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throughout the world. Sadly, the politics of vengeance seems to define the path ahead for the post-September 11 world. Bush, Blair and Bin Laden have already traveled on that path quite a distance.

Terrorism has been a specific political practice that has promised emancipation, and yet delivered only oppression and revenge. In the history of political ideas since the mid-nineteenth century, the advocacy of terrorism as a means of politics has met with a strong critique that has repeatedly demonstrated its – terrorism's—counter-emancipatory thrust. Terrorism, even in its most anti-systemic version, is nothing but a political statement of despair and will for vengeance. It devours the innocent and legitimizes the very adversary that it seeks to expose or weaken. Those who sought martyrdom by causing spectacular harm to the symbols of the American military and economic power achieved their goals at the expense of several thousand innocent people. Those who planned

this anti-American offensive operation of the most daring kind are now witnessing the continuing death of hundreds if not thousands of the innocent people whom they seek to emancipate.

Here perhaps lies a great paradox of the so-called 'war against terrorism', whether it is in Sri Lanka or in the West. Terrorism, though many tend to forget, has both anti-systemic and pro-systemic dimensions. The practice of terrorism has never been the monopoly of anti-state forces. Israel, for instance, is a preeminent practitioner of state terrorism in the Middle East. The United States has demonstrated no moral qualms whatsoever when its covert state agencies resorted to terrorist strategies in the developing world for decades, in order to protect its own interests. Its bombings in Libya, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, not so long ago, were acts of global state terrorism, necessitated by rival practices of terrorism. The US has also supported, directly and covertly, politico-military outfits – in Iraq, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Cuba, for example – that were 'terrorists' even in the simple, anti-statist, definition of the term.

The important point, however, is not about who is a 'terrorist' or who is the terrorist to enjoy legality and legitimacy; rather, it concerns the question of politically dealing with all forms of terrorism which encompass the 'good' and the 'evil' alike, terrorism of systemic as well as anti-systemic projects. This is an issue which the global state system and the anti-systemic movements have actually failed to grasp. Military retaliation, either in the form of suicide missions into crowded apartments in the heart of the 'enemy' country or high-tech bombardment from the blue skies, is the only language they seem to deploy in dealing with each other. Years and decades of demonization of the other – one as a primitive monster with a long beard and fiery eyes, hiding in caves and the other as a sinister beast in striped trousers with tentacles spread all over the world – has divided the world into two antagonistic camps of enmity and hatred. It seems that the post-September 11 world is now sharply polarized into two camps, with contending and mutually exclusivist claims to civilization and barbarism. When one side claims to represent civilization, the other side is barbarism. A discourse of absolute enmity seems to define the new phase of global politics, the politics of terroristic vengeance. President George

Bush in his rustic vocabulary described the shape of the world to come as one where (there are no choices: "either you are with us or with the terrorists." The post-September 11 world will have to learn, and learn anew, how to engage with terrorism politically. As long as the world refuses to move away from military engagement with 'terrorism', 'terrorism' will have no reason to disappear as a weapon of engagement with the adversary. Those who hold the absurd belief that the US or Western enemy could be defeated by means of increasingly spectacular individual and collective terrorism – biological warfare may be their latest military strategy – are not just a bunch of mad men. They are practitioners of a particular kind of politics that romanticizes death and destruction as legitimate political action. It is the same kind of politics that the Western democracies too have practiced under the guise of international legality and legitimacy, against a host of enemies in Palestine, in Iraq and now in Afghanistan. The logic of rationalization of these two forms of terroristic practice is the same: vengeful military action should determine the shape of politics to come. But, this approach to politics is self-defeating, because politics of terrorism can only beget politics of terrorism. It, in other words, militarizes politics. As recent world experience demonstrates, the danger of terroristic militarization of global politics is that the process of confrontation becomes increasingly invisible, unpredictable, enormously destructive and tragically spectacular in terms of human cost.

