

The U.S. government has rushed from an undeniable truth to a false conclusion — that because 3,000 or so people were killed on 9/11, we declared a world war on terrorism and have retaliated with greater violence than that we have suffered as well as strong-armed every nation that has not sympathized with our unilateral declaration of war.

We have committed ourselves to war when it has been unnecessary. A grievous crime was perpetrated against the USA, but not one that was undeserved or should have been so unexpected. We have lived a long time in a false bubble that whatever we do elsewhere in the world will not in similar measure reach us. When we should seek justice for a crime we instead have responded with war, and in the five years since 9/11 we have murdered many times more innocents without trial and certainly without justice as died on 9/11.

We claim these deaths are by accident and not intent, which our apologists (who are also the perpetrators) assure us is much different than the planned murders of 9/11 — but war is murder on a mass scale and we have allowed ourselves to be led to war by the Bushites with hardly any resistance: so these murders are at our door. We are as guilty as terrorists.

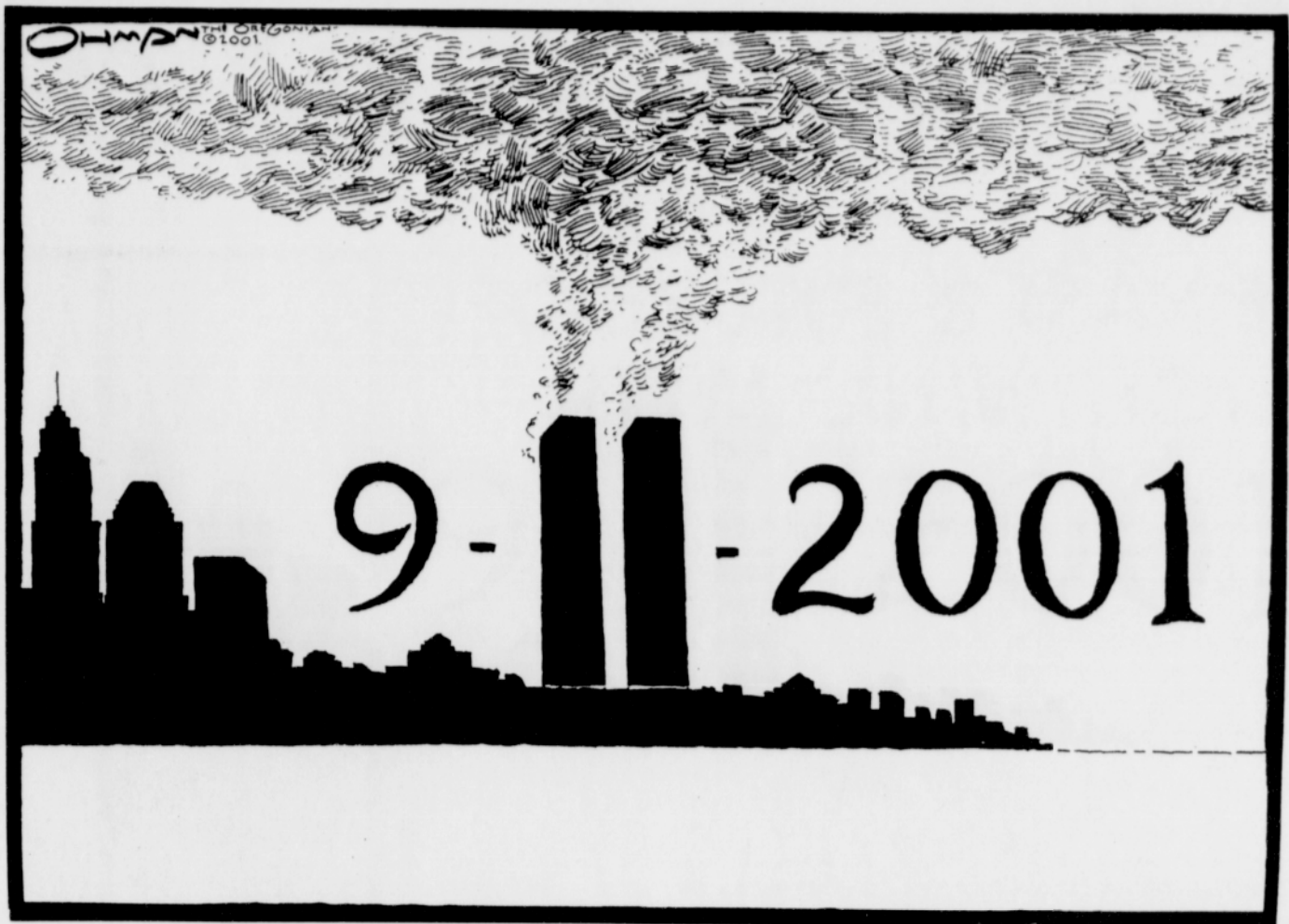
This is the responsibility of free citizens in a democracy. If we are at war to defend democracy we had better ensure the responsibilities of a democracy in its conduct; in other words we must firmly declare individually and collectively the war's limits as well as its targets.

