

Unknowingly, ordinary people in both countries share a common bond — they have to live with the phenomenon of blind, unpredictable terror. Each batch of bombs dropped on Afghanistan is matched by a corresponding escalation of mass hysteria in America about anthrax and other terrorist acts.

There is no easy way out of the spiraling morass of terror and brutality that confronts the world today. It is time now for the human race to hold still, to delve into its wells of collective wisdom, both ancient and modern. What happened on September 11 changed the world forever. Freedom, progress, wealth, technology, war — these words have taken on new meaning. Governments have to acknowledge this transformation and approach their new tasks with a modicum of hostility and humility. Unfortunately, up to now there has been no sign of any introspection.

The International Coalition Against Terror is a large cabal of the richest countries in the world. Between them they manufacture and sell almost all of the world's weapons, they possess the largest stockpile of weapons of mass destruction — chemical, biological and nuclear. They have fought the most wars, account for the most genocide, subjection, ethnic cleansing and human rights violations in modern history, and have sponsored, armed and financed untold numbers of dictators and despots. Between them they have worshipped, almost deified the cult of violence and war. For all its appalling sins the Taliban just wasn't in the same league.

The Taliban was compounded in the crumbling crucible of rubble, heroin and landmines in the backwash of the Cold War. Its oldest leaders are in their early 40s. Many of them are disfigured and handicapped, missing an eye, an arm or a leg. They grew up in a society scarred and devastated by war.

Between the Soviet Union and America over a period of 20 years, about \$45 billion (£30 billion) worth of arms and ammunition was poured into Afghanistan. The latest weaponry was the only shard of modernity to intrude upon a thoroughly medieval society.

Young boys — many of them orphans — who grew up in those times had guns for toys, never knew the security and comfort of family life, never experienced the company of women. As adults and rulers, the Taliban beat, stoned and brutalized women — they didn't seem to know what else to do with them. Years of war stripped them of gentleness, injured them to kindness and human compassion, and they turned their monstrosity on their own people. They danced to the percussive rhythms of the bombs raining down around them.

After all that has happened, can there be anything more ironic than Russia and America joining hands to re-destroy Afghanistan? The question is, can you destroy destruction? 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 globalization, again dominated by America.

With all due respect to President Bush, the people of the world do not have to choose between the Taliban and the U.S. government. All the beauty of human civilization — our art, our music, our literature — lies beyond these two fundamentalist, ideological poles. There is as little chance that the people of the world can all become middle-class consumers as there is that they will all embrace any one particular religion. The issue is not about good versus evil or Islam versus Christianity as much as it is about space. About how to accommodate diversity, how to contain the impulse toward hegemony, every kind of hegemony, economic, military, linguistic, religious and cultural.

Any ecologist will tell you how dangerous and fragile a monoculture is. A hegemonic world is like having a government without a healthy opposition. It becomes a dictatorship. It is like putting a plastic bag over the world and preventing it from breathing. Eventually it will be torn open.

