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September 11 and Terror War: The Bush Legacy and the Risks of Unilateralism

by
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On September 11, 2001, terrorists seized control of an American Airlines flight from Boston to Los Angeles then crashed it into the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City followed by a second hijacking and collision into another WTC tower minutes later. During the same hour, a third commandeered jetliner hit the Pentagon, while a fourth hijacked plane, possibly destined for the White House, went down in Pennsylvania, perhaps crashed out of harm's way by passengers who had learned of the earlier terrorist crimes and were trying prevent another calamity.

The world stood transfixed by the graphic videos of the WTC buildings exploding and discharging a great cloud of rubble. Subsequent images depicted heroic workers struggling to save people, and then themselves becoming victims of the unpredicted collapse of the towers, or shifts in the debris. The WTC towers, the largest buildings in New York City and a potent symbol of global capitalism, were down, and the mighty behemoth of American military power, the mythically shaped Pentagon, was penetrated and on fire. Terrorists celebrated their victory over the American colossus, and the world remained focused for days on the media spectacle of "America Under Attack" and reeling from the now highly feared effects of terrorism.

The Bush Administration and Terrorism

For some weeks after the September 11 attacks there was ferocious debate and intense speculation concerning the U.S. response. On October 7, 2001, George W. Bush announced the beginning of a military campaign in Afghanistan to destroy the Al Qaeda terrorist network and the Taliban regime that was hosting them. Within two months, the Taliban was in retreat and Afghanistan entered a highly uncertain stage. While the media and public have generally accepted that the Bush administration's policy was a

success, I want to argue, by contrast, that its terrorism policy is highly flawed and potentially disastrous in its short and long-term effects.

I will attempt to show that the policies of the Bush administration and the Pentagon in the Afghanistan war were poorly conceived, badly executed, and are likely to sow the seeds of future blowback and reprisal. Hence, while the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the assault on the Al Qaeda infrastructure were justifiable and a salutary blow against global terrorism, the Bush administration and Pentagon campaign in Afghanistan was arguably misconceived and in many ways unsuccessful. In my view, terrorism is a global problem that requires a global solution. The Bush administration's policy, however, is largely unilateral and its military response is flawed and has hindered more intelligent and potentially successful efforts against terror networks, while quite possibly creating more terrorists and enemies of the United States. A global campaign against worldwide terror networks will require multilateral and coordinated efforts across many fronts: financial, legal-judiciary, political, and military. On the financial front, the Bush administration has failed to adequately coordinate large-scale efforts to fight terror networks, and domestically there is criticism that fights between the Treasury, Commerce, and Justice Departments have hampered coordination even in the United States. The Bush administration had systematically pursued a deregulatory policy toward financial markets and has not been able to successfully regulate the flow of funds supporting either the terror networks or other global criminals or corporate allies of the Bush administration that prefer to secure and launder their funds in off-shore banks.

On the legal and judicial front, the Bush administration has also failed to construct a lasting and active international alliance against terror. Whereas many foreign countries have arrested and broken up terror networks in Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Singapore, and elsewhere, the U.S. Justice Department has not been successful in breaking up any major U.S. terrorist networks and the Bush administration has failed to adequately coordinate global anti-terrorist activity with other countries. On the whole, the U.S. has alienated itself from most of its allies in the war against terror by its arrest of suspects that have been held in detention camps without legal rights and forced to face military tribunals and death penalties. In particular, the detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has generated worldwide controversy and driven many European allies to question cooperation with

the U.S. because of the conditions of the incarceration of suspects, the proposed military trials, and threatened use of death.

The Bush administration chose not to criminalize bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network, preferring a largely military solution, and thus has not been able to develop a worldwide political and judicial campaign to shut down the terrorists. Many countries are reluctant to send terrorist suspects to the U.S. because of the secret military courts, lack of standard legal procedures, and dangers of capital punishment that are banned in much of the world. Moreover, the Bush doctrine that maintains “you are with us or against us,” —and that constantly expands its “axis of evil”—has positioned the U.S. as a strictly unilateralist force carrying out *its* war against terror, and has thus undermined developing a more global and multilateral campaign against terrorism. In particular, threatening war against Iraq has alienated the U.S. from both its European and moderate Arab allies, while the Bush administration’s escalating threats against other countries are isolating the U.S. and making multilateral coalitions against terrorism extremely difficult.

There is also a sense that the U.S. is losing the struggle for the hearts and minds of Arabs and Muslims because of its bellicose nationalism, aggressive militarism, often-uncritical support of Israel, and failure to improve relations with Muslim nations and peoples. The excessive bombing of civilians, the lack of a decent U.S. humanitarian program or plan to rebuild Afghanistan, and the unsuccessful propaganda efforts have perhaps produced more enemies than friends in the Arab and Muslim world, and thus have increased the potential for the rise of future terrorist Islamist cadres against the U.S.¹

This situation is especially aggravated as hostilities exploded between the Israelis and Palestinians in 2002. In much of the Arab world, the U.S. is seen as the major supporter of Israel and the inability of the Bush administration to mediate growing conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians, combined with the Bush administration’s neglect of the problem during its first fifteen months, has helped create an explosive situation in the Middle East with no solution in sight. In addition, the lack of ability and will of the Bush administration to moderate the aggressive Israeli responses to suicide bombings and terror acts against Israel in 2002 have created more hatred of the U.S. in the Arab world and a growing tendency to equate Israelis and Americans, Jews and Christians, as the main enemy of Islam.