A major distinction between *just* wars and *unjust* wars (made in medieval times by the Christian church to justify its religious wars) is equally or more important in regard to a war's conduct as it is its reason. The primary distinction is the prohibition of intentionally targeting civilians in a war to be considered a 'just' war, nor should disproportionate force be used. But as the wholesale bombings of cities in World War 2 indicate, the differences are too often degrees of propaganda than reality.

The 9/11 attack on the USA was most assuredly a crime against humanity and a violation of international law because it specifically targeted civilians — which is essentially why U.S. apologists are hasty to assure that every civilian casualty from bombing or other military action since 9/11 has been purely accidental and quite simply a consequence of war rather premeditated murder.

But just as surely as innocents are killed in war, the devastating and unprecedented attack on 9/11 was not directed at the WTC and Pentagon (and perhaps the White House) as mere symbols of American power but instead as the true center of the USA's political, economic and militarily global supremacy. That was clearly the perspective of those who elaborately planned and executed the attacks. They regarded those employed in those two centers (and surely the White House) as directly responsible for American actions around the world. Total war is not only the prerogative of military institutions but also of those who struggle against them by any means at hand, however horrible or catastrophic the results. In a total war everybody is a soldier, which was the ultimate rationale of the mass bombings of cities in World War 2, and certainly the use of two atomic bombs on Japanese cities which ushered in the nuclear age and its iconic mushroom cloud that has billowed over nearly everything since.

Pearl Harbor was the main analogy drawn for 9/11: complete surprise, a direct hit on the USA's symbols of wealth and power, epic destruction. The anger and instant desire for revenge were about the same as Pearl Harbor; also the heart wrenching sense of tragedy, and the immediate finger-pointing at why 9/11 was allowed to happen. Suspicion of government



JACK OHMAN ('THE OREGONIAN')

foreknowledge of 9/11 has also been a Pearl Harbor legacy. And like Pearl Harbor, 9/11 has served for five years as a rallying cry for revenge and war: "You're either with us or against us," Bush declared unilaterally to the rest of the world. From the beginning his stance has been that "cowardly terrorists" jealous of our democratic way of life are fanatically determined to destroy the USA and that we must preempt their evil ways by hunting terrorists everywhere in the world forever.

There are questions about 9/11: the most extreme claim is that it was planned and set in motion at the highest levels of the U.S. government — or at least these upper cadres knew about the terrorists' intentions but did nothing to prevent the attack. Nixon's smoking gun redux: What did the President know and when did he know it — with a corollary: *What has he gained from it?*

It is more than remotely possible the real conspiracy of terror against the USA is inspired at the highest levels in Saudi Arabia — most of the 9/11 kamikazes were from there, as is of course Osama bin Laden (whose family has long been in business with the Bush family). Saudi Arabians, if not their government, have been at the center of world terrorism for decades with little U.S. opprobrium, essentially because of its oil. As much paranoid spook literature projects, there might be infinite layers of intrigue impossible to ascertain — even conceivable that separate agendas coalesce for reasons of opportunity or indispensability, such as the Bush and bin Laden families in gray conspiracy, leading inevitably to 9/11.

Our Achilles tendon has been exposed by 9/11, and like Achilles we will never eliminate its vulnerability to attack and harm. Only if we fully accept citizenship of the world and use our extraordinary power as it was intended to be used rather than treat the rest of the world as either friend or foe (and our friends condescendingly as if they are lesser entities) will we be able to protect ourselves. We act instead on prerogatives of power every would-be world conqueror has eventually been doomed for having utilized — generally leaving a legacy of waste and ruin as a monument.

War and peace are not abstracts. They are as personal as coitus and death. The way to kill 'evil' is certainly not by killing women, men and children. The world has been a slaughterhouse throughout history. Any cry for more killing goes back to our bloody past of claw and fang. Realizing this is the place for the future to intersect with this new millennium.

We are a global civilization, like it or not. Nuclear weapons rendered the nation-state as dead as dinosaurs. And if the so-called global economy is meant to benefit only a few wealthy nations and multinational corporations rather than be a world structure meant to include everybody in equal protections and freedoms, then the nightmare of 9/11 is only an advent of a darker future.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Coincidentally (or maybe not), 9/11 is the national telephone SOS for emergencies. ~MPMc

DANCING WITH DEATH

Mornings are the best time for those of us who relish awakenings. Billy Collins, America's Poet Laureate, describes his mornings in a new book of poems called *Sailing Alone Around the Room*. Espresso. Music. Thoughts. Dawn sky. Energy. A time to read a bit before getting ready for the day ahead.

