

La Trobe University Essay

September 11: A Symposium

Morag Fraser

Never far from one's mind these days, the events of September 11, 2001, and their direct aftermath in Afghanistan and elsewhere, had to be prominent in this month's issue of *ABR*, such is their complex resonance and ubiquitous iconography. To complement Morag Fraser's essay on the consequences of 'September 11' for civic rights and democratic processes — in Australia as well as the USA — we invited a range of writers, scholars and public figures to reflect on how that ironically sunny, egregious morning affected Australian attitudes towards the last 'superpower', the unfolding foreign policies of both nations, and the supposedly new world order. Some, still undecided as to what it all meant, declined. We are grateful to those who agreed to essay brief overviews of this changed international reality. Our list of contributors is deliberately multifarious. It is also as subjective as any symposium should be. We hope it suggests new perspectives, and stimulates letters, comment and debate.

PRIMO LEVI, in two interviews given almost twenty years ago*, set a standard of critical sympathy that is not only exemplary, but peculiarly apt to the fraught debate about the post-September 11 world and the USA's place and reputation within it.

Levi was talking about Israel. The interviews were published in the aftermath of the Phalangist attacks on Sabra and Shatila. The horror of the killings in those Palestinian camps was the spur for Levi's (rare) remarks on Israel, but not their full substance, not the heart of them. Levi, more than most human beings, had seen too much horror to be jolted into revisions of his considered judgment by yet one more instance of it. That does not mean that he was, as a man and as a Jew, unmoved; the depth of his reaction registers in that habitually precise, plain speech of his as clearly as in anyone else's anguished scream. But it was the state of Israel that was his central concern. And his terse opinion of the then Israeli Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon, was not reactive, not merely a response to Sharon's role in allowing the Phalangist militia into the camps (his judgment on Yasser Arafat was correspondingly incisive). Levi's views had been long pondered, and were broadly, not just specifically, critical of Israeli policy. What is remarkable about them is the way in which, in giving them expression, Levi manages to do two things at once. He can utter the most stringent criticism of particular Israeli politicians and régimes while at the same time demonstrating his unwavering commitment and loyalty to Israel. 'Affectionate and polemical rapport' he calls it, a sympathy that 'runs very deep'. That sympathy — a bond, as he says, almost ruefully — is so strong as to be involuntary. And absolutely convincing.

Critical, unblinkered sympathy, or 'polemical rapport', shouldn't be remarkable. But we know it is, and all the more so during war — 'truth the first casualty' etc. Certainly, in the post-September 11 world, and throughout the 'war on terrorism', with its undefined limits, critical rapport has been straining to find a public, let alone a popular or political, forum. George W. Bush's dictum — 'Either you are with us, or you're

with the terrorists' — hasn't left much room for critical loyalty. In Australia, a related and engineered polarisation of opinion has slapped a muzzle on debate. Instance Foreign Minister Alexander Downer's recent, and indecent, haste in consigning Simon Crean to Saddam Hussein's camp the moment the Labor leader made his decidedly pragmatic criticism (but what about the wheat?) of Australia's eagerness to line up with the USA in any pre-emptive strike against Iraq.

Post-September 11, in Australia, as in the USA, the *ad hominem* tactic has had a thorough workout, and the patriotism card is the most thumbed in the deck. As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult, even in our two democracies, to debate crucial matters — ones that have potential life or death decisions written into them — and even harder to make the debate count. Spin rules. Public servants are formed into 'task forces' to keep its wheels turning. Propaganda thrives. Misinformation becomes a ministerial tool, and denigration replaces argument. Draconian laws that once would have been rejected by a public outraged at the infringement of their civil and political rights are passed into law in an atmosphere of contrived panic. There are plenty of journalists and commentators who have now had a rapid education in the consequences of dissent: abuse, threats, dismissal. And this in vaunted democracies. What kind of example, or hope, one has to ask, does this provide to people in other parts of the globe who live without even the presumption of democracy and freedom?

What is lost, in this overheated atmosphere, is understanding, a readiness to reflect, and the analytical capacity to link cause, particularly historically complex cause, with effect. And so we blunder on in a politics of confusion, confabulation and vested interest.

IN JULY this year I spent a lot of time talking to Americans about America. We happened to be in California, but they came from all over — New York, Ohio, Boston, Colorado. It was unsurprising, and characteristic, that the prompt to talk politics came from me. Never underestimate the genuine

politeness of Americans, or the ritual formalities of their hospitality. But, once the rude and divisive subject was broached, there was no stopping them.

Their conversations were different from ones I'd had with other Americans last year, in the weeks after the attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon. Understandably so. At that time, shock and terrible personal loss, compounded by fear, made speculation about causes of the attacks too painful, too difficult. Criticism, even analysis, sounded like betrayal.

