

in a meeting arranged by Laili Helms, the Taliban's unofficial representative in the United States and niece-in-law of Richard Helms, former CIA director and U.S. ambassador to Iran.

According to Pakistani sources, the Taliban and the Pakistani veterans of the CIA-led *mujahedin* war against the Soviets had been keen to rekindle old ties with the former South Asia CIA chief Richard Armitage, now Secretary of State Colin Powell's deputy, and Christina Rocca, assistant secretary of state for South Asia, who is a 15-year veteran of the CIA's Operations Directorate, a position where she also interfaced with the Islamist guerrillas. Rocca had previously met in Islamabad with Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, and his assistant, Sohail Shaheen. Armitage, however, is considered anti-Taliban because he favors restoring the elderly ousted Afghan monarch, King Zahir Shah, to power.

Powell was reportedly upset about the re-establishment of ties with the Taliban and Pakistani Islamists, but has apparently been overruled by the dominant CIA interests in the administration. Intelligence sources point out that, for its part, the CIA wanted to re-establish contact with murky *ex-mujahedin* and Taliban-allied arms- and drug-smuggling fronts in Rawalpindi and Peshawar. According to one senior U.S. government source, the Taliban's greatest cheerleaders are the CIA and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. The source said the CIA had always argued that bin Laden was "overblown" as a threat.

The United States has recently tilted toward the Taliban and against the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance of Gen. Ahmed Shah Massoud. The Defense Department largely supports Massoud, but the CIA and State Department argue that

supporting the general would put the United States on the same side as Russia and Iran—his two major backers.

Massoud was the target of a suicide bomb assassination attempt by two bin Laden allies disguised as television journalists the day before the attack on the United States. (At press time, there were conflicting reports as to whether he was dead or alive.) But that did not stop Massoud's forces from launching a missile attack on Kabul Airport the night of September 11—to the delight of many Americans, many of whom were surprised it was not a U.S. military attack.

After the recovery and mourning period, Washington will go into its traditional finger-pointing mode. Then, the CIA and other Bush administration officials who have had close contact with the Taliban should be asked by Congress about the nature of their relationships with the protectors of bin Laden. For starters, CIA Director George Tenet should be asked what the United States received in return for even talking to the brutal mullahs who run Kabul. The State Department should be questioned as to why it has banned Massoud's movement from occupying the vacant Afghan Embassy in Washington even though it is recognized by the United Nations as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

At the very least, the American people deserve to know why the Bush administration, through its words and actions, has given tacit support to a government that has provided safe haven to the man who may be the worst mass murderer of American civilians in the nation's history. ■

Wayne Madsen is an investigative journalist based in Washington and the author of *Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa*.

9/11/01

IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

THE RATIONAL RESPONSE TO TERROR

By David Moberg

The heinous criminal attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington highlight in a most grisly way the possibilities—and the limits—of violence in contemporary life. The assaults opened up a new tactic that will almost certainly be copied by others, turning every commercial plane into a potential weapon of mass destruction. They escalate both the scale of terrorism, making dreaded scenarios of nuclear bombs in a suitcase or chemical and biological warfare attacks seem more plausible, and the long-term global trend toward making civilians targets in conflicts. Those prospects, just as much as human sympathy, may have led to the nearly unanimous condemnation of the acts by government leaders around the world and unprecedented support from both the United Nations and NATO.

But the attack's evocation of Pearl Harbor to many Americans also underscores how different this event is from

the triggering of the U.S. entry into World War II. The scale of carnage may warrant calling it war, but it is quite obviously not an invasion by a nation bent on conquest or war by any conventional definition. Indeed, although early information indicates a connection of the hijackers to the Middle East, it is not at all clear who was responsible, let alone the implication of any state in the devastation.

Labeling the acts as war risks leading the United States into a strategy that may only enlarge the catastrophe. Just as the attack demonstrated the vulnerability of the world's only superpower, the response needs to recognize the limits of force and violence as a solution. Rabid hawks—like Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Rick Santorum, who called for vengeance not justice, and conservative leader William Bennett, who called for a bloody war against "radical Islam"—represent the kind of shoot-first, think-later (if ever) response that is likely to lead to more terrorist attacks

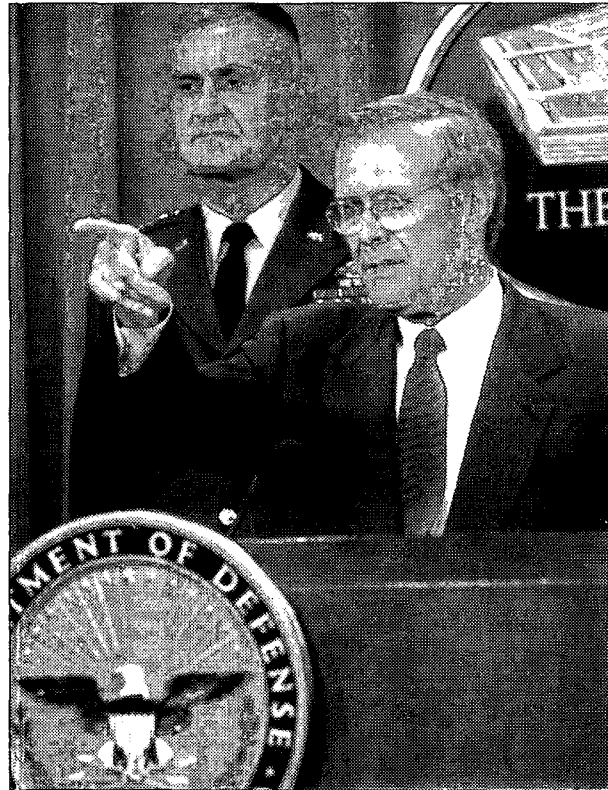
on the United States and the massacre of civilians elsewhere in the world.