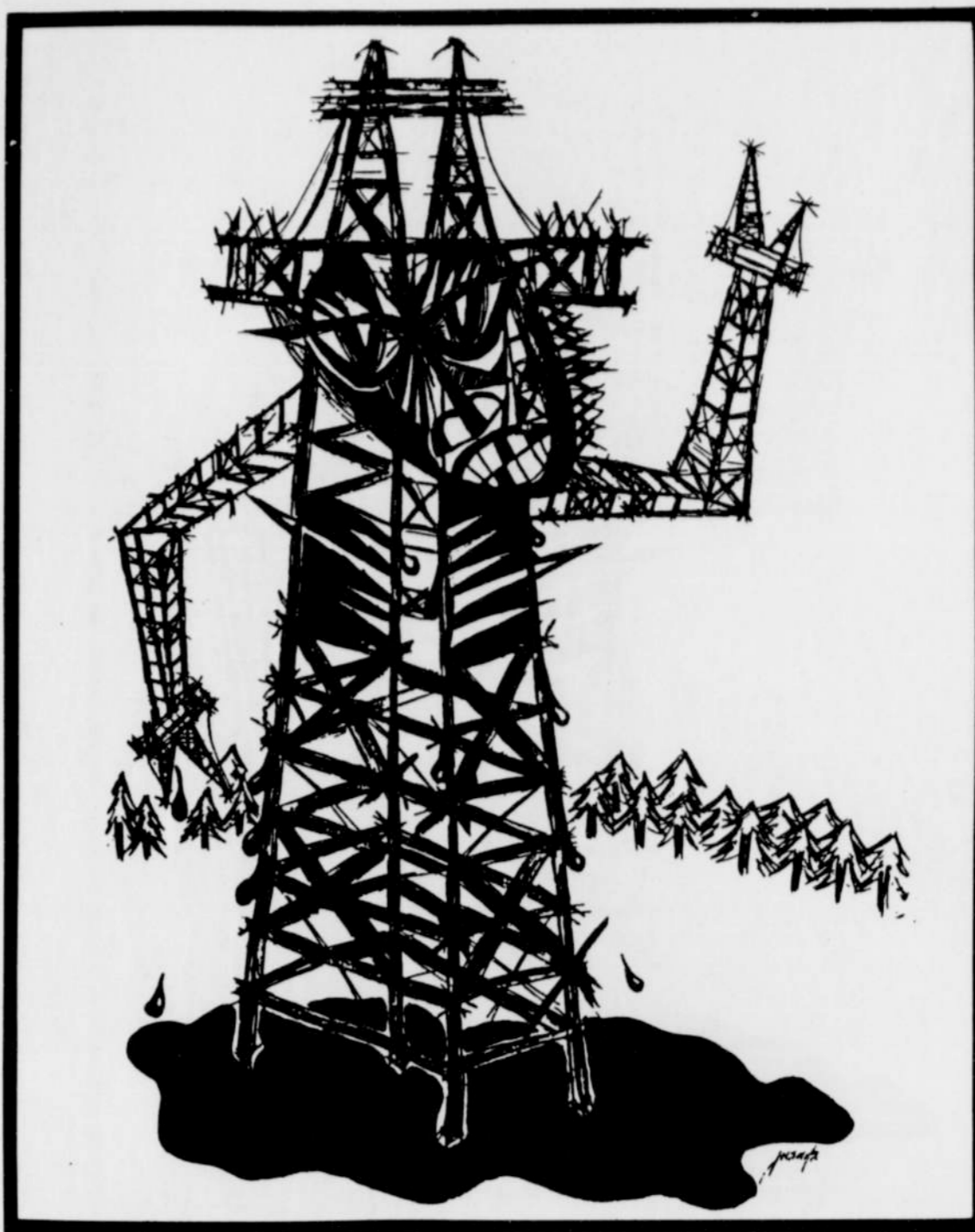
One and a half million Afghan people lost their lives in the 20s years of conflict that preceded this new war. Afghanistan was reduced to rubble, and now the rubble has been pounded into finer dust. Reports trickle in about civilian casualties. For every "terrorist" or his "supporter" killed, hundreds of innocent people have also been killed. And for every hundred innocent people killed, there is a good chance that several future terrorists will be created. Hate and retribution don't go back in the box once you've let them out. Far from stamping it out, igniting this kind of rage is what creates terrorism.

Setting aside the rhetoric for a moment, consider the fact that the world has not yet found an acceptable definition of what "terrorism" is. One country's terrorist is too often another's freedom fighter. At the heart of the matter lies the world's deep-seated ambivalence towards violence.

Once violence is accepted as a legitimate political instrument then the morality and political acceptability of terrorists (insurgents or freedom fighters) becomes contentious, bumpy terrain. The U.S. government itself has funded, armed and sheltered plenty of rebels and insurgents around the world.