Ten months on, however, this group was vocal. They'd had time to distil their reactions, sift the mass of information and counter-information. Other events had impinged and expanded the context of their considerations. They had watched, night after night, as their television sets brought news of the serial defaulting of US corporate giants such as Enron and WorldCom, and the complicit derelictions of the supposed scrutineers (Arthur Andersen et al.). They had watched, in October 2001, as their Senate voted to approve, without debate, the expenditure of US\$60 billion on the as yet unproved missile-defense system. They saw their own and foreign nationals caged in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay in circumstances that could only be described as legal limbo (and a bizarre parody of civil rights abuse Fidel Castro style). They saw their president sign the USA PATRIOT Act, and they understood its ramifications — surveillance, wiretaps, a legalised invasion of the privacy of financial and medical records — all in the name of national security. They saw the freedoms enshrined in their Constitution eroded and their liberties and civil rights treated with cavalier disregard. And they were obliged to consider the liberties and civil rights of foreign nationals who, after another presidential signing, could be remanded to a military tribunal simply on suspicion of having been associated with a terrorist organisation or linked with subversive individuals or ideas.

They saw the stock market buck and plunge. They watched as some of the highest officers in the land, Vice President Dick Cheney among them, were involved in serious questioning of their financial dealings. They also heard, in every press statement, presidential utterance, in speech after speech, and on the nightly television news, a loop of rhetoric that was mind-numbing in its repetitive banality — a signal for patriotic suspension of the critical faculty. 'We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world.' Don't ask how. Wrong question. They heard, repeated ad nauseam, the same disingenuous evasion — 'régime change' — used to presage war. And, if they did not already know, they learned from their own experienced and wary US military veterans (such as Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf of Gulf War fame) that the projected régime change could mean a war against another state that, like any number of states including Saudi Arabia, harbours terrorists but that also boasts 400,000 troops, many of them well-equipped and battle-hardened, particularly on the ground. War on terror, or war on Iraq? They understood that the two are different and that the latter could lead

their country into drawn-out strife, and entail American casualties and international isolation precisely at a time when its previous isolationism had ended. It ended in the worst possible way on September 11, but it ended nonetheless.

None of these people wants to live anywhere but in the USA. They are disturbed by the unilateralism of the Bush camp, but they are not about to start a revolution. They want, instead, to see a reassertion of the values and liberties that they, as Americans, cherish. They certainly want to see that at home, and they demonstrated a fair notion of how close is the connection between a revival of liberty and democracy at home and the promotion of liberty and democracy abroad.

Another odd thing: they didn't resent my asking questions, or voicing criticism. 'Please write about this,' they said. They didn't think of themselves willingly as part of an imperial power, but they were ready enough — their initiative, not mine — to look at the history of US involvement in South America, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, the Middle East. They were also ready to look at their ally and former imperial power, Great Britain, and its history of political and economic involvement in the Arab regions that so preoccupy us all, post-September 11. And some of us (not all: this was America) were boning up, as fast as possible, on whatever was being written about Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, oil, weapons trade, Islam and Christianity — fundamentalist or not.

In Australia, my interrogatory bent, or indeed that of any commentator who doesn't salute and fall in with the Bush line, risks being traduced as agonised, leftist and anti-American. (See, for example, Salusinszky and Melliush's *Blaming Ourselves: September 11 and the Agony of the Left*, Duffy & Snellgrove, 2002.) My American conversationalists didn't see it like that. Together we were neither agonised nor self-flagellating. Concerned? Yes. Critical? Certainly. Un-American? What I heard from them was in the finest tradition of American reflection on the state of their nation, the kind of summation that you'd hope for in an ideal State of the Union address. They weren't a statistically significant sample of US opinion (though their views are repeated and amplified now in much of the press). They were just a bunch of regular, educated Americans, willing to talk. They were too busy, all of them, to be political activists, and any left-right taxonomy would not have made much sense; their views and allegiances — Democrat, Republican, uncommitted — ranged too widely. What they did have in common, and with me, was a conviction that, in the post-September 11 world, it has become increasingly difficult to voice opposition to the status quo and to have the integrity of that opposition accepted, let alone acted upon. More broadly, it seemed clear to us that, in the world in which the USA has become the dominant power, there is no elbow room for countervailing critique. Oppositions are no longer allowed to be loyal oppositions. That model of civilised, substantive argument in a common cause, for a common good (Levi's 'polemical rapport'),

is acknowledged in principle but ignored, bypassed, ducked, disregarded or downright condemned in practice.

In that sense, there has been a change, or at least an acceleration towards intolerance and an erosion of the liberal ethos that we all treasure.

