

Come September

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Forthcoming in Arundhati Roy, *War Talk*
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Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I'm beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it's actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative — they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told. Fiction and non-fiction are only different techniques of story telling. For reasons I do not fully understand, fiction dances out of me. Nonfiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning.

The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as non-fiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they're engaged in. John Berger, that most wonderful writer, once wrote: Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one. There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing.¹ So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a storyteller who wants to share her way of seeing. Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories, it's about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a state or a country, a corporation or an institution — or even an individual, a spouse, friend or sibling — regardless of ideology, results in excesses such as the ones I will recount here.

Living as I do, as millions of us do, in the shadow of the nuclear holocaust that the governments of India and Pakistan keep promising their brainwashed citizenry, and in the global neighborhood of the War Against Terror (what President Bush rather biblically calls "The Task That Does Not End"), I find myself thinking a great deal about the relationship between citizens and the state.²

In India, those of us who have expressed views on Nuclear Bombs, Big Dams, corporate globalization and the rising threat of communal Hindu fascism — views that are at variance with the Indian government's — are branded "anti-national." While this accusation does not fill me with indignation, it's not an accurate description of what I do or how I think. An "anti-national" is a person who is against his/her own nation and, by inference, is pro some other one. But it isn't necessary to be "anti-national" to be deeply suspicious of all nationalism, to be anti-nationalism. Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's minds and then as

¹. See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

². See Damon Johnston, "U.S. Hits Back Inspirations," *The Advertiser*, September 22, 2001, p. 7.

ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead. When independent, thinking people (and here I do not include the corporate media) begin to rally under flags, when writers, painters, musicians, film makers suspend their judgment and blindly yoke their art to the service of the "Nation," it's time for all of us to sit up and worry. In India we saw it happen soon after the Nuclear tests in 1998 and during the Kargil War against Pakistan in 1999. In the US we saw it during the Gulf War and we see it now, during the "War Against Terror." That blizzard of Made-in-China American flags.³

Recently, those who have criticized the actions of the US government (myself included) have been called "anti-American." Anti-Americanism is in the process of being consecrated into an ideology.

The term "anti-American" is usually used by the American establishment to discredit and, not falsely — but shall we say inaccurately — define its critics. Once someone is branded anti-American, the chances are that he or she will be judged before they're heard and the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised national pride.

What does the term "anti-American" *mean*? Does it mean you're anti-jazz? Or that you're opposed to free speech? That you don't delight in Toni Morrison or John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant Sequoias? Does it mean you don't admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean that you hate all Americans?

This sly conflation of America's culture, music, literature, the breathtaking physical beauty of the land, the ordinary pleasures of ordinary people with criticism of the U.S. government's foreign policy (about which, thanks to America's "free press," sadly most Americans know very little) is a deliberate and extremely effective strategy. It's like a retreating army taking cover in a heavily populated city, hoping that the prospect of hitting civilian targets will deter enemy fire.

There are many Americans who would be mortified to be associated with their government's policies. The most scholarly, scathing, incisive, hilarious critiques of the hypocrisy and the contradictions in US government policy come from American citizens. When the rest of the world wants to know what the US government is up to, we turn to Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Howard Zinn, Ed Herman, Amy Goodman, Michael Albert, Chalmers Johnson, William Blum and Anthony Arno to tell us what's really going on.

Similarly, in India, not hundreds, but millions of us would be ashamed and offended if we were in any way implicated with the present Indian government's fascist policies which, apart from the perpetration of state terrorism in the valley of Kashmir (in the name of fighting terrorism), have also turned a blind eye to the recent state-supervised pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat.⁴ It would be absurd to think that those who criticize the Indian government are "anti-Indian" — although the government itself never hesitates to take that line. It is dangerous to cede to the Indian government or the American government or *anyone* for that matter, the right to define what "India" or "America" are, or ought to be.

To call someone "anti-American," indeed, to *be* anti-American, (or for that matter anti-Indian, or anti-Timbuktuan) is not just racist, it's a failure of the imagination. An

³. See John Pomfret, "Chinese Working Overtime to Sew U.S. Flags," *Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, p. A14.

⁴. See Arundhati Roy, "Democracy: Who Is She When She's at Home," forthcoming in *War Talk* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003).

inability to see the world in terms other than those that the establishment has set out for you: If you're not a Bushie you're a Taliban. If you don't love us, you hate us. If you're not Good you're Evil. If you're not with us, you're with the terrorists.

Last year, like many others, I too made the mistake of scoffing at this post September Eleventh rhetoric, dismissing it as foolish and arrogant. I've realized that it's not foolish at all. It's actually a canny recruitment drive for a misconceived, dangerous war. Every day I'm taken aback at how many people believe that opposing the war in Afghanistan amounts to supporting terrorism, or voting for the Taliban. Now that the initial aim of the war — capturing Osama bin Laden (dead or alive) — seems to have run into bad weather, the goal posts have been moved.⁵ It's being made out that the whole point of the war was to topple the Taliban regime and liberate Afghan women from their burqas. We're being asked to believe that the US marines are actually on a feminist mission. (If so, will their next stop be America's military ally Saudi Arabia?) Think of it this way: In India there are some pretty reprehensible social practices, against "untouchables," against Christians and Muslims, against women. Pakistan and Bangladesh have even worse ways of dealing with minority communities and women. Should they be bombed? Should Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka be destroyed? Is it possible to bomb bigotry out of India? Can we bomb our way to a feminist paradise? Is that how women won the vote in the United States? Or how slavery was abolished? Can we win redress for the genocide of the millions of Native Americans upon whose corpses the United States was founded by bombing Santa Fe?

