

Casualties of Nine Eleven

the new world USA

One year after terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, it is time to think of the casualties of that fatal day — 11th of September, 2001. The first casualties were those of the passengers in the planes, the terrorists themselves and, minutes after, the over three thousand people present in the WTC. They were initially said to be over six thousand but eventually turned out to be over three thousand. Numbers do count but the principle should count even more. Even if one person had died, such an act should still be condemned as a heinous crime against humanity.

But the casualties did not stop at that. I remember when I wrote a column condemning the atrocity last year, I hoped they would. As I wrote I knew that if history was any guide they would not. I still hoped against hope but within a few days it was all too clear that the next important casualty would be peace and good sense. As the war drums started beating in the United States and the world followed suit, it was clear that not only peace but the whole idea of creating first the League of Nations and then the United Nations would also be a casualty. After all, these international bodies were created to prevent a country from invading another. And now if the United States could actually attack Afghanistan on the suspicion of having harboured terrorists, then there was no question of any country being safe from this time onwards. The consequences of this violation of international norms of peaceful co-existence were not appreciated at that time.

Then came the attack on the Indian parliament and India amassed its troops on Pakistan's borders. Such attacks had been going on for quite some time. The present writer, in a number of articles, had always condemned them with utmost and genuine sincerity. I had always opposed the use of fighters to carry on a proxy war with India just as I had also condemned India's violation of the rights of Kashmiris. But terrorism — yes, even terrorism — does not justify a full scale war or even a threat of one. What had happened was that the unspoken balance between Pakistan and India had

shifted. India now felt that if the US could actually bomb the Taliban government out of existence, it too could threaten to use force to stop fighters entering its side of the Line of Control. Thus restraint between the South Asian neighbours was a casualty. Rationality was a casualty. Good sense was a casualty. A new idea had been born: that of lashing out at everyone without restraint even without full proof. This idea was the illegitimate child of Nine Eleven.

This illegitimate child encouraged hawks everywhere in the world. In Israel Sharon flexed his muscles sending in tanks at the



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whatever we may experience in the twenty-first century, we must know that all this is

because the liberal idea is dying and it is Nine Eleven which precipitated its death.

One part of the gathering of the hawks is President Bush's doctrine of there being 'evil' states. Of course many world leaders must have felt that their antagonists were 'evil' but before Nine Eleven it was not easy to say such things. Thus, the language of diplomacy seems to be another casualty. And perhaps the result of this newfound language of bullying is the verbal assault on Iraq by the some of Mr Bush's support-

dead and fathers screaming in pain. We know how prisoners were locked up in oil tankers till they suffocated to death. We have heard of that unfeeling term 'collateral damage' and we know it means death, destruction, disease and untold suffering. We know how marriage parties were fired upon and the gaiety of life turned into mourning. All this we know. And we also know that the funeral services in this September will not be for these obscure casualties. These are the ignored, poor relations of the American casualties. But those of us who aspire to be human, which essentially means being compassionate, should bow our head in sorrow and humility for all casualties — American, Afghan, Pakistan, Arab and Israeli etc, etc.

We know that al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hizollah etc are the products of violence. We know that violence creates more and more violence. So why can't we persuade Mr Bush — or at least try to do so — that violence on a scale as large as a full scale war in the Middle East will produce so many casualties that most of us would regret not giving peace a chance

slightest provocation. And provocations there were galore because it is anger which creates provocations and anger was mounting in the Arab world — nay, in the Muslim world. In the Philippines the US army helped hunt down Muslims rebels. In Europe the right wing was encouraged to scoff at liberal ideas of freedom, privacy and individualism. In the United States the freedom of many people, most of them proved innocent later, was trampled upon. The idea that people cannot be trusted, especially if they happen to be Muslims, was born. In short, on the plane of the history of ideas, if the liberal idea felt seriously ill then it was on the 11th of September, 2001.

Now whether we have racial profiling in the name of security; or a barrage of anti-Muslim movies from Hollywood; or identity cards in countries which have never had them; or Muslim children in Western schools pretending they are not Muslims or, possibly, asserting their Muslim identity more forcefully —

I am calling it 'bullying' and 'verbal assault' because I still find it difficult to believe that even Mr Bush will actually go to war against Iraq — not just Saddam Hussain — because at some future, unknown and unknowable date, the US might be threatened by Iraq. The fact that Iraq has done nothing new to the United States clearly tell us that the idea that one can threaten war because a country can be a danger in future, is an indirect consequence of Nine Eleven. This event has changed the norms of diplomacy. It has made statesmen somewhat like dockyard bullies who use aggressive language only to intimidate rivals.

I have not mentioned the Afghan casualties, the Pakistani casualties, the casualties of other nations. These will forever remain unknown because the media has not revealed them to the world — at least not fully nor extensively. But the media has given us glimpses into the unknown number of shocked little girls who woke up to find their mothers

Moreover the casualties have not stopped. On 05 September Kabul was rocked by bomb blast. Hamid Karzai was attacked. Afghanistan may be on the brink of another round of bloodletting. There will be more casualties in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of these casualties would not have taken place if the response of the US to Nine Eleven had been different. We cannot change the past. We can, however, change the future. If we want to escape the casualties of USA's war on Iraq, this is the time to enter the debate to persuade President Bush to go for peace. We know that al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hizollah etc are the products of violence. We know that violence creates more and more violence. So why can't we persuade Mr Bush — or at least try to do so — that violence on a scale as large as a full scale war in the Middle East will produce so many casualties that most of us would regret not giving peace a chance? I still advocate US pullout from the Muslim world; withdrawal of Israel to its pre-1967 boundaries in return for peace; Arab and Muslim acceptance of Israel within the pre-1967 borders and peaceful coexistence with Israel; massive international investment to end poverty in the Muslim world; world wide return to less state intrusion and liberal values — any takers? Or is it that the world is ticking forward to annihilation and people like me who still talk of peace and liberty are the dinosaurs who will be the next casualties!