Still, you can't say we hadn't been warned. Forty years ago, another old soldier (and Republican president) had something to say about powerful influences on the nature of American democracy:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the federal government. We recognise the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military–industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's concluding emphasis, on the symbiotic prospering of security and liberty, is what makes his January 1961 presidential farewell so resonant today. Since September 11, security and liberty in America, and to a lesser extent in Australia, have been in an accelerated process of uncoupling. And our leaders have done much to ensure that the citizenry do not become the alert and knowledgeable guardians that Eisenhower nominated as indispensable for maintaining the balance of power in a democracy. Ignorance is now cultivated. In our politicians it is faux ignorance (only a happy few rejoice in the genuine article). 'I don't know' or 'I didn't know' is not a becoming political modesty; it's the stock legalist formula for evading political and moral responsibility. See the records of the Australian Senate inquiry into the children overboard incident for evidence of the technique, polished and honed. The ignorance in the citizenry is, however, harder to manage. The pesky desire to know, and a few venerable conventions keep getting in the way. Remember the English political apparatchik who tried to bury some bad news about British transport by suggesting it be released on the afternoon of September 11? She came unstuck. We can be sure that many other similar attempts have been successful. The point of political information management is to ensure that we don't hear the bad news, or, if we do, that we don't notice too much. There is now a battery

of sanctioned techniques (commercial-in-confidence requirements for example) to keep us from knowing. And, if all else fails, invoke national security.

SO HAS THE world changed since September 11? No. In large part it is as it was, lopsidedly wealthy, indefensibly poor, and caught up in cycles of poverty, war and ideological strife that keep children out of school, or thrust them in fundamentalist training houses for more war. People still die in their millions from treatable diseases like malaria. War is a potent distraction from the difficult business of breaking cycles of oppression, hunger, disease and misery. And not much education goes on while war is alienating the best energies of nations and peoples.

There have been régime changes. Afghanistan has a new-old set of rulers, and the Taliban have been scattered. About Al Qaeda we know about as much and as little as we ever did. But we have become much more nervous. India and Pakistan have slightly different grounds for warlike (and nuclear) posturing than before. While the USA has winked, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has exploded.

The USA has not so much changed as been shaken into a new period of self-scrutiny, and perhaps a greater awareness of context, of connectedness. Meanwhile, reactive or opportunistic US unilateralism runs ahead of national self-knowledge. That may change, too. But there is no guarantee, even with the current emergence of American pragmatists and wiseheads cautioning against a war with Iraq that has no escape clause and few allies.

September 11 has been the catalyst, or the excuse, for policy initiatives that are extensions of what was happening before. Certainly, in Australia, what we have seen since September 11 is a strengthening of impulses that were already running in our political culture. It is easy to conflate the *Tampa* incident with the cataclysm of September 11 (as Peter Reith so artfully did), but the *MV Tampa* was heading into Australian territorial waters some weeks before the USA was attacked. Relations with our Muslim neighbours, Indonesia in particular, were strained well before we had such shocking warrant to link militant Islam and terrorism.

The logic of imperialism does not often lead to enlightenment, let alone universal prosperity. But the USA is a very unusual empire. In its own examination of the nature of its democracy and connection with the rest of the world may lie the fitting memorial to those who died in the furnace of September 11.

*'Io, Primo Levi, chiedo le dimissioni di Begin', 'Primo Levi: Begin should go', interview with Giampaolo Pansa, *La Repubblica*, 24 September 1982, and 'Se questo è uno Stato', 'If This Is a State', interview with Gad Lerner, *L'Espresso*, 30 September 1984, republished in *The Voice of Memory, Primo Levi, Interviews, 1961–1987*, edited by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon, translated by Robert Gordon, The New Press, New York, 2001.

Gareth Evans

The main impact of September 11 was to change perceptions, not realities. Some things, certainly, are different: a new sense of vulnerability in Western capitals; more understanding of the interconnectedness of things, that grievances bred elsewhere can have catastrophic consequences half a world away (and, with this, the end of US isolationism, if not unilateralism); and a new recognition that we can no longer treat with erratic neglect the problems of the Arab and Islamic world. And, in the new post-September 11 atmosphere, some old problems — like Sudan and Sri Lanka — have become a little easier to resolve. But some others are in danger of reigniting, not least because of Washington's new enthusiasm for 'hot pre-emption': it's hard to find anyone else in the world outside the USA (or Canberra) who thinks the lumping together of Iran, North Korea and Iraq as coaxial evil-doers was other than simplistic, provocative and counter-productive.

What have not changed at all since September 11 are the fundamentals of global security and social justice. The distribution of power in the world remains incredibly lopsided, with the USA, just as much after September 11 as it was before, a military and economic hyperpower in comparison with everyone else — and a target, as a result, for a great deal of envy, resentment and outright hostility. In many parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Latin America, there are major unresolved political problems — some of them with underlying economic and social causes — that have been inadequately addressed, incompetently addressed or deliberately left to fester, nearly all with the potential to generate violent conflict. As to global social justice fundamentals, nobody made the point better than Kofi Annan in his end-of-year press conference last December: 'For many people in the world 2001 was not different from 2000 or 1999. It was just another year of living with HIV/AIDS, or in a refugee camp, or under repressive rule, or with crushing poverty.'