Thus, the goals of creating better images of the U.S. in the eyes of the Arab, Islamic, and global world, and improved relations between the U.S. and Arab world, have failed miserably. The incapacity to enhance U.S. and Western relations with Islam is largely the result of the botched military campaign, an inept ideological strategy, and the failure to engage in a fruitful dialogue with Arabs and Muslims. Thus, Bush administration policy is inhibiting the creation of coalitions for peace and the rebuilding of devastated parts of the Arab world like Afghanistan. Part of the goals and justification for the Afghanistan war was to not only eliminate Al Qaeda terrorist forces, but to forge more creative relationships with Arab and Islamic countries, and this goal remains unrealized and unrealizable under Bush administration unilateralist policy.

A successful campaign, then, would communicate the message that the U.S. respects the Islamic world, wants to carry out more productive activities with it, and desires dialogue, peace, and better relations. But this project has not succeeded, in part, because of the violent and destructive military campaign, with the Bush administration and Pentagon putting military priorities over beginning the reconstruction of Afghanistan well into 2002. In addition, the propaganda efforts undertaken by the Bush administration have been extremely crude and have mostly backfired, losing more hearts and minds than were gained, as I will document in this article. Later historians of the Afghanistan war and its propaganda campaign, I would submit, will find Bush administration policy in the propaganda war embarrassingly inept and unsuccessful, pointing to another serious deficiency in its handling of its war against terrorism.

From a strictly military standpoint, I would argue that major goals for the Afghanistan war were not achieved and that the deeply flawed campaign will be costly and consequential in its later effects. In particular, the Afghanistan campaign is at best a partial success because of the failure to capture, or destroy, key Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership and cadres. This was largely due to a refusal to effectively use ground troops to deal with the Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership and their major fighting forces. The Afghanistan campaign, like the Gulf War, Kosovo war, and other U.S. military interventions in the past decade, relied largely on bombing at a distance and the refusal to use U.S. ground troops, following the “zero casualty tolerance” policy of the past years. The result was that in the decisive battles of Kandahar and Tora Bora, significant numbers of Al Qaeda and Taliban

forces escaped, including their leadership and perhaps Osama bin Laden himself.

What is needed, then, is an international and multilateral mission in Afghanistan and elsewhere that combines military, police, humanitarian, and reconstruction efforts. The U.S. has said it will train an Afghani army, but not use U.S. forces for police or security action. In fact, given the chaos in Afghanistan, it is unwise to separate military and police forces. Thus, a multilateral coalition should combine police, military, and humanitarian efforts. Likewise, a multilateral force of European Union countries, the U.S., Arab, and other countries should train an Afghani military as they police and patrol the country, fight remnants of Al Qaeda and Taliban, and rebuild the country. The Bush administration policy, by contrast, has not adequately dealt with humanitarian, security, or the socio-political needs of the country, rather focusing primarily on military action against Al Qaeda and Taliban forces.

The primarily military and unilateral strategy of the Bush administration in its response to terrorism constitutes is the major Achilles' heel of its policy with its decision not to engage a multilateral approach to international terrorism. The unilateral U.S. policy has produced an excessive militarizing and inadequate criminalizing of the problem of dealing with terrorism, and Bush administration policies are increasingly isolating the U.S. from potential allies in a global campaign against terrorism. Moreover, such unilateral policies are more than likely to position the U.S. and its citizens as the targets of future terror attacks. Increasingly, Bush administration foreign policy is being resisted in much of the world, and it is encountering mounting hostility from allies and enemies alike. This is especially so since Bush's "axis of evil" speech and the intensification of the Israel and Palestine conflict, generated in part by the Bush administration's failure to successfully mediate it.

By contrast, a multilateral campaign would make it clear that in a worldwide struggle against terror it is the combined forces of civilization that are allied against international terror networks. Such a campaign would rely on global forces on political, judicial, economic and military fronts, rather than privileging the militarist solution of war. Indeed, since December 2001, the Bush administration has expanded the front of its war against terrorism, sending U.S. troops to the Philippines, Pakistan, and a whole ring of Central Asian countries, while threatening military action in Somalia, Indonesia,

Yemen, and the infamous “axis of evil”: Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The list was expanded in May 2002 to include Syria, Libya, and Cuba. George W. Bush has declared that an unrelenting war against terrorism is the major focus of his administration and the Pentagon has discussed developing smaller nuclear weapons to be used against terrorist forces, as well as other high-tech weapons, ruthless bombing, and covert assassination.

In addition, the Bush administration manipulated the September 11 terror attacks to push through a hard right domestic agenda that constitutes a clear and present danger to U.S. democracy. As Governor of Texas, George W. Bush consistently performed favors for his largest contributors, like the Enron Corporation and oil and energy companies, and as president he has done the same. Since September 11, the Bush administration has exploited the fear of terrorism to push through further bailouts of corporations that contributed to his campaign, and the center of its economic program has been to create tax breaks for the most wealthy, while cutting back on liberal social programs and environmental legislation, and carrying out the most right wing law and order domestic policy in U.S. history.

On the foreign policy front, the Bush administration made use of the September 11 tragedy to renounce arms treaties it had already opposed and thus jettisoned the idea of arms control on a worldwide scale. It also used the September 11 attacks to legitimate an increased military budget and series of military interventions, to test and build new nuclear weapons, to threaten countries like Iraq and Iran with military attacks, and to abandon multilateralism for an unilateralist “America First” approach to foreign affairs. In June 2002, the Bush administration proclaimed a dangerous “first strike” policy, saying that henceforth it would engage in “preemptive strikes,” abandoning the containment policy and diplomatic strategy for dealing with crises and adversaries in the post-World War II era.