In engaging terrorism politically, the responsibility for first political initiative lies squarely with the US and its European allies. And that political engagement should begin in the Middle East, in the unfolding conflict involving Israel and the Palestine. It will also require a totally fresh look at the politics in the Middle East as well as Western South Asia where anti-American and anti-Western politics of despair seems to concentrate, giving rise to a radicalism of the suicidal kind. But the West will have to disabuse its own mind from the old categories of thinking and seeing the world. The Western powers at the moment do not seem to have a language other than militaristic terrorism in order to engage the world. The world constructed after the cold war seems to have entered an irreversible phase of catastrophe.

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This issue of *Pravada* focuses on the aftermath of the September 11 attack on New York and Washington DC by suspected Islamic radicals. Among the analysts are leading philosophers, thinkers and writers from Asia and elsewhere.

THERE ARE MANY ISLAMIS

Edward Said

Spectacular horror of the sort that struck New York (and to a lesser degree Washington) has ushered in a new world of unseen, unknown assailants, terror missions without political message, senseless destruction.

For the residents of this wounded city, the consternation, fear, and sustained sense of outrage and shock will certainly continue for a long time, as will the genuine sorrow and affliction that so much carnage has so cruelly imposed on so many.

New Yorkers have been fortunate that Mayor Rudy Giuliani, a normally rebarbative and unpleasantly combative, even retrograde figure, has rapidly attained Churchillian status. Calmly, un sentimentally, and with extraordinary compassion, he has marshalled the city's heroic police, fire and emergency services to admirable effect and, alas, with huge loss of life. Giuliani's was the first voice of caution against panic and jingoistic attacks on the city's large Arab and Muslim communities, the first to express the commonsense of anguish, the first to press everyone to try to resume life after the shattering blows.

Would that that were all. The national television reporting has of course brought the horror of those dreadful winged juggernauts into every household, unremittingly, insistently, not always edifyingly. Most commentary has stressed, indeed magnified, the expected and the predictable in what most Americans feel: terrible loss, anger, outrage, a sense of violated vulnerability, a desire for vengeance and unrestrained retribution. Beyond formulaic expressions of grief and patriotism, every politician and accredited pundit or expert has dutifully repeated how we shall not be defeated, not be deterred, not stop until terrorism is exterminated. This is a war against terrorism, everyone says, but where, on what fronts, for what concrete ends? No answers are provided, except the vague suggestion that the Middle East and Islam are what 'we' are up against, and that terrorism must be destroyed.

What is most depressing, however, is how little time is spent trying to understand America's role in the world, and its direct involvement in the complex reality beyond the two coasts that have for so long kept the rest of the world extremely distant and virtually out of the

average American's mind. You'd think that 'America' was a sleeping giant rather than a superpower almost constantly at war, or in some sort of conflict, all over the Islamic domains. Osama bin Laden's name and face have become so numbingly familiar to Americans as in effect to obliterate any history he and his shadowy followers might have had before they became stock symbols of everything loathsome and hateful to the collective imagination. Inevitably, then, collective passions are being funnelled into a drive for war that uncannily resembles Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick, rather than what is going on, an imperial power injured at home for the first time, pursuing its interests systematically in what has become a suddenly reconfigured geography of conflict, without clear borders, or visible actors. Manichaeic symbols and apocalyptic scenarios are bandied about with future consequences and rhetorical restraint thrown to the winds.

Rational understanding of the situation is what is needed now, not more drum-beating. George Bush and his team clearly want the latter, not the former. Yet to most people in the Islamic and Arab worlds the official US is synonymous with arrogant power, known for its sanctimoniously munificent support not only of Israel but of numerous repressive Arab regimes, and its inattentiveness even to the possibility of dialogue with secular movements and people who have real grievances. Anti-Americanism in this context is not based on a hatred of modernity or technology-envy: it is based on a narrative of concrete interventions, specific depredations and, in the cases of the Iraqi people's suffering under US-imposed sanctions and US support for the 34-year-old Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Israel is now cynically exploiting the American catastrophe by intensifying its military occupation and oppression of the Palestinians.