These problems cry out for imaginative, engaged commitment by the world's governments and intergovernmental organisations — acting comprehensively, intelligently and, above all, cooperatively. Whether the issue is terrorist war on states, war within states, war between states, or catastrophic human misery experienced in a dozen other ways, none of these problems can be solved by any government acting alone. Not even by the government of the richest and most powerful country the world has ever known.

Alison Broinowski

We have heard many times that on 11 September 2001 the world as we knew it suddenly changed. Even allowing for the shock and outrage felt by many around the world at the attack on the USA, how unpredictable was it really? How predictable is the next one? What are the implications for Australia?

Americans joke that theirs is the country that most people hate and most people want to migrate to, but even their

friends and admirers know that outside the USA a vatful of fear and loathing of the global hegemon has been fermenting for years. The hate mail began arriving with the first World Trade Centre bombing, the Lockerbie hijack and the attacks on US Embassies. But those who understood these messages didn't tell the president. George W. Bush seemed genuinely shocked that anyone should so hate the USA as to attack it.

Americans are probably as ignorant or expert about the rest of the world as any other people, but no others claim to be the superpower. The USA breathtakingly set one standard for themselves and another for everyone else. Americans call for disarmament, free trade, human rights, environmental protection and the rule of law, but refuse to be bound by universal agreements on them. The USA stands for democracy, but American agencies have for years 'gone after' leaders in other countries, overthrown, imprisoned, and even murdered them. They sustain corrupt, sexist, authoritarian régimes such as Saudi Arabia and belligerent ones such as Israel. American presidents habitually declare 'war' on poverty, unemployment, crime or drugs, and now terror, as if the only way to deal with such problems is to make them the enemy. They arrogate to themselves the right to decide who are 'evil doers', 'rogue states', 'evil empires' and 'bad guys'. Having decided, they forget about due process, the presumption of innocence, and habeas corpus, even for the citizens of their allies.

Well before September 11, and before the economic rot set in, some of us could hear the distant sound of civilisations clashing. The much-disparaged prediction by Samuel Huntington of a clash of Islamic and Confucian civilisations with the West began to seem less outrageously simplistic. Huntington, like Bush, denied in 2001 that the attack on America represented such a clash. Civilisation, culture and religion are great unifiers of nations against an outsider, enemy or scapegoat. But what else was Bush thinking of when he linked Iraq, Iran and North Korea in an 'axis of evil'? What else was his 'war on terrorism' other than a holy war, a crusade? In such a war, by definition, the enemy is armed with evil 'weapons of mass destruction'. The crusaders are armed with righteousness. If you're not with our civilisation, you're against it.

Where, then, does Australia stand? Not with Al Qaeda, obviously, but we don't welcome the Taliban either. Nor do we join with the many countries that are urging moderation and restraint on Washington. Australia stands with the USA, uncritically, without public or parliamentary debate, without knowing the cost of the war nor its objective. The Opposition urges no real alternative. Australia's national interest, apparently, is served by following the US crusade wherever it goes, even making enemies of two important trading partners and a sensitive neighbour with whom we've just renewed diplomatic relations. Does Australia have to repeat Vietnam to learn that, in the war on terror, Australia could become similarly bogged down and itself become a target?

Patrick McCaughey

Every American knows where they were when they heard about loaded planes flying into buildings, the Pentagon on fire. The following weeks brought images of devastation, stories of despair and despairing heroism, laments for the dead. *The New York Times* began its 'Profiles in Grief', essaying snapshots of everybody killed in the Twin Towers. For Americans, September 11 falls like a blow and feels like a wound as much as an attack on the homeland.

Outside the USA, others with the imagination of sympathy could see the pain and the sorrow but could hardly experience the event as an act of war. Other responses were harder to take. Americans were dumbfounded, as I was, to hear some Brits, some Europeans, saying, 'America had it coming to them', barely stopping short of saying, 'America deserved it'. Three hundred and forty-three firefighters did not hear the order to leave the building half an hour before the first tower fell. Did these men 'have it coming to them'?

Everything since September 11 has driven a wedge between the US experience and those outside. Despite its mistakes — the bombing of a wedding party misidentified as remnants of Al Qaeda — and its failure to find bin Laden, the Afghanistan campaign seemed inevitable to most Americans. How quickly Australian or British or European, let alone Arab, support dissipated once the Taliban were comprehensively driven from the land. It deepens now into a strident, even fearful, opposition as President Bush rattles the sabres at the Iraqis.