My morning of September 11, 2001 was quite like that. I opened, as I drank my cup of tea, KMUN classical music floating about, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, which somehow in life I'd missed. The complete title is *Slaughterhouse Five: Or The Children's Crusade, A Duty Dance With Death*. The subtitle, under Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s name reads: "A fourth-generation German/American now living in easy circumstances on Cape Cod (and smoking too much), who as an American Infantry Scout Hors de Combat, as a prisoner of war, witnessed the fire-bombings of Dresden, Germany, 'The Florence of the Elbe', a long time ago, and survived to tell the tale. This is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where flying saucers come from. Peace."

I'm not really a fan of science fiction, so the Tralfamadorian flying saucers sort of put me off (I have better stuff than this to read, I thought). Nevertheless, I delved in, and had just arrived at the part where Vonnegut tells Harrison Starr, a movie-maker, that he is writing an antiwar book. Harrison's response was, "Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?" Vonnegut says that what he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they are as easy to stop as glaciers. "And even if wars didn't keep coming like glaciers, there would still be plain old death."

As I say, I was just reading that part when the music was interrupted by the broadcast that will never be forgotten in our lifetimes. Suddenly, it seemed the whole world was blowing up as sheer horror beyond imagination was being described over the airwaves. On CNN the sight of those airliners packed with people smashing into the Twin Towers was so horrific, it could only be compared to the complete destruction of the city of Dresden, Germany in 1945 by the Allied Forces (us) just as the war was winding down.

I hadn't even reached the part in Vonnegut where Dresden became one huge flame from the furious blast of the high-explosive bombs our Air Force dropped. We fried the place. About 130,000 people died that night. It was the most despicable destruction of a city in modern warfare so far, and it was of no strategic value to America. Exquisite as a painted porcelain teacup, it must have offended someone in command, because our forces totally leveled the city. The only survivors were Vonnegut and a few other POWs who were kept in the basement of a slaughterhouse that served as a prison during the last days of World War 2. Though that bombing has largely been forgotten or never known about by younger generations, Vonnegut expresses his outrage at the senseless destruction of life and property decades after the event.

We had beaten the Germans. We bombed them back to the stone age. Europe was one great ruin and what population was left was starving and shelterless. Ragtag groups of POWs were being exchanged. The "mopping up" had begun. We had won the war after years of brutal fighting and we were victorious.

Did we bomb Dresden for revenge? Did we hate them for their elegant lifestyle, their wealth and maybe consequent smugness? Perhaps their sense of security in not being touched by the violence that had been a condition of life throughout Europe the first half of the 20th century? Did we, that night, establish the model by which warfare would be conducted for the rest of the 20th and into the 21st century? We certainly didn't stop with Dresden. It wasn't enough for us, obviously. From our safe haven here in America we have waged acts of war against others, the likes of which would make God roll over in his grave.

There isn't a country in the world that has guaranteed safety from our firepower when our mind is set on destruction. We have demonstrated time and time again that we are entitled to call the shots, that we are the rulers of the New World Order, and that we will decide, under our own conditions, who will be favored and who will be destroyed.

Starr's statement that war is inevitable, and therefore futile to protest against, looks like a cold hard fact. Other than the commodities and comforts this century brings us, we are still, nevertheless, primitives who practice ritual sacrifice of our young males periodically in order to maintain a psychic safety level. Hence the "Children's Crusades" subtitle of *Slaughterhouse Five*. The Tralfamadorians in Vonnegut's book were fascinated with the humans of Planet Earth and abducted them occasionally to put them in their museums. They also took really good care of the humans, giving them all they needed. The planet was peaceful and everyone had enough.

When I faced a classroom of high school students on the morning of September 11, I had no words to express what I saw happening; once again. Sacrificial lambs. Just awakening. Then the voice of Astoria High School Principal Larry Lockett came over the intercom with a promise to make a statement within the hour. True to his word he gave a response that I wish the President could have given.

He spoke eloquently of our need now to make this a better world through the elimination of hate for anyone, for to hate is to be a terrorist. He said, "In our free society where so much is taken for granted and where we have so many gifts, it is hard for us to comprehend how some could hate so much to take their own lives and the lives of others at the same time. In many places around the world this is the way life is lived every day. For us the feeling is almost incomprehensible."

As he spoke I almost wondered if he had been to Tralfamadore, but I hadn't got to that part of the book yet.

~KAREN MELLIN (NCTE, October, 2001)



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