Consequently, the Bush administration claimed repeatedly that “World War III” had started and that the Cold War was being succeeded by a dangerous and long-term period of Terror War. I use the term “Terror War” to describe the Bush administration’s “war against terrorism” and its use of aggressive military force and terror as the privileged vehicles of constructing a U.S. hegemony in the current world (dis)order. The Bush administration has developed its war against Islamic terrorism into a policy of Terror War where they have declared the right of the U.S. to strike any enemy state or organization presumed to harbor or support terrorism, or to eliminate

“weapons of mass destruction” that could be used against the U.S. The right wing members of the Bush administration seeks to promote this Terror War as the defining struggle of the era, coded as an apocalyptic battle between good and evil. My studies will attempt to disclose the dangers of such policies and worldviews, and to depict how Bush administration Terror War played out in the Afghanistan war and subsequent military adventures.

The Bush Administration and its Failure to Detect and Stop the September 11 Terrorist Attacks

The likely result of the Bush administration’s Terror War is that in a global world the U.S. will become ever more isolated and will continue to be the major source of international anger and terror attacks. Not only is the Bush administration’s foreign policy dangerous and reckless, but the administration has demonstrated stunning incompetence on the domestic front in the so-called “war against terror” and were highly negligent by allowing the U.S. to become vulnerable to the September 11 terrorist attacks in the first place. On May 15, 2002, a political uproar erupted when CBS News broadcast a report that the CIA had briefed George W. Bush when he was vacationing at his ranch in Texas, about bin Laden’s network’s plans to hijack airplanes on August 6. There was immediately an explosion of controversy, raising questions for the first time in a public debate, about what the Bush administration knew about possible terrorist attacks pre-September 11 and what they had done to prevent them. Also, during May 2002, a year old FBI memo from the Phoenix, Arizona, office was released that warned of the dangers of Middle Eastern men going to flight school in order to gain the skills necessary to hijack planes, and of the dangers of the Al Qaeda network carrying out such hijackings. Moreover, the arrest of Zacarias Moussaouri, the alleged 20th Al Qaeda hijacker, in Minnesota in late August 2001, who had also been taking flying lessons and acting suspiciously, should have raised warning signals.

Over the summer of 2001, there had been reports that there were dangers of an airplane terrorist attack on the G8 economic summit in Genoa that George W. Bush attended. There were purportedly so many intelligence reports circulating in the of summer 2001 of the dangers of imminent terrorist attacks on the U.S. that government official Richard Clarke, the National Security Council’s counterterrorism coordinator, warned FBI, the FAA, INS, and other crucial government agencies to be on the highest alert

and not to take vacations during a six week period over the summer. John Ashcroft, U.S. Attorney General, was ordered to take government jets instead of commercial airlines and the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) passed down several alerts to the commercial airlines.

It was also well known in political circles that in 1994 the French had foiled a terrorist airplane attack on the Eiffel Tower, while in 1995 arrests were made of terrorists who allegedly planned to use an airplane to attack CIA headquarters. Philippine police subsequently warned the U.S. that Ramzi Yousef, who had helped plan the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, had schemes to hijack and blow up a dozen U.S. airliners and was contemplating taking over and crashing a plane into the CIA headquarters. Thus, in the light of all of this information, it is scandalous that the Bush administration did not take stronger anti-terrorist actions. Senate Intelligence Committee Vice-Chair Richard Shelby stated: "There was a lot of information . . . I believe, and others believe, that if it had been acted on properly, we may have had a different situation on September 11."

Furthermore, there had been a whole series of U.S. government reports on the dangers of terrorism and need for a coordinated response. A 1996 report by the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security, headed by Al Gore, developed a report on dangers of airplane hijacking that was never acted on. A 1999 National Intelligence Council report on terrorism specifically warned that bin Laden's Al Qaeda network might undertake hijacking planes and using them against U.S. targets; the report noted that members of the Al Qaeda network had threatened to do this before and that the U.S. should be alert to such strikes. Perhaps most significantly, blue ribbon commission reports by former U.S. Senators Gary Hart and Howard Rudman, and by the Bremer National Commission, highlighted the dangers of a domestic terrorist attack against the U.S. and the need to develop appropriate protective measures. The Hart-Rudman report recommended consolidating U.S. intelligence on terrorism and organizing federal responses to prevent and fight domestic terrorist attacks on the U.S.²

Hence, the Bush administration failed to act on warnings of imminent terrorist attacks and the need to provide systematic government responses to coordinate information and attempt to prevent and aggressively fight terrorism. Moreover, it halted a series of attempts to fight the bin Laden network that had been undertaken by the Clinton administration. Just after the September 11 attacks, a wave of revelations came out, ignored completely

in the U.S. media, concerning how high-ranking officials in the Bush administration had neglected threats of terrorist attacks by the bin Laden network and even curtailed efforts that had been initiated by the Clinton administration to shut down the terrorist organization.

An explosive book published in France in mid-November, *Bin Laden, la verite interdite* (2001), by Jean Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie, claimed that under the influence of oil companies, the Bush administration initially blocked ongoing U.S. government investigations of terrorism, while it bargained with the Taliban over oil rights and pipeline deals and handing over bin Laden. This evidently led to the resignation of an FBI deputy director, John O'Neill, who was one of the sources of the story. Brisard and Guillaume contend that the Bush administration had been a major supporter of the Taliban until the September 11 events, and had blocked investigations of the bin Laden terror network. Pursuing these leads, the British *Independent* reported on October 30: "Secret satellite phone calls between the State Department and Mullah Mohammed Omar and the presentation of an Afghan carpet to President George Bush were just part of the diplomatic contacts between Washington and the Taliban that continued until just days before the attacks of 11 September." Furthermore, Greg Palast had published a FBI memo that confirmed that the FBI was given orders to lay off the bin Laden family during the early months of George W. Bush's rule.³

The U.S. media completely ignored these and other reports concerning how the Bush administration had shut down or undermined operations against the bin Laden network initiated by the Clinton administration. An explosive article by Michael Hirsch and Michael Isikoff entitled "What Went Wrong," published in the May 28, 2002, issue of *Newsweek*, however, contained a series of revelations of how the Bush administration had missed signals of an impending attack, and systematically weakened U.S. defenses against terrorism and the bin Laden network. According to the *Newsweek* story, the Clinton administration national security advisor Sandy Berger had become "'totally preoccupied' with fears of a domestic terror attack and tried to warn Bush's new national security advisor Condoleezza Rice of the dangers of a bin Laden attack." But while Rice ordered a security review, "the effort was marginalized and scarcely mentioned in ensuing months as the administration committed itself to other priorities, like National Missile Defense and Iraq."

