

The algebra of infinite justice



ARUNDHATI ROY

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.

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'.

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.

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.

The world will probably never know what motivated those particular hijackers who flew planes into those particular American buildings.

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?'

terror,' before it invites (and coerces) countries to actively participate in its almost godlike mission called Operation Infinite Justice until it was pointed out that this could be seen as an insult to Muslims, who believe that only Allah can mete out infinite justice, and was renamed Operation Enduring Freedom.

the world, whose ruling Taliban government is sheltering Osama bin Laden, the man being held responsible for the September 11 attacks.

The only thing in Afghanistan that could possibly count as collateral value is its citizenry. (Among them, half a million maimed orphans. There are accounts of hobbling stampedes that occur when artificial limbs are airdropped into remote, inaccessible villages.)

10 years of relentless conflict, the Russians withdrew, leaving behind a civilisation reduced to rubble.

Civil war in Afghanistan raged on. The jihad spread to Chechnya, Kosovo and eventually to Kashmir. The CIA continued to pour in money and military equipment, but the overheads had become immense, and more money was needed.

Secular violence, globalisation's structural adjustment programmes and drug lords are tearing the country to pieces. Set up to fight the Soviets, the terrorist training centres and madrasahs, sown like dragon's teeth across the country, produced fundamentalists with tremendous popular appeal within Pakistan itself.

Now the US government is asking (asking?) Pakistan to garotte the pet it has hand-reared in its backyard for so many years.

India, thanks in part to its geography, and in part to the vision of its former leaders, has so far been

deadly payload of innocuous crop-duster aircraft. Being picked off a few at a time may end up being worse than being annihilated all at once by a nuclear bomb.

The US government, and no doubt governments all over the world, will use the climate of war as an excuse to curtail civil liberties, deny free speech, lay off workers, harass ethnic and religious minorities, cut back on public spending and divert huge amounts of money to the defence industry.

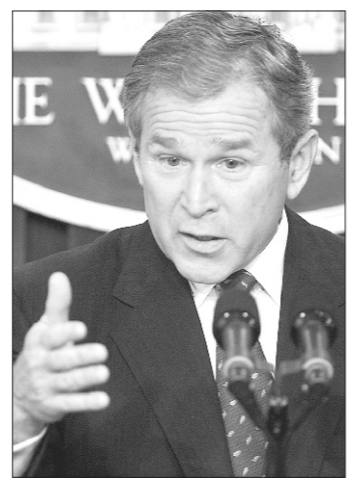
Terrorism as a phenomenon may never go away. But if it is to be contained, the first step is for America to at least acknowledge that it shares the planet with other nations, with other human beings who, even if they are not on TV, have loves and griefs and stories and songs and sorrows and, for heaven's sake, rights.

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.

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.

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 jihadis who moved to Afghanistan in 1979 when the CIA commenced its operations there.

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.



Albright, then the US secretary of state, was asked on national television what she felt about the fact that 500,000 Iraqi children had died as a result of US economic sanctions.

She replied that it was a very hard choice, but that, all things considered, 'we think the price is worth it.' Albright never lost her job for saying this.

So here we have it. The equivocating distinction between civilisation and savagery, between the 'massacre of innocent people' or, if you like, a 'clash of civilisations' and collateral damage. The sophistry and fastidious algebra of infinite justice.

order to take its soldiers in. Fearing an attack from America, one million citizens have fled from their homes and arrived at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In 1979, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the CIA and Pakistan's ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) launched the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA.

The desolate landscape of Afghanistan was the burial ground of Soviet communism and the springboard of a unipolar world dominated by America. It made the space for neocapitalism and corporate globalisation, again dominated by America.

In 1989, after being bloodied by

ginal sect of dangerous, hardline fundamentalists fought its way to power in Afghanistan. It was funded by the ISI, that old cohort of the CIA, and supported by many political parties in Pakistan.

After all that has happened, can there be anything more ironic than Russia and America joining hands to re-destroy Afghanistan?

And what of America's trusted ally? Pakistan too has suffered enormously. The US government has not been shy of supporting military dictators who have blocked the idea of democracy from taking root in the country.

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fortunate enough to be left out of this Great Game. Had it been drawn in, it's more than likely that our democracy, such as it is, would not have survived.

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British Muslims united to condemn terrorism

HEATHER FORSE

MUSLIM leaders in the United Kingdom have spoken of their horror and sadness at the atrocities committed in the United States and say they stand shoulder to shoulder in grief with the rest of the outraged world.

condemning what it described as, "these dreadful, wanton attacks ... senseless and evil attacks that appal all people of conscience."

The statement continued: "Our thoughts and prayers are with all the innocent victims, their families and communities. We convey our deepest sympathies to President Bush and the people of America. No cause can justify this carnage. We hope those responsible will swiftly be brought to justice for their unconscionable deeds."

Representatives of the UK Muslim community have since met the US Ambassador in Britain, William S Farish, to personally express their horror and sympathy for the innocent victims of the atrocities in New York and Washington.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was set up in 1997 to highlight issues facing Muslims in the UK and to promote harmony between all cultures and those following the

teachings of Islam.

Now, its members, who believe their organisation reflects the views of the majority of the UK's estimated two million Muslims and which has more than 350 affiliated organisations, fear that dangerous factions are presenting a view of their culture and religion to the world which is totally at odds with that of mainstream Muslims.

Inayat Bunglawala, a spokesman for MCB, told the London Press

Service that those responsible for the crimes in the US and the small extremist groups expressing anti-American views were un-Islamic.