The paradox is inescapable: the fateful blow, the wound of September 11, has borne the strange fruit of an intense anti-Americanness throughout the world. How curiously personalised a form this antipathy takes. Bush is vilified as much as LBJ at the nadir of the Vietnam War, or Nixon after the bombing of Cambodia. Bush sounds so tinny, so lightweight, so lacking in the resonance of the truly purposeful that such vilification seems overblown. For months it looked as though September 11 and its aftermath would guarantee his second term. The corporate scandals, the faltering economy and the deep perturbation Americans feel about the Middle East have weakened that view.

To my astonishment over the last few weeks, I have heard educated, reasonably affluent,

mildly conservative Americans voicing scepticism, bordering on derision, towards Bush. This may be the comfort of the north-east, where even registered Republicans regularly vote Democratic.

The truth is that nobody rides in triumph from September 11, except perhaps ex-Mayor Rudy Giuliani — to baseball matches at Yankee Stadium. Like the assassinations of President Kennedy or Martin Luther King, September 11 already belongs to history, to the American experience. It cannot give a sitting president his *casus belli* for Iraq, nor provide a campaign slogan for the mid-term elections.

It shook the earth
And the clogged underearth, the River Styx.
The winding streams, the Atlantic shore itself.
Anything can happen, the tallest things

Be overturned, those in high places daunted.
Those overlooked esteemed ...

So Seamus Heaney in a version of Horace, just three months after September 11.

Allan Patience

In the year before September 11, Professor Chalmers Johnson, a US liberal, published a prescient book, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2000). The book criticised the blinkered narcissism characterising US foreign policy since the Cold War. Johnson warned that US foreign and defence planners (including presidents and secretaries of state) were cultivating a huge antipathy — hatred even — towards the USA among the dispossessed across the globe, among whom terrorists and fundamentalists were incubating at a frightening rate. Even in countries thought to be friendly, such as Japan and some parts of Europe, there was a growing resentment of US unilateralism. He predicted consequences ('blowback') horrible beyond words if the USA persisted in its current arrogance as the world's 'lonely superpower'. He urged a more conciliatory US diplomacy towards states that had been left brooding in humiliation and despair, too often caused

by ham-fisted strategies (some covert and morally indefensible). He called for an informed sensitivity and respect for non-Western cultures and traditions that should not be expected to ape contemporary US cultural values. The essence of Johnson's message was that the USA is its own worst enemy. Its superpowerdom leads it to imagine it is invincible, if not perfect. Not so, says Johnson: America is flawed and vulnerable in all sorts of ways.

The ascendant right in America's intellectual establishment greeted the book with a haughty disregard. And then September 11 happened. They have since gone very quiet about the book. But there are no indications whatsoever that the lessons Johnson was trying to teach theoretically in the book have been taken to heart in any practical way since the terrible events of September 11. President Bush has used the events to justify pursuing terrorism to all the corners of the earth. His discombobulated strategy is one of a cowboy-configured war — lengthy, dangerously unpredictable, costly, hi-tech, merciless and jingoistic. His jejune assumption is that the USA is the innocent party following September 11. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell demonstrate no acknowledgment of US complicity in the making of monsters such as Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. None of them seems aware of US husbanding of 'predatory globalisation', its relentless stomping on the rights of 'misrecognised' peoples ('aliens') beyond the imperium. And with John Howard's self-appointment as Bush's Asia-Pacific cheerleader, Australia is being drawn into the 'encircling gloom'. Our troops may soon be in Iraq, in a war that will end nothing and start much.

September 11 has taught us nothing.

Dennis Altman

Enough already. Even if the USA still sees the world through the prism of September 11, there is no reason for us to do likewise. Even without September 11, there would still be warfare over Kashmir and Palestine, increasing gaps between rich and poor, world hunger and disease, and financial and political turmoil in countries as far apart as Turkey, Argentina and Russia. In our immediate neighbourhood, the possible disintegration of Indonesia is a far greater security risk than the resurgence of Al Qaeda.

What is most distressing is that September 11 has given John Howard the opportunity to rerun the scripts of the Cold War, which identified our interests and our security entirely with those of the USA. In his eagerness to cosy up to President Bush, he reminds me of the class nerd who, by some fluke, finds himself momentarily in favour with the school captain, and fails to understand that he is only one of a number of sycophants.

Perhaps some Australians do see the world differently since the attacks, but I doubt it. Neither terror nor an awareness that the USA is both dominant and vulnerable are new concepts, and, if there was some possible justification for

eliminating the Taliban as an act of revenge, it is increasingly difficult to see how this might apply to Iraq. Saddam Hussein's is a vile and dictatorial régime, and one that probably encourages various forms of terrorism, but the same might be said of some of America's current allies, especially Saudi Arabia.