What kind of response is appropriate legally, politically and strategically? The goals should be to bring those responsible to justice and to prevent future acts of terrorist violence—set within the larger context of pursuing international peace. The methods for doing so are primarily political and diplomatic, even if some targeted use of force may be both legitimate and effective. It is important for the United States, which has a long and sorry history of both tolerating terrorists acting in our supposed national interests (such as contras in Nicaragua or the current paramilitaries in Colombia) and attacking civilian targets (from Hiroshima to Vietnam), to break out of the cycle of violence in this instance and set

an example that we would want other governments to follow. This is not because the United States has lost legitimacy to act because of any past misdeeds. Important as it is to understand how this country has fueled violence around the world (and not only by being its largest arms dealer), nothing the United States has done justifies the attacks made on the World Trade Center.

But the attacks set off a stampede of politicians calling for immediate increases in U.S. military spending, but buying more fighters or building a National Missile Defense system would do nothing to advance the country's legitimate goals. If it's unclear whether Star Wars would be able to stop any missiles, it's unquestionable that it will do nothing to prevent attacks like those against the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Spending the \$8.3 billion Bush is requesting for missile defense on economic development in the Middle East would do far more for national security.

Under the U.N. charter, nations may legally engage in violence only through the Security Council or in self-defense, not for reprisals or pre-emptive attacks. Setting aside for a moment the question of Security Council action, there is a plausible—if legally disputable—case the United States might make for attacks on terrorist groups or even a nation supporting them, according to Doug Cassel, director of the Center for International Human Rights at Northwestern University. For example, if the attacks are



"It's war," says the Pentagon.

Massive military attacks on a wide variety of targets are unlikely to have much impact on any dispersed terrorist operations.

through some massive display of force. But there are many reasons why it should adopt a multi-layered strategy that uses force selectively.

Massive military attacks on a wide variety of targets are unlikely to have much impact on any dispersed terrorist operations, or even many governments that might be targeted. As a *New York Times* correspondent in Afghanistan noted, it would be difficult to bomb that devastated country "back to the stone age," since it is there already. And as a former CIA operative noted, Clinton administration cruise missile attacks on al-Qaeda camps bounced some rubble around in the mountains of Afghanistan without affecting terrorist capabilities.

If bin Laden really is the mastermind, then the most devastating attack on the world's greatest power was launched from what is probably the world's poorest and most backward nation. That alone should suggest that conventional notions of warfare simply aren't going to work in this case, unless the United States intends large-scale ground invasions and long-term occupations of most of the Middle East, which could lead to World War III.

At the moment, the United States is in the rare position of having worldwide public sympathy and at least nominal support for suppressing terrorism. If it abuses the legitimacy of its moral high ground, then it will lose the political support that may be the most effective means of both bringing the guilty to justice and controlling terrorism. Massive attacks—let alone such mindless strategies as a war against "radical

linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda group, then the United States could argue that counter-strikes are part of self-defense against an ongoing series of attacks.

Following a World Court ruling on state responsibility for terrorist groups in Honduras, it would also be possible to argue that the Afghan government holds some responsibility in such a case. Yet even if these arguments are accepted, the legitimate response must aim at military targets, try to avoid civilian casualties and be proportionate—which, given the scale of attack on the United States, still gives a lot of leeway. The United States—or the United Nations—could also set out to arrest and try all those involved, although it also would have the right to use violence against anyone who resisted arrest.

Of course, there is little chance that the United States will adopt such a measured response. Beyond the cries for revenge, there are also demands that the United States demonstrate its power

Islam”—will surely lead to large numbers of civilian casualties and hardship. Such attacks will not only make it difficult for any government in the region to cooperate with the United States, they will also generate thousands of new recruits for terrorist groups and millions of sympathizers.

There is good reason to distrust the intentions of governments in the Middle East. Many are undemocratic and often unpopular. They may be reluctant to crack down on fundamentalist Islamic groups that focus their hatred on the United States or Israel out of fear that such groups might then turn against them. Although the only effective way to combat the terrorist groups of the region would be with the cooperation of governments in the Middle East, they would need something from the United States or the rest of the world to reward their assistance. Yet help from these governments, especially if it was seen as an alliance with the United States, could backfire politically, unleashing more popular support for militant fundamentalism.