"UK Muslims have been totally horrified by the events of last week. The people who died would have been from all faiths including Muslims and such attacks make victims of us all," he said.

"We realise that there are fringe elements inciting a minority of Muslims. Such people are self-appointed leaders who have made highly irresponsible statements and who have used disgusting language condemning America. They are highly dangerous and unrepresentative of ordinary mainstream Muslims."

Mr Bunglawala added: "The Muslim community has been totally, totally, shocked by what has happened. We all want to make the distinction between those who perpetrated this act these tiny cells of extremists and ordinary Muslim people who are as shocked as everyone else."

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has been quick to distance UK Muslims from the events in the US. The day after the attack, Mr Blair said: "I was pleased to see the very strong statement of condemnation from the British Muslim Council echoing that of the American Muslim Council. As Muslim leaders and clerics around the world are making clear, such acts of infamy and cruelty are wholly contrary to the Islamic faith."

"The vast majority of Muslims are decent, upright people who share our horror at what has happened. We have to make it clear that such acts of wickedness and terrorism are wholly contrary to the proper principles of the Islamic faith. This is not a situation in which we should see this as a cause between the Muslim faith and the world but between terrorism and the rest of the world, including the Muslim faith."

welcomed by the MCB which represents many hardworking Muslim families who have chosen to make their lives in the UK and live peacefully in the country's multi-cultural community.

Mr Bunglawala said: "Muslims came to this country in large numbers because they saw it as a place where they could do well and bring up their children safely. Muslims overseas long to come to the UK because it is seen as being fair and democratic and here we have rights more rights than we would have in any other country in the world."

"Britain has been good to us. It is our home and we are proud of it and we will do anything we can to protect it from those who seek to harm it. We are proud to be British Muslims. We have been very heartened by the reaction of the Prime Minister whose words distanced British Muslims from these atrocities from the start. He has shown exactly the kind of leadership we had hoped for."

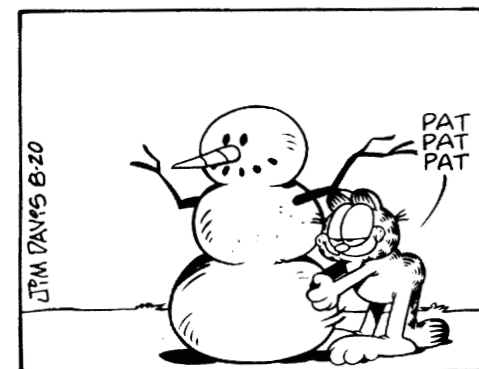
The MCB is not the only group which has spoken out against the events in the US. Other groups which have disassociated their people and condemned the atrocities include the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism and the Imams & Mosques Council (UK).

One typical Muslim businessman, Arshad Javed from Bradford in Northern England, said: "These people's views are as alien to us as they are to Christians. Muslims all over Britain have to stand up and be counted and say they will not have anything to do with them."

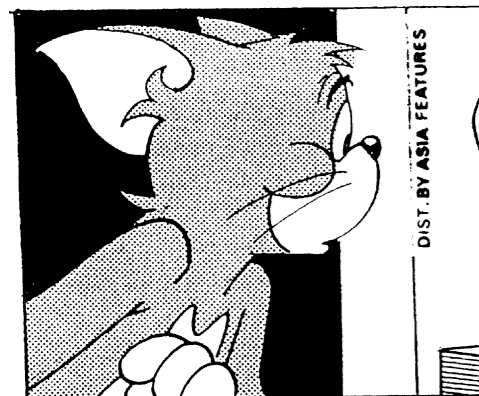
And the MCB has urged Muslims worldwide to join calls for those guilty of the crimes to be brought to trial. MCB Secretary General Yousuf Bhalloik said: "Now is the time for all Muslims to show the world that we stand for justice. The pursuit of justice is the Islamic ideal and Muslims must be in the vanguard to secure justice for this crime against humanity."

Mr Blair's words were warmly

Garfield

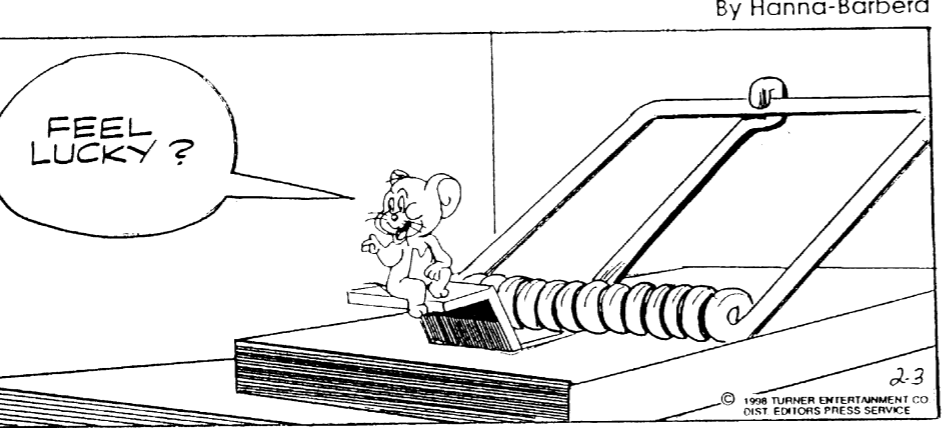


TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera

by Jim Davis



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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.

(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 multinationalals 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 'is 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.

Arundhati Roy is a celebrated Indian writer. Courtesy: The Guardian, London