We are constantly told that we are at war, and it is a war against international terrorism fuelled by fundamentalism. We are simultaneously told that this is not directed at Islam. The harder question, which our politicians ignore, is the extent to which the logic of all fundamentalist religions and nationalisms leads to events like September 11; and whether Israeli settlers on the West Bank, Palestinian and Sri Lankan suicide bombers, Hindu nationalists, and the right-wing Christian fundamentalists who spawned Timothy McVeigh do not share more than separates them.

The opposition to terror is based upon the principle of the sanctity of life, and the concept that to attack people indiscriminately, whatever the apparent justification, is to undermine the legitimacy of one's cause. Over the past decade, we have seen far greater loss of life than occurred on September 11: in civil conflicts in Rwanda, the Congo and the former Yugoslavia, and in racial and religious rioting in south Asia and Indonesia. If there is to be an international 'war on terror', it should apply the same standards against America's allies as it does against its foes.

John Carroll

September 11 has forced all of us who were baptised at the cultural altar of the West to engage ourselves in two separate domains. One is practical: how to defend ourselves against further acts of mega-terrorism. The other is metaphysical.

Firstly, to the practical. The two most reliable books to date on Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda global network — Peter Bergen's *Holy War Inc.* and Rohan Gunaratna's *Inside Al Qaeda* — make clear the grave threat of further attack on Western cities. The entire West is the enemy, with the USA, to use one of bin Laden's metaphors, as head of the snake. Al Qaeda has cells not only throughout the Islamic world, but also in every country that contains Muslim migrant populations of any size. It has its own intelligence network, as large as some European services. It has its own finance committees, operating in four continents. Its leadership is made up, not of other-worldly clerics, but technocrats (one of bin Laden's aliases is 'the Director'). Its operations are meticulously planned — in the case of September 11, over many years.

The US government is now primarily concerned about the threat of a 'dirty bomb', transportable in a suitcase. Were one detonated from the top of a tall building in, say, Washington or New York, it could render the city uninhabitable with radioactive pollution. Everything bin Laden has done and said indicates an unblinking mania for destruction — the more infidels who die, the greater the satisfaction.

The US campaign in Afghanistan was essential in closing

down the headquarters of mega-terrorism; bin Laden had a dozen training camps operating there. That was the easy stage. It is quite unclear what to do now, apart from a slow, painstaking choice of small, elusive targets, while the West reconstructs its inept intelligence services — a return to using men on the ground rather than reliance on hi-tech surveillance. The gravity of the danger confronting us — Australia almost certainly harbours Al Qaeda cells — demands that we forget petty political differences. Out of self-interest, we should all be wishing President Bush good judgment and good fortune.

My own greater concern about September 11 is with its psychic impact. The World Trade Centre symbolised the pride and achievement of industrial civilisation. An age that knew no upward limit on how high it could build is now over. Bin Laden, who has arrived as our nemesis, mocked that his god had created the heavens without pillars. Disciplined men unafraid of death could not bring down his culture.

It is too early to chart the extent of our deflation. The trinity of monuments that once symbolised New York and the USA — the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building and the World Trade Centre — has been replaced by a hole of discomposure. Symptomatic of current derangement in the West is the absence of any plausible idea as to what to do with the sixteen-acre site. Paralysis is the likely result.

The US title for its campaign — Operation Enduring Freedom — is a further sign of blindness. The metaphysical challenge of September 11 is not about freedom — the modern individual has plenty of that. It is about a culture that is quite uncertain about what it believes, that has cocooned itself in excessive comfort, and that has retreated into the illusion that some sort of package tour through life might be fulfilling. More has come down with the Twin Towers in New York than concrete and steel — and 3000 lives.

Peter Mares

The chances of dying in a terrorist attack are miniscule. In Australia, there is probably a greater risk of being killed by an unleashed pit bull terrier in a city park. This is not to diminish the tragedy of September 11 or to trivialise the terrible loss of life, but to indicate that the terrorist's insidious purpose is not just to maim and kill. It is to terrorise — to instil fear in our hearts and minds.

Counter-terrorism strategies target the physical risk, seeking to deter future attacks through improved intelligence, greater police powers and heightened awareness. But these measures do not address the psychological threat of terrorism. If anything, they exaggerate it. The price of eternal vigilance is to be constantly afraid.

Australia, after September 11, became a more frightened country, and this has implications well beyond the mental well-being of each of us as individuals. Fear breeds mistrust, particularly of foreigners. (The anniversary of September 11

coincides with the anniversary of the *Tampa* affair and the birth of the 'Pacific solution'.) Fear makes us defensive and risk-averse. In foreign policy terms, the safest course appears to lie on the well-worn track of the past. We hold fast to our alliance with the USA, and pledge our support for an attack on Iraq.