Moreover, *Newsweek* reported that John Ashcroft, U.S. Attorney General, was eager to set a new right wing law and order agenda and was not focused on the dangers of terrorism, while other Bush administration high officials also had their ideological agendas to pursue at the expense of protecting the country against terror attacks. Ashcroft reportedly shut down wiretaps of Al Qaeda-related suspects connected to the 1998 bombing of African embassies and cut \$58 million from a FBI request for an increase in its anti-terrorism budget (while at the same time switching from commercial to government jets for his own personal flight). On September 10, when Ashcroft sent a request for budget increases to the White House, it covered 68 programs, none of them related to counterterrorism. Nor was counterterrorism in a memorandum he sent to his heads of departments stating his seven priorities. According to *Newsweek*, in a meeting with FBI chief Louis Freeh, he rebuffed Freeh's warnings to take terrorism seriously and turned down a FBI request for hundreds of additional agents to be assigned to tracking terrorists.⁴ In the *Newsweek* summary:

It wasn't that Ashcroft and others were unconcerned about these problems, or about terrorism. But the Bushies had an ideological agenda of their own. At the Treasury Department, Secretary Paul O'Neill's team wanted to roll back almost all forms of government intervention, including laws against money laundering and tax havens of the kind used by terror groups. At the Pentagon, Donald Rumsfeld wanted to revamp the military and push his pet project, NMD. Rumsfeld vetoed a request to divert \$800 million from missile defense into counterterrorism. The Pentagon chief also seemed uninterested in a tactic for observing bin Laden left over from the Clinton administration: the CIA's Predator surveillance plane. Upon leaving office, the Clintonites left open the possibility of sending the Predator back up armed with Hellfire missiles, which were tested in February 2001. But through the spring and summer of 2001, when valuable intelligence could have been gathered, the Bush administration never launched even an unarmed Predator. Hill sources say DOD [Department of Defense] didn't want the CIA treading on its turf.

A *Time* magazine cover story later in the summer by Michael Elliot, "The Secret History" (Aug. 4, 2002), provides more detail concerning how the Clinton administration had planned a program to attack Al Qaeda in November 2001, when the contested election battle in Florida was raging.

The Clinton administration was not able to implement the plan, however, because “with less than a month left in office, they did not think it appropriate to launch a major initiative against Osama bin Laden.” Clinton administration officials claim that Bush’s National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice was fully informed of this plan, and that Clinton National Security Advisor Sandy Berger stressed the need for a major initiative against bin Laden and Al Qaeda, but nothing was done. Moreover, the head of anti-terrorist operations in the Clinton administration, Richard Clarke, who stayed on for the Bush administration, had himself drawn up the plan and urged its implementation when the Bush team took office. Unfortunately, fighting terrorism was not a priority in the Bush administration, and so the plan for attacks on Al Qaeda went through the usual layers of bureaucracy, finally reaching Bush and his inner circle in early September, too late to prevent the September 11 attacks.

As these revelations unfolded in the summer of 2002, Democrats and others called for blue-ribbon commissions to study intelligence and policy failures that made possible the September 11 terrorist attacks. Republicans, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, predictably attacked the patriotism of anyone who ascribed blame to the U.S. government concerning the September 11 attacks. Moreover, according to Democratic Senate Majority leader Tom Daschle, Cheney had repeatedly urged him not to hold hearings on U.S. policies or failures that led to the September 11 attacks. Bush administration spokespeople attacked as well California Senator Dianne Feinstein who retorted in a memo:

I was deeply concerned as to whether our house was in order to prevent a terrorist attack. My work on the Intelligence Committee and as chair of the Technology and Terrorism Subcommittee had given me a sense of foreboding for some time. I had no specific data leading to a possible attack.

In fact, I was so concerned that I contacted Vice President Cheney’s office that same month [July 2001] to urge that he restructure our counter-terrorism and homeland defense programs to ensure better accountability and prevent important intelligence information from slipping through the cracks.

Despite repeated efforts by myself and staff, the White House did not address my request. I followed this up last September

2001 before the attacks and was told by 'Scooter' Libby that it might be another six months before he would be able to review the material. I told him I did not believe we had six months to wait.⁵

This is highly shocking and calls attention to the key responsibility of Vice President Dick Cheney in failing to produce an adequate response to the dangers of terrorism. A year previous, in May 2001, the Bush administration announced that "Vice President Dick Cheney is point man for [the Bush] administration . . . on three major issues: energy, global warming, and domestic terrorism." On a May 19, 2002, episode of *Meet the Press*, Cheney acknowledged that he had been appointed head of a Bush administration task force on terrorism before September 11, and claimed that he had some meetings on the topic. Yet Cheney and others in the Bush administration seemed to disregard several major reports that cited the dangers of terrorist attacks, including congressional reports by former Senators Gary Hart and Howard Rudman in early 2001 that had called for a centralization of information on terrorism, but it appeared that the Bush administration failed to act on these recommendations. Obviously, Cheney concentrated on energy issues to the exclusion of terrorism and should thus be held in part responsible for the Bush administration's ignoring pre-September 11 terrorist threats.⁶

Crucially, plans to use airplanes as vehicles of terrorist attack should have been familiar to the intelligence agencies and to Cheney and the Bush administration. Furthermore, there were many other reports circulating from foreign and domestic intelligence services provided just before the September 11 terror attacks that the U.S. had reason to fear terrorist attacks from the bin Laden network.⁷ Thus, there should have been attempts to coordinate intelligence between the various agencies, warnings to the airlines industry regarding potential hijackings, and security alerts to the public to be on the lookout for potential terrorist attacks.