Political rhetoric in the US has overridden these things by flinging about words like 'terrorism' and 'freedom' whereas, of course, such large abstractions have mostly hidden sordid material interests, the influence of the oil, defence and Zionist lobbies now consolidating their hold on the entire Middle East, and an age-old religious hostility to (and ignorance of) 'Islam' that takes new forms every day.

Intellectual responsibility, however, requires a still more critical sense of the actuality. There has been terror of course, and nearly every struggling modern movement at some stage has relied on terror. This was as true of Mandela's ANC as it was of all the others, Zionism included. And yet bombing defenceless civilians with F-16s and helicopter gunships has the same structure and effect as more conventional nationalist terror.

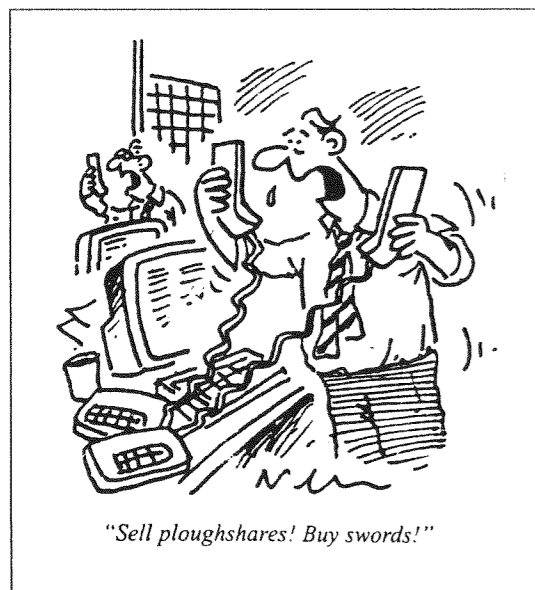
What is bad about all terror is when it is attached to religious and political abstractions and reductive myths that keep veering away from history and sense. This is where the secular consciousness has to try to make itself felt, whether in the US or in the Middle East. No cause, no God, no abstract idea can justify the mass slaughter of innocents, most particularly when only a small group of people are in charge of such actions and feel themselves to represent the cause without having a real mandate to do so. Besides, much as it has been quarrelled over by Muslims, there isn't a single Islam: there are Islams, just as there are Americas. This diversity is true of all traditions, religions or nations even though some of their adherents have futilely tried to draw boundaries around themselves and pin their creeds down neatly. Yet history is far more complex and contradictory than to be represented by demagogues who are much less representative than either their followers or opponents claim. The trouble with religious or moral fundamentalists is that today their primitive ideas of revolution and resistance, including a willingness to kill and be killed, seem all too easily attached to technological sophistication and what appear to be gratifying acts of horrifying retaliation. The New York and Washington suicide bombers seem to have been middle-class, educated men, not poor refugees. Instead of getting

a wise leadership that stresses education, mass mobilisation and patient organisation in the service of a cause, the poor and the desperate are often conned into the magical thinking and quick bloody solutions that such appalling models provide, wrapped in lying religious claptrap.

On the other hand, immense military and economic power are no guarantee of wisdom or moral vision. Sceptical and humane voices have been largely unheard in the present crisis, as 'America' girds itself for a long war to be fought somewhere out there, along with allies who have been pressed into service on very uncertain grounds and for imprecise ends. We need to step back from the imaginary thresholds that separate people from each other and re-examine the labels, reconsider the limited resources available, decide to share our fates with each other as cultures mostly have done, despite the bellicose cries and creeds.

'Islam' and 'the West' are simply inadequate as banners to follow blindly. Some will run behind them, but for future generations to condemn themselves to prolonged war and suffering without so much as a critical pause, without looking at interdependent histories of injustice and oppression, without trying for common emancipation and mutual enlightenment seems far more wilful than necessary. Demonization of the Other is not a sufficient basis for any kind of decent politics, certainly not now when the roots of terror in injustice can be addressed, and the terrorists isolated, deterred or put out of business. It takes patience and education, but is more worth the investment than still greater levels of large-scale violence and suffering.

Prof. Edward Said teaches at Columbia University, New York. Among his books are *Orientalism*, *Culture and Imperialism*, *Covering Islam*, and *Peace and its Discontents*.