Perhaps the real challenge of September 11 is to transcend our fear; to refuse to succumb to terrorists' psychological weaponry; to reassert the centrality of trust and hope as guiding principles in the human struggle to build a better world; to dare to be idealistic. I am not advocating an 'all you need is love' approach to foreign policy, but it is important to remember that the view from the bunker is never very good.

Consider the figure of the refugee. As Arthur C. Helton writes in his recent book *The Price of Indifference* (OUP), refugees 'provide important insights into the modern dilemmas of statecraft', not least because their very presence reflects past 'failures in governance and international relations'. Human displacement sows seeds of instability that can blossom into ugly flowers. (Look at Israel and the Palestinian territories.) Before following George W. Bush to Baghdad, we should contemplate the figure of the refugee and think carefully about the possible consequences of our actions.

There may be no simple trajectory from injustice to terrorism. It has been pointed out often enough that Osama bin Laden comes from a family of billionaires. But this does not invalidate the view that, unless injustice is overcome, the war on terror will be never-ending. Churchill and Roosevelt recognised this. In the Atlantic Charter of August 1941, they declared that 'the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny' must be followed by a peace 'which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want'. No such vision accompanies today's talk of war. Yet without a just peace, military victory will be short-lived.

Susan Hawthorne

The USA PATRIOT Act (2002) is an acronym for 'Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism'. It gives powers to the US Federal government's agents to seize the assets of any organisation or individual aiding and abetting 'terrorist activities'. Foreign individuals can be arrested, detained indefinitely, deported and subjected to a military tribunal. They can also be shot. All of this can be done without reference to the usual appeals processes of courts and juries.

September 11 has become the impetus for new draconian legislation in the USA and in Australia. As Diane Bell points out in her essay in *September 11, 2001: Feminist Perspectives*, for any Australian or other foreigner living in the USA at present, the USA PATRIOT Act (2002) is being used to criminalise dissent. 'This is war and the politics of free speech have moved to the right. If one is a citizen the threat is being called unpatriotic. If one is a non-citizen one can

be tried before a military tribunal and shot.' In Australia, the ASIO legislation due to be debated in late August will allow the Australian government to detain people without charge for up to seven days; and it takes away the right to silence. This legislation can be applied very broadly and could have an impact on political activists of all kinds, including feminists, unionists, anti-globalisation activists, eco-activists and the like.

This is political opportunism of the worst sort. It brings to the fore questions of who is a terrorist. These are not paltry questions that affect just a few. When a terrorist is defined by the powerful as anybody of a different nationality or political persuasion, the freedoms of citizens are severely threatened.

As a feminist, I have long been critical of the masculinism of the military and of its close partner, corporate globalisation. Over the last twelve months, I have become even more wary of this nexus of powerful forces, which I believe has become far too strong, which is having long-term effects on the level of poverty in the world and on the destruction of global biodiversity, and which is reinforcing political and business opportunism.

The political colour of the world has changed in the last twelve months. The Howard government's policies on refugees, its refusal to be party to the convention against torture, its gung-ho willingness to follow George W. Bush into almost any theatre of war — these are all part of the same political strategy that emphasises security and sacrifices social justice.

The political system needs to be challenged by new ideas that take the lives of the most marginal seriously. I suggest a new political force coming from what I call the diversity matrix, which includes feminists and lesbian feminists, indigenous peoples, the poor, refugees and migrants, disability activists and anyone concerned with the long-term well-being of the planet.

Tony Coady

The terrible events of September 11 did not 'change the world', as many proclaimed at the time, but they created a new sense of vulnerability in the USA and, to a much lesser degree, in other industrialised nations. Americans now suffer pained feelings of bewilderment and grievance at the hostility of much of the rest of the world. Their government has reacted by attempting to impose its will by military force even more widely than ever before. The dubious doctrine of 'pre-emptive war' has been revived, even for planning attacks on nations that have no ideological connection with the attacks of September 11.

Of course, the world's only 'hyperpower', like so many conventional empires of the past, has long made a practice of projecting violence around the world in pursuit of 'régime change' or 'régime stabilisation'. The names of Iran,

Guatemala, Chile, Cuba and Nicaragua begin a list I don't have space to finish. The new militarism is merely an acceleration of older tendencies, but it shows a failure to understand what, in part, gave rise to the terrorist attacks on the home soil.

A spell in Washington DC a few years ago, as a generously funded Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace, confirmed my earlier impressions that Washington was the seat of quasi-imperial power and knew it. At numerous seminars, briefings and lectures, US government officials debated or declared what 'we' would do to solve this, that and the other crisis abroad. A Sri Lankan scholar could stand it no longer and burst out, 'We! Who is this "we"? I only know it does not include me and my countrymen.' The American speakers were puzzled and politely confused — surely the free world was trailing along behind them.