Consequently, serious questions should be raised to the Bush administration, and to the head of their anti-terrorism Task Force Dick Cheney, concerning what they knew and did not know, and what they did and did not do in response to the reports from domestic and foreign intelligence concerning the likelihood of Al Qaeda airplane hijackings and terrorist attacks on the U.S. As head of the Bush administration task force on terrorism, Dick Cheney should be held especially accountable, but so far the media and Democrats

have not raised this issue, and Cheney himself is aggressively attacking anyone who raises such issues as an unpatriotic enemy of state. Obviously, there was no apparent coordination of information on terrorist threats in the Bush administration and if Cheney was head of the task force that was supposed to deal with terrorism, it is disgraceful that he did not establish a group to centralize information, focus more on the dangers of terrorism, and do more to prevent the September 11 attacks.

It therefore appears as I write in summer 2002, that top officials of the Bush administration did little or nothing to protect the U.S. against domestic terror attacks. When confronted with reports that Bush had been advised of impending terror attacks and had not acted on them, Bush was highly indignant, attacking those who criticized him for “second guessing” and engaging in partisan politics. He shrilly retorted that had he known exactly what was to happen, he would have prevented it. This was not, of course, the issue, but rather that of the failure of the Bush administration to take seriously the threats of terrorism and to develop an anti-terror policy. In fact, Bush was on an unprecedentedly long one-month summer vacation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, when he was briefed on the dangers of looming Al Qaeda attacks, and no one could expect the highly unqualified president-elect to “connect the dots” and see the need to organize the country against domestic terrorist attacks.

Yet the media is also to blame for not focusing more intently on problems of terrorism over the previous decade. During the 1980s, terrorism emerged as a major problem and there were frequently news reports, specials, documentaries, and media discussion of the problem. Yet in the 1990s, the corporate media became increasingly tabloidized, focusing on the O.J. Simpson trial, the Clinton sex scandal, and the other obsessions of the moment. As noted above, major reports on the dangers of terrorism were released without media scrutiny. The Hart-Rudman “Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change,” warning of dangers of a terrorist attack on the U.S., had been released in January 2001 and was ignored by much of the mainstream media, as well as the Bush administration.⁸ Instead, there was an obsessive focus on tabloid stories during pre-September 11, 2001 in the mainstream media, such as the disappearance of intern Chandra Levy and her affair with Congressman Bill Condit.

Not surprisingly, many elaborate conspiracy theories emerged alleging U.S. government complicity in the September 11 terror attacks since there were

many unexplained strange elements of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon—and because the Bush administration and military establishment was the main beneficiary of the terror attacks. Additionally, the shocking history of the Bush family to engage in daring and major conspiracies may have contributed to the widespread circulation of allegations concerning U.S. government involvement in the September 11 terror attacks. There are, in fact, three major possibilities to explain Bush administration responsibility or complicity in the September 11 terror attacks: 1) either the Bush administration was completely incompetent and too focused on pushing through its right wing agenda to detect the obvious signs of impending Al Qaeda terror attacks that I have just outlined above; 2) the Bush administration may have known that attacks were indeed coming but welcomed them as a chance to push through its stalled right wing and militarist agenda; or 3) the Bush administration, or rogue sectors of the U.S. government, were actively involved in the conspiracy.⁹ As of now, it is impossible to confidently affirm the precise responsibility of the Bush administration for the September 11 attacks, but obviously this is a matter of grave concern and should be thoroughly investigated.

The Bush administration's surprise June 6, 2002, call for a new cabinet-level Homeland Defense agency, however, was seen by critics as an attempt to deflect attention from investigations of Bush administration and intelligence failures. There have been widespread fears that it would increase bureaucracy and even provide the apparatus for a Gestapo-type police state. Indeed, the "USA Patriot Act" pushed through by the Bush administration following September 11 already was erecting the powerful trappings of a police state. It included allowing the government the right to eavesdrop on all electronic and wireless communication, to arrest individuals without specific charges and to hold them indefinitely, to monitor conversations between lawyer and client, and to carry out secret military trials of suspected terrorists.

Moreover, the Bush administration's assault on civil liberties has weakened constitutional democracy and the rule of law in the United States. On August 15, 2002, Human Rights Watch released a report that claimed: "The U.S. government's investigation of the September 11 attacks has been marred by arbitrary detentions, due process violations, and secret arrests." Human Rights Watch discovered that over 1,200 non-citizens were secretly arrested and incarcerated and that "the U.S. government has held some detainees for prolonged periods without charges; impeded their access to counsel; subjected them to coercive interrogations; and overridden judicial orders to

release them on bond during immigration proceedings. In some cases, the government has incarcerated detainees for months under restrictive conditions, including solitary confinement. Some detainees were physically and verbally abused because of their national origin or religion. The vast majority are from Middle Eastern, South Asian, and North African countries. The report describes cases in which random encounters with law enforcement or neighbors' suspicions based on no more than national origin and religion led to interrogation about possible links to terrorism."¹⁰ Yet not only has the Bush administration dangerously undermined the U.S. constitutional order, but their economic policies have produced almost unparalleled economic crisis, scandal, and corruption.

