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"America's Best Political Newsletter" Out of Bounds Magazine

counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st. clair

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Terrorists Should be Tried in Court

Bombing civilians will only lead to further atrocities.

By Imran Khan

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when there was restraint shown by the US and George Bush acknowledged that this is a "different type of war". And then the US embarked on a conventional war by bombing Afghanistan.

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October 8, 2001

By doing so it may have played into the hands of the terrorists. For terrorism to flourish there has to be a feeling of injustice which breeds the anger and hatred needed to produce someone desperate enough to kill himself for his cause.

The sight of any further suffering by Afghan civilians in the form of "collateral damage" will shift Muslim sympathies towards them. A side-effect of the bombing will be massive dislocation, leaving them vulnerable to the severe Afghan winter, which will inevitably take a severe toll on these impoverished people who had absolutely nothing to do with the September 11 outrage.

Particularly alarming for Muslims is the news that the US has told the UN that it reserves the right to attack any state that it thinks harbours terrorists. Neither Mr Blair's wonderful speech in the House of Commons nor Mr Bush's visits to Islamic community centres will allay our fears that the target of such an anti-terror campaign is Muslims, especially if another Muslim country is bombed after Afghanistan.

As a Pakistani my fear is that if some Pakistani fanatics get involved in terrorist acts in the US, will we as a country of 140m get blamed? For the past 10 years our country has been unable to control internal terrorism. What if our government cannot destroy the terrorist networks within? Could we face the same situation as Afghanistan?

The country that is worst affected by the

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US bombing of Afghanistan is Pakistan. President Musharraf was bluntly and arrogantly told that either we cooperate with the US or be considered its enemy and be prepared to be bombed into the stone age. For no fault of its own, Pakistan was put into this no-win situation.

Today Pakistan is a US ally helping to destroy their neighbours and allies, the Taliban regime, and as a result helping the Northern Alliance which is pro-India and openly hostile to Pakistan. Anyone who knows Afghanistan also knows that the vacuum created by destroying the Taliban could lead to a civil war that could take years to settle and have a destabilising effect on the two bordering provinces of Pakistan.

Most worrying for us are the protests that have erupted all over Pakistan that could take the country towards anarchy and chaos. At the moment President Musharraf is in control, but he knows that the silent majority is rapidly turning against the bombing of Afghanistan; especially when TV shows the expensive US missiles creating more rubble in this war-ravaged country.

Were it to become vocal and come out in support of the extremists, the whole region could be destabilised--something the perpetrators of the September 11 acts are desperately hoping will happen. The worst case scenario for Pakistan would be the US messing up in Afghanistan and killing thousands of innocent civilians: countrywide protests could then lead to a

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new government led by hard-liners.

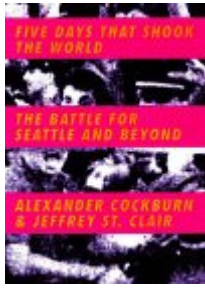
If the conflict in Afghanistan gets prolonged and bloody then other Muslim countries could become destabilised, with pro-western governments replaced by anti-American, extremist ones. The ultimate nightmare will be the US taking military action against Muslim countries and in the process breeding many more Bin Ladens and al-Qaidas.

Bear in mind that a few desperate people today can do more damage than ever before in human history. I don't need to go into the havoc chemical warfare can create in civilian populations. Thus it is advisable for the US and its allies to sit back and consider whether it is wise to be guided by opinion polls and popularity ratings rather than by common sense.

The only way to deal with global terrorism is through justice. We need international institutions such as a fully empowered and credible world criminal court to define terrorism and dispense justice with impartiality. There should be a distinction made between freedom struggles based on human rights and self-determination, and terrorism. This is not going to be an easy thing to do, because there are a lot of shades of grey--but unfortunately we have run out of easy options.

It is wrong to suggest the September 11 terrorists were driven to suicide by the lure of virgins waiting for them in heavens. This simplistic and naive assumption cannot explain the suicide attacks conducted by the Hindu Tamil tigers in Sri Lanka, or for that matter the

Seattle and Beyond



By Alexander
Cockburn
and Jeffrey St. Clair
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Japanese Kamakazi pilots during the second world war.

The world is heading towards disaster if the sole superpower behaves as judge, jury and executioner when dealing with global terrorism. It is also the direction the terrorists of the September 11 desperately hope will be taken: to pit the 1.3 billion Muslims in this world against the US.

Imran Khan is leader of the Tehreek Insaaf party of Pakistan.

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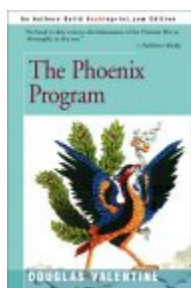
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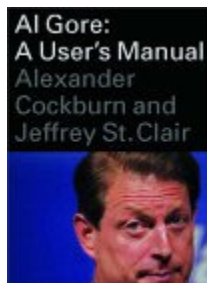


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