

I should be clear about the Pakistan I know and, in many ways, love. It is a curiously peaceful, kind country. You may still walk its cities and towns without threat. The people are clever and ambitious and warm. But there are too many of them: too many, proliferating, to feed or to harness. And the finest minds, in despair, go overseas, where their talent can bloom. A disaster waiting to happen—unless it can catch its breath and find a stable governance that has the flexibility of democracy built in as India's does.

This week Pakistan's unelected president will decide what compromises he can make and where he must duck for cover. He's

an intelligent and often reasonable man. But there won't, in the end, be any compromise unless freedom can at last take root here.

The enemy of my enemy is my temporary friend? Islamabad and New Delhi both find themselves ranged against the enemy of terrorism. A wise west might make something of that. A wise west would care for Pakistan as more than a series of air bases set on the edge of the Hindu Kush. A wise west would wonder not just what Pakistan could do for it in the pursuit of prime suspects, but what it now, at a moment of test, could do for Pakistan.

Courtesy *Guardian*

Peter Preston is a British journalist

## COMMENTARY AND ANALYSIS

Susan Sontag

The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards.

Our leaders are bent on convincing us that everything is OK. America is not afraid. Our spirit is unbroken, although this was a day that will live in infamy and America is now at war. But everything is not OK. And this was not Pearl Harbor. We have a robotic President who assures us that America still stands tall. A wide spectrum of public figures, in and out of office, who are

strongly opposed to the policies being pursued abroad by this Administration apparently feel free to say nothing more than that they stand united behind President Bush. A lot of thinking needs to be done, and perhaps is being done in Washington and elsewhere, about the ineptitude of American intelligence and counter-intelligence, about options available to American foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, and about what constitutes a smart program of military defense.

But the public is not being asked to bear much of the burden of reality. The unanimously applauded, self-congratulatory bromides of a Soviet Party Congress seemed contemptible. The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.

Those in public office have let us know that they consider their task to be a manipulative one: confidence-building and grief management. Politics, the politics of a democracy—which entails disagreement, which promotes candor—has been replaced by psychotherapy. Let's by all means grieve together. But let's not be stupid together. A few shreds of historical awareness might help us understand what has just happened, and what may continue to happen. "Our country is strong," we are told again and again. I for one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not all America has to be.

Susan Sontag is one of America's leading writers.