The Bush Reich

The consequences of the Bush administration's failed Terror War policies and domestic policy outrages are frightening. The Bush Reich seems to be erecting an Orwellian totalitarian state apparatus and plunging the world into ongoing war that could generate military and police states domestically and abroad. In his prophetic novel *1984*, George Orwell engaged a grim condition of total warfare in which his fictional state "Oceania" ruled its fearful and intimidated citizens through war, police state terror, surveillance, and the suppression of civil liberties. This constant warfare kept Oceania's citizens in a perpetual situation of mobilization and submission. Further, the Orwellian state controlled language, thought, and behavior through domination of the media, and was thereby able to change the very meaning of language ("war is peace") and to constantly re-write history itself.¹¹

Orwell's futuristic novel was, of course, an attack on the Soviet Union and therefore a favorite of conservatives over the years, but it uncannily describes the horrors and dangers of the regime of George W. Bush. Orwell's totalitarian state had a two-way television screen that monitored its citizens' behavior and a system of spies and informers that would report on politically incorrect thought and activity. Bush's police state has its "USA Patriot Act" that enables the state to monitor the communications of e-mail, wireless, telephones, and other media, while allowing the state to arrest citizens without warrants, to hold them indefinitely, to monitor their conversations, and to submit them to military tribunals, all of which would be governed by the dictates of the Supreme Leader (in this case, a dangerously demagogic figure-head, ruled by right wing extremists).

The Bush administration also has its TIPS (Terrorist Information and Prevention System) program that would turn citizens into spies who would report suspicious activities to the government and would recruit truck drivers, mail carriers, meter readers, and others who would “report what they see in public areas and along transportation routes,” thus turning workers into informants. In addition, John Ashcroft, U.S. Attorney General, has proposed concentration camps in the U.S. for citizens that he considers “enemy combatants.”¹²

With their Orwellian-sounding Office of Homeland Security, proposed Office of Strategic Information, Shadow Government, and “USA Patriot Act,” the Bush administration has in place the institutions and apparatus of a totalitarian government. Since the elections in 2000, the Bush clique has practiced a form of Orwellian “Bushspeak” that endlessly repeats the Big Lie of the moment. Bush and his propaganda ministry engage in daily propagandistic spin to push its policies and to slime their opponents, while showing no regard whatsoever for the canons of truth and justice that conservatives have traditionally defended.¹³

To keep the public in a state of fear, Bush and his administration have repeatedly evoked the specter of renewed terrorist attacks and promised an all-out war against an “axis of evil.” This threatening “axis,” to be defined periodically by the Bush administration, allegedly possesses “instruments of mass destruction” that could be used against the U.S. Almost without exception, the mainstream media have been a propaganda conduit for the Bush administration Terror War and have helped generate fear and even mass hysteria. The mainstream corporate media have thus largely failed to advance an understanding of the serious threats to the U.S. and to the global economy and polity, and to debate the range of possible responses to the September 11 attacks and their respective merits and possible consequences.

The Bush administration Terror War raises the specter that Orwell’s *1984* might provide the template of the new millennium, as the world is plunged into endless wars, as freedom and democracy are being snuffed out in the name of freedom, as language loses meaning, and as history is constantly revised (as Bush and his scribes constantly rewrote his own personal history). There is thus the danger that Orwell’s dark grim dystopia may replace the (ideological) utopia of the “information society,” the “new economy,” and a prosperous and democratic globalization that had been the dominant

ideology and vision of the past decade. Questions arise: Will the Bush administration Terror War lead the world to ruin through constant war and the erection of totalitarian police states over the façade of fragile democracy? Or can more multilateral and global solutions be found to the dangers of terrorism that will strengthen democracy and increase the chances for peace and security?

There is indeed a danger that Terror War will be a force of historical regression, and the motor of destruction of the global economy, liberal polity, and democracy itself, all to be replaced by an aggressive militarism and totalitarian police state. It could well be that Orwell will be the prophet of a coming New Barbarism with endless war, state repression, and enforced control of thought and discourse, and that George W. Bush and his minions are the architects of an Orwellian future.

It could also be the case, however, that the Taliban, bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Bush administration represent obsolete and reactionary forces that will be swept away by the inexorable forces of globalization and liberal democracy. The opposing sides in the current Terror War of the Bush administration reactionaries and Al Qaeda could be perceived as representing complementary poles of an atavistic and premodern version of Islam and nihilistic terrorism confronted by reactionary right wing conservatism and militarism.¹⁴ In this scenario, both poles can be perceived as disruptive and regressive forces in a global world that need to be overcome to create genuine historical progress. If this is the case, Terror War would be a momentary interlude in which two obsolete historical forces battle it out, ultimately to be replaced by more sane and democratic globalizing forces.

This is, of course, an optimistic scenario and probably, for the foreseeable future, progressive forces will be locked into intense battles against the opposing forces of Islamic terrorism and right wing militarism. Yet if democracy and the human species are to survive, global movements against militarism and for social justice, ecology, and peace must emerge to combat and replace the atavistic forces of the present. As a new millennium unfolds, the human race has regressed into a New Barbarism unforeseeable prior to September 11. If civilization is to survive, individuals must perceive their enemies and organize to fight for a better future.

Consequently, I argue that Bush administration militarism is not the way to fight international terrorism, but is rather the road to an Orwellian future in

which democracy and freedom will be in dire peril and the future of the human species will be in question. These are frightening times and it is essential that all citizens become informed about the fateful conflicts of the present, gain clear understanding of what is at stake, and realize that they must oppose both international terrorism and Bushian militarism and an Orwellian police-state.