That might be lessened, however, if Middle Eastern governments truly democratized themselves, as part of an economic and political development package. Democracy is no sure-fire antidote to Islamic fundamentalism, but it is the best long-term bet. It will not be easy to ask for both democratic reform

and action against terrorists, but anything less would risk a greater version of the same “blowback” from past U.S. interventions that plagues the country now. After all, bin Laden rose to prominence as part of the U.S.-funded, CIA-assisted Afghan fundamentalist war against the Soviets during the '80s.

Massive military attacks are also likely to alienate many of the diverse range of leaders outside the region, not just Europe but also Russia and China, who have lined up in support of the United States. The broader the network of cooperation, the easier it will be to put pressure on states like Pakistan or Afghanistan that may be harboring whoever is responsible.

At home, the war frenzy risks provoking threats to civil liberties and democracy for all Americans, but especially Arabs or other Muslims living in the United States. That may come partly in deference to any actions taken in the name of security. It may also come with Congress giving the President carte blanche or encouraging the CIA, which has

not provided needed intelligence about terrorist groups, to return to its bad old ways (starting with lifting restrictions on working with known human rights violators).

The dangers are perhaps made even greater because the target is a shadowy, fetishized enemy—“terrorism”—ripped out of any social or historical context that would help us

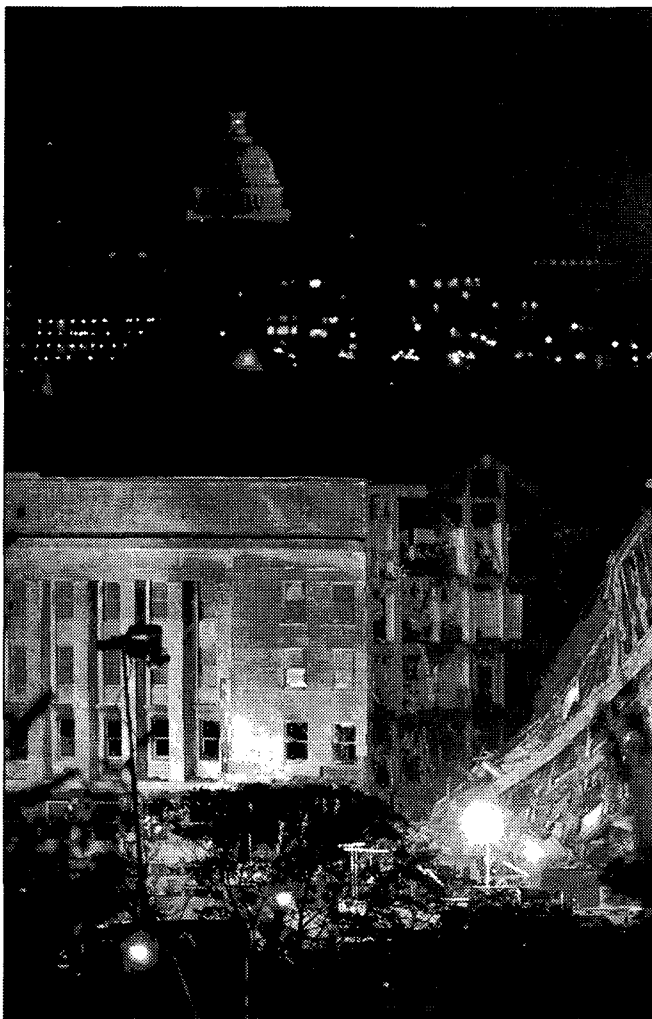
understand and deal with the roots of terror. For example, *New Republic* editor Peter Beinart is already viciously attempting—in an updated version of McCarthyism—to link the domestic anti-globalization movement to anti-American terrorism and demands that the movement must choose between America and the terrorists. He writes: “Domestic political dissent is immoral without a prior statement of national solidarity, a choosing of sides.”

The key to resolving the ongoing problem of terrorism from the Middle East is a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that the terrorist attacks proved the folly of appeasement, there has been no appeasement of Palestinians. Indeed, there has been little from the Bush administration at all, except a disengaged but lockstep support for Israel.

The United States has also lost its limited credibility as a neutral broker. At this point, a multilateral intervention, involving the European Union

and possibly the Security Council, to promote a peace agreement would be more promising, even if diplomatically unwieldy. The grand bargain must include not only security for Israel and a Palestinian state, but a regional strategy of cooperation against terrorism, deliberate steps toward democracy, and a plan for economic development and poverty reduction.

Needless to say, it will not be quick or easy to reach such an agreement, but the level of worldwide unity and concern prompted by the terrorist attacks on the United States opens the door of opportunity. While the world will tolerate and even support limited military actions aimed at bringing the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks and their backers to justice, the political and diplomatic unity needed for a long-term solution will be shattered by widespread military action. The United States will exercise real strength if it takes the firm but principled high road to justice and peace. It will demonstrate the futility of its own military might if it resorts to war. ■



BOB HOULIHAN/US NAVY/GETTY IMAGES