The CIA and Pakistan's ISI trained and armed the mujahedin who, in the 1980s, were seen as terrorists by the government in Soviet occupied Afghanistan. Today, Pakistan — America's ally in this new war — sponsors insurgents who cross the border into Kashmir in India. Pakistan lauds them as "freedom fighters." India calls them "terrorists." India, for its part, denounces countries that sponsor and abet terrorism, but the Indian army has, in the past, trained separatist Tamil rebels asking for a homeland in Sri Lanka — the LTTE, responsible for countless acts of bloody terrorism.

Just as the CIA abandoned the mujahedin after they served its purpose, India abruptly turned its back on the LTTE for a host of political reasons. It was an enraged LTTE suicide bomber who assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1989.)



JUANITA HUEBNER

It is important for governments and politicians to understand that manipulating these huge, raging human feelings for their own narrow purposes may yield instant results, but eventually and inexorably, they have disastrous consequences. Igniting and exploiting religious sentiments for reasons of political expediency is the most dangerous legacy that governments or politicians can bequeath to any people — including their own.

People who live in societies ravaged by religious or communal bigotry know that every religious text — from the Bible to the *Bhagavad Gita* — can be mined and misinterpreted to justify anything, from nuclear war to genocide to corporate globalization.

This is not to suggest that the terrorists who perpetrated the outrage on September 11 should not be hunted down and brought to book. They must be. But is war the best way to track them down? Will the burning haystack find you the needle? Or will it escalate the anger and make the world a living hell for all of us?

At the end of the day, how many people can you spy upon, how many bank accounts can you freeze, how many conversations can you eavesdrop on, how many E-mails can you intercept, how many letters can you open, how many phones can you tap? Even before September 11, the CIA had accumulated more information than is humanly possible to process. (Sometimes too much data can actually hinder intelligence — small wonder the U.S. spy satellites completely missed the preparation that preceded India's nuclear tests in 1998.)

The sheer scale of the surveillance will become a logistical, ethical and civil rights nightmare. It will drive everybody clean crazy. And freedom, that precious, precious thing, will be the first casualty. It is already hurt and hemorrhaging dangerously.

Governments across the world are cynically using the prevailing paranoia to promote their own interests. All kinds of unpredictable political forces are being unleashed. In India, for instance, members of the All India People's Resistance Forum, who were distributing antiwar and anti-U.S. pamphlets in Delhi, have been jailed. Even the printer of the leaflets was arrested.

The rightwing government (while it shelters Hindu extremist groups such as the Vishnu Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal) has banned the Islamic Students Movement of India and is trying to revive an anti-terrorist act which had been withdrawn after the Human Rights Commission reported that it had been more abused than used. Millions of Indian citizens are Muslim. Can anything be gained by alienating them?

Every day that the war goes on, raging emotions are being let loose into the world. The international press has little or no independent access to the war zone. In any case, mainstream media, particularly in the U.S., have more or less rolled over, allowing themselves to be tickled on the stomach with press handouts from military men and government officials. Afghan radio stations have been destroyed by the bombing. In the propaganda war there is no accurate estimate of how many people have been killed, or how much destruction has taken place. In the absence of reliable information, wild rumors spread.

Put your ear to the ground in this part of the world, and you can hear the thrumming, the deadly drumbeat of burgeoning anger. Enough people have died. The smart missiles are not just smart enough. They blow up whole warehouses of suppressed fury.

President George Bush recently boasted, "When I take action, I'm not going to fire a \$2 million missile at a \$10 empty tent and hit a camel in the butt. It's going to be decisive." President Bush should know that there are no targets in Afghanistan to give his missiles their money's worth. Perhaps, if only to balance his books, he should develop cheaper missiles to use on cheaper targets and cheaper lives in the poor countries of the world. But then, that may not make good business sense to the coalition's weapons manufacturers. It wouldn't make any sense at all, for example, to the Carlyle Group — described by the *Industry Standard* as "the world's largest private equity firm," with \$13 billion under management. Carlyle invests in the defense sector and makes its money from military conflicts and weapons spending.