Conclusion

September 11, the subsequent Terror War, the Enron scandals and other often-Bush-Cheney-related corporate scandals that emerged during these events and the ongoing misadventures of the Bush administration constitute what I am calling “the New Barbarism.” It was scandalous that civilized countries tolerated the Taliban and allowed the bin Laden Al Qaeda network to develop, while the Bush Terror War unleashed new forces of barbarism now evident in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world. The term “New Barbarism” denotes frightening historical regression in an era of highly uncivilized and violent behavior. While one would hope that the New Millennium would signal a chance for progress and historical optimism, instead the human species is moving into a situation where the universal values of the Enlightenment, the institutions of democracy, the global economy, and the earth and human species itself are faced with challenges of survival.

As a response to the September 11 terror attacks, the Bush administration has answered with an intensified militarism that threatens to generate an era of Terror War, a new arms race, accelerated military violence, U.S. support of authoritarian regimes, an assault on human rights, constant threats to democracy, and destabilizing of the world economy. The New Barbarism also describes Bush administration practices of providing political favors to its largest corporate and other supporters, unleashing unrestrained Wild West capitalism (exemplified by the Enron scandals), and a form of capitalist cronyism whereby Bush administration family and friends are provided with government favors, while social welfare programs, environmental legislation, and protection of rights and freedoms are curtailed.

The corporate media, especially television, are part and parcel of the New Barbarism, spewing forth almost unopposed propaganda for the Bush administration, fanning war fever and terrorist hysteria, while cutting back

on vigorous political debate and varied sources of information as it produces waves of ideologically conservative talk shows and mindless entertainment. I have been closely tracking the media and the crisis of democracy for over a decade now and the current crisis marks the low point of U.S. media performance. The U.S. corporate media at first fanned the flames of war and hysteria, and then became a conduit for Bush administration and Pentagon propaganda rather than a forum of reasoned debate, serious discussion, exposure of the dangers and failures of Bush administration responses to terrorism, and the exploration of more sane alternatives.

In view of the enormity of the events of September 11, and their frightening aftermath and consequences, it is now appropriate to reflect on what happened, why it happened, and what lessons we can learn as we seek to apply such insights to the crisis that we now find ourselves in. It's a time for intelligence, not knee-jerk reaction, a time for thought and not for hysteria. It's a time for reflection, figuring out what went wrong, and for informed and intelligent action that will get at the source of our problems. It's also a time for stock-taking, taking account individually and collectively of our views of the world, and our everyday behavior. A situation of crisis provides an opportunity for positive change and reconstruction, as well as barbaric regression. Thus, now is the time for reflection on such things as democracy, globalization, and the flaws, limitations, and fallacies in our individual thoughts and actions, as well as problems with U.S. institutions and leadership.

Momentous historical events, like the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the subsequent Terror War, test social theories and provide a challenge to give a convincing account of the events and their consequences. They also provide cultural studies an opportunity to trace how political and ideological discourses, propaganda, and mythologies play themselves out in media discourse and representations. Major historical events and media spectacles also provide an opportunity to examine how the broadcast and other dominant modes of communication perform or fail to perform their democratic role of providing accurate information and discussion.

Quite possibly we will never know exactly what happened in the Afghanistan war. I published one of the first books on the Gulf War (Kellner 1992), largely based on Internet sources, the newspapers of record, press conference transcripts, and other government material available on the Internet. I followed closely subsequent memoirs of military participants in the war,

journalists providing first-person accounts, and other studies. But no definitive history of the Gulf War has yet emerged, and we still do not know all of the shadowy details of relations between George Bush and Saddam Hussein, of why Iraq invaded Kuwait and what knowledge the U.S. did or did not have of Iraqi plans, how the U.S. orchestrated the Gulf War, or what actually happened. Yet it is always possible to expose the fallacies and holes in official accounts, to expose lies and disinformation, and to provide contextualization and interpretations of major historical events like the Gulf War, the September 11 terror attacks, and the Afghanistan war.

I would argue that a combination of critical social theory and cultural studies can help illuminate the September events, their causes, effects, and importance in shaping the contemporary moment. Certainly, the terror spectacle of those events is one of the major media and political events of our day and interpreting the affair and its aftermath provides crucial insight into the dynamics and conflicts of the present era. The subsequent Terror War appears to be the major ongoing spectacle of the new millennium that the Bush administration is using to promote its agenda and to build up the U.S. military as a hegemonic force, creating the “new world order” that George Bush had wanted to create at the end of the Gulf War. As envisaged by the second Bush administration, Terror War is projected as the defining feature of the new millennium for the foreseeable future.

Notes

¹ While the Bush administration propaganda war was immensely successful at home, garnering support for its Afghanistan war from 85-90% of those polled, a number of polls done in the Arab and Muslim worlds revealed a striking lack of support for U.S. policies, and the majority polled did not even believe that Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network were responsible for the September 11 terror attacks. However one explains this, it is clear, as I will attempt to show in this study, that the Bush administration failed miserably in its efforts to communicate and improve relations with the Arab and Muslim world. For a variety of polls on Arab attitudes toward the U.S. pre- and post-September 11, see <http://www.zogby.com/main.cfm>. For the 2002 Gallup Poll on the Islamic world, see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/summits/islam.asp>. For a PEW poll that cites growing European criticism and distance from Bush administration policies, see the PEW institute's report "Americans and Europeans Differ Widely on Foreign Policy Issues" that concludes: "The survey revealed considerable European support for taking a more independent course in security and diplomatic affairs. Majorities in France, Germany and Italy think Western Europe's partnership with the United States should not be as close as it has been in the past. People in Great Britain are divided on the question. European support for a more independent approach is not especially linked to negative reactions to recent U.S. policies, such as the steel tariffs. Rather, it is more associated with general criticism of President Bush, the feeling that the United States has ignored allied interests in conducting the war on terrorism, and general disapproval of U.S. policies in the Middle East" (see <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=153>).