He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. *They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.* Nation will not take up sword against nation. Nor will they train for war any more.

Isiah Chapter 2 verse 4

THE ALGEBRA OF INFINITE JUSTICE

Arundhati Roy

In the aftermath of the unconscionable September 11 suicide attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre, an American newscaster said: "Good and evil rarely manifest themselves as clearly as they did last Tuesday. People who we don't know massacred people who we do. And they did so with contemptuous glee." Then he broke down and wept.

Here's the rub: America is at war against people it doesn't know, because they don't appear much on TV. Before it has properly identified or even begun to comprehend the nature of its enemy, the US government has, in a rush of publicity and embarrassing rhetoric, cobbled together an international coalition against terror, mobilised its army, its air force, its navy and its media, and committed them to battle.

The trouble is that once America goes off to war, it can't very well return without having fought one. If it doesn't find its enemy, for the sake of the enraged folks back home, it will have to manufacture one. Once war begins, it will develop a momentum, a logic and a justification of its own, and we'll lose sight of why it's being fought in the first place. What we're witnessing here is the spectacle of the world's most powerful country reaching reflexively, angrily, for an old instinct to fight a new kind of war. Suddenly, when it comes to defending itself, America's streamlined warships, cruise missiles and F-16 jets look like obsolete, lumbering things. As deterrence, its arsenal of nuclear bombs is no longer worth its weight in scrap. Box-cutters, penknives, and cold anger are the weapons with which the wars of the new century will be waged. Anger is the lock pick. It slips through customs unnoticed. Doesn't show up in baggage checks.

Who is America fighting? On September 20, the FBI said that it had doubts about the identities of some of the hijackers. On the same day President George Bush said, "We know exactly who these people are and which governments are supporting them." It sounds as though the president knows something that the FBI and the American public don't.

The Enemy

In his September 20 address to the US Congress, President Bush called the enemies of America enemies of freedom. Americans are asking, "Why do they hate us?" he said. "They hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." People are being asked to make two leaps of faith here. First, to assume that 'The Enemy' is who the US government says it is,

even though it has no substantial evidence to support that claim. And second, to assume that 'The Enemy's' motives are what the US government says they are, and there's nothing to support that either.

For strategic, military and economic reasons, it is vital for the US government to persuade its public that their commitment to freedom and democracy and the "American Way of Life" is under attack. In the current atmosphere of grief, outrage and anger, it's an easy notion to peddle.

However, if that were true, it's reasonable to wonder why the symbols of America's economic and military dominance—the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon—were chosen as the targets of the attacks. Why not the Statue of Liberty? Could it be that the stygian anger that led to the attacks has its taproot not in American freedom and democracy, but in the US government's record of commitment and support to exactly the opposite things: to military and economic terrorism, insurgency, military dictatorship, religious bigotry and unimaginable genocide (outside America)? It must be hard for ordinary Americans, so recently bereaved, to look up at the world with their eyes full of tears and encounter what might appear to them to be indifference. It isn't indifference. It's just augury. An absence of surprise. The tired wisdom of knowing that what goes around eventually comes around. American people ought to know that it is not them but their government's policies that are so hated. They can't possibly doubt that they themselves, their extraordinary musicians, their writers, their actors, their spectacular sportsmen and their cinema, are universally welcomed. All of us have been moved by the courage and grace shown by firefighters, rescue workers and ordinary office staff in the days since the attacks.

America's grief at what happened has been immense and immensely public. It would be grotesque to expect it to calibrate or modulate its anguish. However, it will be a pity if, instead of using this as an opportunity to try to understand why September 11 happened, Americans use it as an opportunity to usurp the whole world's sorrow to mourn and avenge only their own. Because then it falls to the rest of us to ask the hard questions and say the harsh things. And for our pains, for our bad timing, we will be disliked, ignored and perhaps eventually silenced.

The world will probably never know what motivated those particular hijackers who flew planes into those particular American buildings. They were not glory boys. They left no suicide notes, no political messages; no organisation has claimed credit for the