Carlyle is run by men with impeccable credentials. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci is Carlyle's

chairman and managing director (he was a college roommate of Donald Rumsfeld). Carlyle's other partners include former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker III, George Soros and Frank Malek (George Bush Sr.'s campaign manager). An American newspaper, the *Baltimore Chronicle & Sentinel*, says that former President George Bush Sr. is reported to be seeking investments for the Carlyle Group from Asian markets. He is reportedly paid not inconsiderable sums of money to make "presentations" to potential governmental clients. As the tired saying goes, it's all in the family.

Then there is that other branch of traditional family business — oil. Remember, President George Bush (Jr.) and Vice President Dick Cheney both made their fortunes working in the U.S. oil industry.

Turkmenistan, which borders the northwest of Afghanistan, holds the world's 3rd largest gas reserves and an estimated 6 billion barrels of oil reserves. Enough, experts say, to meet American energy needs for the next 30 years (or a developing country's requirements for a couple of centuries). America has always viewed oil as a security consideration, and protected it by any means it deems necessary. Few of us doubt that its presence in the Persian Gulf has little to do with its concern for human rights and almost entirely to do with its strategic interest in oil.

Oil and gas from the Caspian region currently move northward to European markets. Geographically and politically, Iran and Russia are major impediments to American interests. In 1998, Dick Cheney, then CEO of Halliburton, a major player in the oil industry, said, "I can't think of a time when we've had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian. It's almost as if the opportunities have arisen overnight." True enough.

For some years an American oil giant called Unocal has been negotiating (initially with the now deposed Taliban) for permission to construct an oil pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan and out into the Arabian Sea. From here, Unocal hopes to access the lucrative "emerging markets" in south and southeast Asia. In December 1997, a delegation of Taliban mullahs traveled to America and met U.S. State Department and Unocal executives in Houston. At that time the Taliban's taste for public executions and its treatment of Afghan women were not made out to be the crimes against humanity that they are now, but even then pressure from hundreds of outraged American feminist groups was brought to bear on the Clinton administration. Fortunately, they managed to scuttle the deal. And now comes the U.S. oil industry's big chance.

In America the arms industry, the oil industry, the major media networks and U.S. foreign policy are all controlled by the same business combines. Therefore it would be foolish to expect this talk of guns and oil and defense deals to get any real play in the media. In any case, to a distraught, confused people whose pride has just been wounded, whose loved ones have been tragically killed, whose anger is fresh and sharp, the inanities about the "clash of civilizations" and the "god versus evil" discourse home in unerringly. They are cynically doled out by government spokesmen like a daily dose of vitamins or antidepressants. Regular medication ensures that mainland America continues to remain the enigma it has always been — a curiously insular people, administered by a pathologically meddling, promiscuous government.

And what of the rest of us, the numb recipients of this onslaught of what we know to be preposterous propaganda? The daily consumers of the lies and brutality smeared in peanut butter and strawberry jam being air-dropped into our minds just like those yellow food packets in Afghanistan. Shall we look away and eat because we are hungry or shall we stare unblinkingly at the grim theater unfolding in Afghanistan until we retch collectively and say, in one voice, that we have had enough?

Arundhati Roy is the author of *The God of Small Things* (Random House, 1997), which won the Booker Prize and has been translated into 40 languages. This article is an abridgement of two articles which appeared in *The Guardian of London*.

Roger Hayes is an Astoria artist who often contributes original work to the NCTE.

Juanita Huebner is a poet, artist and teacher who lives in Eugene after several years in Astoria. She organized several *Times Eagle* parties.

Old Town Framing Co.

1287 COMMERCIAL ST.
ASTORIA 325-5221