² For the Gore report, see <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat /212fin~1.html>; for the Hart-Rudman report, see <http://www.nssg.gov/News/news.htm> and for the Bremer National Commission on Terrorism report, see <http://w3.access.gpo.gov/nct>. See also "1999 Report Warned of Suicide Hijack," *Associated Press*, May 17, 2001.

³ See Greg Palast, "FBI and U.S. Spy Agents Say Bush Spiked bin Laden Probes Before September 11." *The Guardian* (Nov. 7, 2001). Palast's article is collected on his home page that has a lot of other interesting reports on Bush administration activities; see <http://www.gregpalast.com>. See also "U.S. agents told: Back off bin Ladens" at <http://old.smh.com.au/news/0111/07/world/world100.html>.

⁴ In "Ashcroft Knew," Bruce Shapiro names Ashcroft "the official responsible for the most dramatic failures of September 11" (*Salon*, May 23, 2002). Ashcroft will indeed emerge as one of the villains of this article, in part because of his stunning incompetence and failures to address the dangers of terrorism due to his fanatic obsession with pushing through a right wing law and order agenda. But Ashcroft also carried out the most systematic assault on civil liberties in U.S. history and emerges as a clear and present danger to constitutional democracy. Yet in my reading, it is the collective responsibility of the Bush administration that failed to heed warnings of imminent terror attacks and its systematically carrying out policies that made them more likely.

⁵ The Feinstein memo is found at <http://www.senate.gov/~feinstein/Releases02/attacks.htm>.

⁶ See *CBS News*, "New Terror Task Force. Cheney To Lead at Terrorist Threats to U.S.," May 8, 2001. A June 30, 2001, CNN report headlined: "Cheney is point man for administration," noting that Cheney would be in charge of task forces on three major issues:

energy, global warming, and domestic terrorism.” On May 11, the website <http://www.disasterrelief.org> also posted a report that states: “Bush asked Vice President Dick Cheney to lead the task force, which will explore how attacks against U.S. citizens or personnel at home and overseas may be detected and stopped.” To prevent future terror attacks on the U.S., it would thus be highly important to see exactly what Cheney did or did not do and address the problems revealed.

⁷The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on September 14 2002 that German intelligence sources had gathered warnings from the Echelon spy system that Middle Eastern terrorists were “planning to hijack commercial aircraft to use as weapons to attack important symbols of American and Israeli culture” and had passed the warnings to the U.S. government. On Israeli intelligence warning the U.S. of terrorist networks sneaking into the U.S. for attacks, see “Officials Told of ‘Major Assault’ Plans,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 20, 2001. Carolyn Kay has assembled scores of material from Russian, Israeli, German, U.S. and other intelligence sources warning that a major domestic terrorist attack was about to unfold against the U.S., but Cheney, the Bush administration, and the national security apparatus failed to respond or prepare for the impending attacks, see <http://makethemaccountable.com/whatwhen/index.html>; see also Russ Kirk, “September 11, 2001: No Surprise” for an analysis of a myriad of sources signaling the September 11 terror attacks (<http://www.loompanics.com/Articles/September 11.html>).

⁸ See Harold Evans, “What We Knew: Warning Given . . . Story Missed. How a Report on Terrorism Flew Under the Radar,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (Nov-Dec. 2001). Evans points out that the Bush administration blocked planned Congressional Hearings on the Hart-Rudman report in May 2001, instead “forming its own committee, headed by Dick Cheney, who was expected to report in October.” Even former Republican House Majority leader and conservative ideologue Newt Gingrich concedes, “The [Bush] administration actually slowed down response to Hart-Rudman when momentum was building in the spring.”

⁹ For previous accounts of Bush family conspiracies, see Kellner 1990, 1992, and 2001. Major conspiracy sites for September 11 include Michael Rupert’s <http://www.fromthewilderness.com>; the Emperor’s Clothes site at <http://www.tenc.net>, and the compendium of conspiracy theories collected at the Global Research site at <http://www.globalresearch.ca>. The best-selling French conspiracy book by Thierry Meyssan was reportedly being translated into English as *9-11, the Big Lie*.

¹⁰ See Human Rights Watch report, “Presumption of Guilt: Human Rights Abuses of Post-September 11 Detainees,” at: <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/08/usdetainees081502.htm>.

¹¹ For a discussion of Orwell’s prophetic novel, see Kellner 1990; in the light of the Bush administration projected Terror War, however, it could well be Orwell and not Huxley and Marcuse, as I argue in the article cited here, who provide the most prescient templates of the future present.

¹² See Jonathan Turley, “Camps for Citizens: Ashcroft’s Hellish Vision.” *Los Angeles Times* (Aug. 14, 2002). U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft was awarded the annual 1984 award for “Worst Government Official” by Privacy International. The watchdog group said the top U.S. law enforcement officer “is responsible for a massive increase in wiretapping of phones and other electronics and for the imprisonment without charge of as many as 1,200 people in the United States after the Sept. 11 attacks on America.” See Reuters (April 19, 2002).

¹³ See Kellner 2001 for documentation and systematic critique of Bushspeak.

¹⁴ Tariq Ali captures this dialectic in his book *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (2002), whose cover pictures George W. Bush shading into the visage of Osama bin Laden, two fundamentalists whose families had long been linked in shady business practices and who personally represented the competing fundamentalisms of the ongoing Terror War.