This widespread resentment of US power, and the arrogance with which it is often used, needs to be understood as part of the background to the inexcusable attacks of September 11. It also partly explains the elated reactions to these attacks in many parts of the Arab world, and highlights the ambiguities of the 'war against terrorism'. But the current US leadership remains intent on unilateral military solutions to complex political problems, thereby fanning the anti-Americanism that is part of the problem. Contrary to George W. Bush's belief that 'they hate us because we're so good', the hate and mistrust directed against America is mostly generated by the perception that its foreign policies are powerful, misguided and destructive.

Of course, there are other factors, a primary one being a revulsion against modernity shared by Islamic militant fundamentalists and the romantic wings of various Western protest movements.

Contrary to the fanatics' belief, there are many things to admire in American civilisation, especially its diversity, its intellectual energy, its many generous and altruistic impulses. But its stance in the world too often fails to reflect these virtues. The terrorist attacks have given carte blanche to a reactionary US administration headed by a compromised president who confuses bombastic rhetoric with political sagacity. He is supported (or driven) by a number of Cabinet officials whose backgrounds encourage the propagation of policies imbued with messianic political (and sometimes religious) fundamentalism that ironically mirrors a similar drive in their enemies.

Rather than responding to the challenge by forced régime change, the USA and the rest of us need to address the huge imbalances of power and wealth that disfigure the world community and fan the flames of hatred and terror. Militant Islamic fundamentalism is no answer for the grievances of the powerless and persecuted, but it will continue to be attractive while the USA and its allies remain insensitive to what is legitimate in those grievances.

Richard Neville

Events since September 11 have revealed:

- That naked, tooth-and-claw fundamentalism remains a brain disease and the enemy of freedom. This applies to the Old Testament White House and Zionist land-stealers, as well as to militant Islam.
 - That hawks in the West outnumber the doves by at least ten to one, except in Washington and Canberra, where the doves are virtually extinct. If you think Colin Powell is a dove, you're hallucinating.
 - That US foreign policy is openly manipulated for the benefit of a group of oil-sodden, multi-millionaire arms dealers who will fight for their feather beds at any cost, including the well-being of the earth, and the lives of wedding guests in Afghanistan.
 - That for such an élite, globalisation is a code word for cheap labour and hungry markets rather than a unifying approach to international problems such as tyranny, global warming and torture.
 - That there is one law for America and a boot up the ass for everyone else.
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- That the Federal Coalition, unlike Australian army chiefs, learned nothing from its complicity in the war against Vietnam and is now preparing to shed blood in Iraq.
 - That the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, believes anyone who questions this policy is a fool and an appeaser.
 - That the credo of 'my country right or wrong', especially as fanned by media hacks, makes it unnecessary for politicians to be fussy about global justice.
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- That freedom of the press is a peacetime privilege, not an inalienable right.
 - That the web has come of age.
 - That, shortly after the September strikes, there came to light a second series of attacks, both here and in the USA, upon thousands of innocent citizens, which perhaps can be classed as acts of ethical terror. It wasn't landmark towers that crashed to the ground, but landmark companies, starting with Enron, wiping out the savings and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of employees and shareholders, creating misery and bleak futures. Why? Megalomania, greed and social irresponsibility. Scores of those at the helm of the terror wars are linked to companies that have fleeced the public and/or pillaged the developing world.
 - That George Bush was able to describe Ariel Sharon as a 'man of peace' without him or any newsreader throwing up.
 - That Sharon and Arafat will share the same circle of hell.
 - That as far as the USA is concerned, the Geneva Convention is of no more worth than Enron's official statement of ethics.
 - That the Bush administration believes that environmental laws do not apply to vast tracts of oceans under US control, paving the way for toxic dumping, oil rigs and military manoeuvres.
 - That America intends to forcibly board any vessel on the high seas it regards as 'suspicious'.
 - That, in the last calendar year, US weapons manufacturers entered into new agreements worth US\$12.1 billion and delivered US\$9.7 billion worth of arms, basically cornering the market in weapons of death.
 - That, in the twenty-first century, a pre-emptive strike is now considered a civilised option, if delivered by the West.
 - That, one year on, the US cluster bombs scattered in the Afghan sands are still killing and maiming children.
 - That each week, factories set up in eastern Afghanistan are producing hundreds of kilos of heroin.
 - That those nations who join the World Court without pledging to protect from its jurisdiction those Americans serving on its soil are likely to lose all US military aid.
 - That Britain and the USA have assumed the power to detain suspects for as long as they like, without putting them on trial, or even charging them, contrary to obligations dating as far back as the Magna Carta (1215).
 - That to hasten the extraction of information, enemy suspects can be secretly transferred to friendly police states in order to be tortured.
 - That, instead of working to 'save civilisation', as shock-jock John Laws and Prime Minister Howard jointly boasted this country would aim to do on the morning of September 12, both Australia and the USA have retreated from civilisation.