid the use of adjectives, qualifiers or offensive words towards the author of that speech. They would be absolutely unnecessary and untimely when the tensions and seriousness of the moment advise thoughtfulness and equanimity. I will limit myself to underline some short phrases that say it all: "We will use every necessary weapon of war." "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have ever seen." "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." "I've called the armed forces to alert and there is a reason. The hour is coming when America will act and you will make us proud." "This is the world's fight, this is civilization's fight." "I ask for your patience ... in what will be a long struggle." "The great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depend on us." "The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. ... And we know that God is not neutral."

I ask our fellow countrymen to meditate deeply and calmly on the ideas contained in several of the above-mentioned phrases: . Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. No nation of the world has been left out of the dilemma, not even the big and powerful states; none has escaped the threat of war or attacks. We will use any weapon. No procedure has been excluded, regardless of its ethics, or any threat whatever fatal, either nuclear, chemical, biological or any other. It will not be short combat but a lengthy war, lasting many years, unparalleled in history. It is the world's fight; it is civilization's fight. The achievements of our times and the hope of every time, now depend on us. Finally, an unheard of confession in a political speech on the eve of a war, and no less than in times of apocalyptic risks: The course of this conflict is not known; yet its outcome is certain. And we know that God is not neutral. This is an amazing assertion. When I think about the real or imagined parties involved in that bizarre holy war that is about to begin, I find it difficult to make a distinction about where fanaticism is stronger. On Thursday, before the United States Congress, the idea was designed of a world military dictatorship

under the exclusive rule of force, irrespective of any international laws or institutions. The United Nations Organization, simply ignored in the present crisis, would fail to have any authority or prerogative whatsoever. There would be only one boss, only one judge, and only one law. We have all been ordered to ally either with the United States government or with terrorism. Cuba, the country that has suffered the most and the longest from terrorist actions, the one whose people are not afraid of anything because there is no threat or power in the world that can intimidate it, with a high morale Cuba claims that it is opposed to terrorism and opposed to war. Although the possibilities are now remote, Cuba reaffirms the need to avert a war of unpredictable consequences whose very authors have admitted not to have the least idea of how the events will unfold. Likewise, Cuba reiterates its willingness to cooperate with every country in the total eradication of terrorism.

An objective and calm friend should advise the United States government against throwing the young American soldiers into an uncertain war in remote, isolated and inaccessible places, like a fight against ghosts, not knowing where they are or even if they exist or not, or whether the people they kill are or not responsible for the death of their innocent fellow countrymen killed in the United States. Cuba will never declare itself an enemy of the American people that is today subjected to an unprecedented campaign to sow hatred and a vengeful spirit, so much so that even the music that sings to peace has been banned. On the contrary, Cuba will make that music its own, and even our children will sing their songs to peace while the announced bloody war lasts. Whatever happens, the territory of Cuba will never be used for terrorist actions against the American people and we will do everything within our reach to prevent such actions against that people. Today we are expressing our solidarity while urging peace and calmness. One day they will admit we were right. Our independence, our principles and our social achievements we will defend with honor to the last drop of blood, if we are attacked! It will not be easy to fabricate pretexts to do it. They are already talking about a war using all the necessary weapons but it will be good recalling that not even that would be a new experience. Almost four decades ago, hundreds of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons were aimed at Cuba and nobody remembers anyone of our countrymen sleepless over that. We are the same sons and daughters of that heroic people, with a patriotic and revolutionary conscience that is higher than ever. It is time for serenity and courage. The world will grow aware of this and will raise its voice in the face of the terrible threatening drama that it is about to suffer. As for Cubans, this is the right time to proclaim more proud and resolute than ever: Socialism or death! Homeland or death! We will overcome. ■