

traces the donation of large sums to Harvard by Osama's several siblings (he has 54 in total) living in Boston.

What tones this essay has nothing to do with "anti-Americanism" -- that giant of a phrase, which seals the fate of any kind of reasoning both in America and around the world. Vidal is a red-blooded American and he scathingly brackets Osama as "Allah's soldier fighting the infidels". He recounts the efforts of Osama in persuading a huge group of people to prepare for fighting in Afghanistan. Osama comes off as something of an Allah-obsessed sociopath in Vidal's view. Even the history of Saladin's conquest (during the 12th century) is seen from a Western perspective. Yet, the piece gives us accounts of history that the Bushites remain doggedly silent about.

What remains unuttered in the land of the free, is common knowledge in the rest of the world. Vidal brings it up and risks not getting a publisher. He brought into sharp focus the lobbying of a missile at a Sudanese aspirin factory by Clinton which was quickly followed by Osama's embassy-blowing spree in Africa, he knocked out two in all. Alongside Osama's antics, FBI's shenanigans too are revealed. The 1993 "murderous attack" is recalled, where, in the name of fighting terrorism, FBI mounted an offensive killing of 82 evangelical Christians "who were living peaceably in their own compound at Waco, Texas". Among the dead were 25 children.

The "acts" that made the great wheel of freedom take a reverse turn, flouting the norms of democracy, were consecutively introduced both by Clinton and Bush. Clinton's 1996 "conference bill" gave the attorney general the power to use the armed services against the civilian population. This act empowered the SWAT teams to an inhuman degree. "Special Weapons and Tactics", aka SWAT came into being, as Vidal observes, when in the 70s the "white-shirt-and-tie FBI reinvented itself from a corps of 'generalists' trained in law and accounting." In the early 80s, an FBI super-SWAT team was formed. The Waco catastrophe was the handy work of one such team.

After the Twin Tower Tragedy, the SWAT teams' actions were enhanced to the limit, the army's adventures in Iraq is the burning testimony. At the verbal horizon Bushites seemed to have mustered the same amount of 'horsepower'. A sample of Bush's knowledge of Islam's wiles and ways: "They hate what they see right here in this chamber. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedom, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with

each other." But the same man decried: "You are either with us or against us."

Since the terror attack, Bush seems to have lodged himself in a position where he is flanked by a group that is with him, and another that opposes him. It is certainly a self-appointed role. And by waging a war against one man, the self-appointed-messiah has defined 'good' and 'evil' in the slimmest terms possible. With the middle tones effaced, all things are seen in black and white.

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Vidal thinks that the word "terrorism" is a hard nut to crack, especially in legal terms. But not every other man belonging to the Western stream of knowledge finds it difficult to define. The British ambassador to the UN unflinchingly says, "You know it when you see it."

In the war against terrorism the civilians in Afghanistan or Iraq, or even the American soldier's democracy and its ways are also in a tailspin. And it is clearly discernible in its true colour and with the overall weight of the ideological baggage, through words of the pontiffs who support the 'war-time' emergency measures. Micheal Ignatieff writes in *Index*, where Vidal's piece also appears, at last, in English for the first time, "Community -- especially moral community -- is not easy on free thought. The risks of censorship, as usual, are probably less serious than those of self-censorship."

The oppressive moralism that thickens the air on the American home-front after September 11, is well registered in the opinion polls. According to a November 1995 CNN-Time poll, 55 percent of the people believed: "The federal government has become so powerful that it poses a threat to the rights of ordinary citizens." Three days after the Twin Tower Tragedy, 74 percent said they thought: "It would be necessary for Americans to give up some of their personal freedom."

"The end justifies the means" -- a dictum that dictators keep cozily tucked under their sleeves, seems to be creeping into other domains. Terrorists justify their acts by resorting to it, now even democracies are following suit.

The world, it seems, is never flanked by a clearly defined line that puts good and evil in two opposite sides. To be able to side with what is good is an ongoing struggle for humans, as it is for any nation state.