

New York and Washington

We are all outraged at the assaults on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. We were outraged to see Americans commandeered in the sky and used as lethal weapons to massacre their own people on their own soil. The targets were chosen carefully. The first visited our national security interests, our survival, our defense; the second our national interests, the quality of life, how we live.

The two attacks shook our confidence as individuals and as a nation. The staggering loss of lives and the enormous number of injured was greater than the strongest among us could bear. Our material losses pale before this human sacrifice.

To characterize them as acts of war or terrorist acts is to clothe them in the garb of undeserved respectability. They were ideological acts not in the sense of good or bad or light and darkness, but as insidious challenges that demand less brawn and more brain responses. We must eschew the newly discovered logic of terrorist management that eradicates one virus and generates another. This struggle demands will power, wit, cunning and heavy doses of fairness and justice.

How did we the United States plunge from the most beloved, the most respected, the most esteemed nation in the world only fifty years ago to these depths wherein some of our closest European allies have characterized us as arrogant and insensitive, and former Asian allies called us the Great Satan? From what planet did these American haters descend to unleash their fury on us? And why, of all the constellations in the universe did they select us? Or, if they are earthlings what moved them to strike now in this last decade and not before? What motivated them to exact this terrible pain? We need answers to these questions.

In this time of travail when national unity is essential, we must remain vigilant that national solidarity is not equated with blind acceptance of national policy and that closed ranks not become the intellectual equivalent of closed minds. Unquestioned policy must never be the litmus test of loyalty or the gauge of love of country.

Yet even as the consequence of this awful tragedy are not fully known, the major television networks and the written media parade before us politicians and policy makers to lecture us on the perpetrators. Understandably they never suggest that their own incoherent and inconsistent foreign policies may have played some part in creating the environment that bred hatred and disrespect for our country. Unforgivably the media validates their silence by not raising the question of accountability.

Just as we must hold accountable those who perpetrated this appalling crime, we need accountability from those politicians that systematically led us down this tortured path, from the media that marginalized or would not print the views of competent Americans that opposed or questioned these policies, and from members of Congress who sent one-size-fits-all form letters instead of studied replies to constituents who questioned them on foreign policy issues.

Among the Americans that these politicians let down on that sunny morning of 11 September 2001 were Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, capitalists, laborers, the straight and the gay, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all confident that their national leaders were doing the right thing by them when they left for work never to return, interred instead in a collection requiem, their blood and charred flesh aflame in one ecumenical holocaust.

We can redeem their deaths by remaining the most militarily powerful and the freest nation on earth and by leading a coalition that unites the world rather than divides it. A coalition to achieve justice and fairness is one worthy of American leadership. Nothing underscores this more than the stark reality that our massive military force and immense material wealth combined with that of our most powerful allies cannot achieve our self-appointed mission to rid the world of terrorism without the help of the poorest, the smallest, the weakest of nations, where terrorism too often is a daily does of injustice and humiliation while we and our allies look the other way until we need them. Those that call such a coalition unrealistic need to explain why their realism has spawned unending violence for these many decades.

In assessing where we have been and where we are headed, in our question for justice and fairness, we must be vigilant. Hatred of us among some individuals and some governments, whatever the reasons, has taken a life of its own. Bent as they are on translating this hate into our death and destruction, they must be confronted forcefully. But this kind of hate need not exist forever. We proved this when we rehabilitated Germany and Japan after World War II despite their atrocities, and in Vietnam when we abandoned flawed policies and reconciled with and embraced our adversaries in spite of 55,000 soldiers dead and untold wounded.

We must return to the time when a strong and fair American was a beacon of light and hope to all peoples not just for the favored few.

America's security and survival require no more.

The American people deserve no less.

John S. Habib, PhD

11 September 2001

Brussels