None of us need anniversaries to remind us of what we cannot forget. So it is no more than co-incidence that I happen to be here, on American soil, in September — this month of dreadful anniversaries. Uppermost on everybody's mind of course, particularly here in America, is the horror of what has come to be known as Nine Eleven. Three thousand civilians lost their lives in that lethal terrorist strike.⁶ The grief is still deep. The rage still sharp. The tears have not dried. And a strange, deadly war is raging around the world. Yet, each person who has lost a loved one surely knows secretly, deeply, that no war, no act of revenge, no daisy-cutters dropped on someone else's loved ones or someone else's children will blunt the edges of their pain or bring their own loved ones back. War cannot avenge those who have died. War is only a brutal desecration of their memory.

To fuel yet another war — this time against Iraq — by cynically manipulating people's grief, by packaging it for TV specials sponsored by corporations selling detergent or running shoes, is to cheapen and devalue grief, to drain it of meaning. What we are seeing now is a vulgar display of the *business* of grief, the commerce of grief, the pillaging of even the most private human feelings for political purpose. It is a terrible, violent thing for a state to do to its people.

It's not a clever-enough subject to speak of from a public platform, but what I would really love to talk to you about is Loss. Loss and losing. Grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming. The absolute, relentless, endless, habitual unfairness of the world. What does loss

⁵. See David E. Sanger, "Bin Laden Is Wanted in Attacks, 'Dead or Alive,' President Says," *New York Times*, September 18, 2001, p. A1. John F. Burns, "10-Month Afghan Mystery: Is bin Laden Dead or Alive?" *New York Times*, September 30, 2002, p. A1.

⁶. See the Associated Press database of those confirmed dead, reported dead or reported missing in the September 11 terrorist attacks (<http://attacksvictims.ap.org/totals.asp>).

means to individuals? What does it mean to whole cultures, whole peoples who have learned to live with it as a constant companion?

Since it is September Eleventh that we're talking about, perhaps it's in the fitness of things that we remember what that date means, not only to those who lost their loved ones in America last year, but to those in other parts of the world to whom that date has long held significance. This historical dredging is not offered as an accusation or a provocation. But just to share the grief of history. To thin the mist a little. To say to the citizens of America, in the gentlest, most human way: Welcome to the World.

Twenty-nine years ago, in Chile, on the Eleventh of September 1973, General Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in a CIA-backed coup. "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," said Henry Kissinger, Nobel Peace Laureate, then President Nixon's national security adviser.⁷

After the coup President Allende was found dead inside the presidential palace. Whether he was killed or whether he killed himself, we'll never know. In the regime of terror that ensued, thousands of people were killed. Many more simply "disappeared." Firing squads conducted public executions. Concentration camps and torture chambers were opened across the country. The dead were buried in mine shafts and unmarked graves. For more than sixteen years the people of Chile lived in dread of the midnight knock, of routine "disappearances," of sudden arrest and torture.⁸

In 2000, following the 1998 arrest of General Pinochet in Britain, thousands of secret documents were declassified by the US government.⁹ They contain unequivocal evidence of the CIA's involvement in the coup as well as the fact that the US government had detailed information about the situation in Chile during General Pinochet's reign. Yet Kissinger assured the general of his support: "In the United States, as you know, we are sympathetic with what you are trying to do," he said, "We wish your government well."¹⁰

Those of us who have only ever known life in a democracy, however flawed, would find it hard to imagine what living in a dictatorship and enduring the absolute loss of freedom really means. It isn't just those who Pinochet murdered, but the lives he stole from the living that must be accounted for too.

Sadly, Chile was not the only country in South America to be singled out for the US government's attentions. Guatemala, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, El Salvador, Peru, Mexico

⁷. Quoted in Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), p. 265.

⁸. See *Chile: The Other September 11*, eds. Pilar Aguilera and Ricardo Fredes (New York: Ocean Press, 2002); Amnesty International, "The Case of Augusto Pinochet" (http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/chile/pinochet_case.html);

⁹. Clifford Krauss, "Britain Arrests Pinochet to Face Charges by Spain," *New York Times*, October 18, 1998, p. 1: 1; National Security Archive, "Chile: 16,000 Secret U.S. Documents Declassified," Press Release, November 13, 2000 (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20001113/>); and selected documents on the National Security Archive web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20001113/#docs>).

¹⁰. Kissinger told this to Pinochet at a meeting of the Organisation of American States in Santiago, Chile, on June 8, 1976. See Lucy Kosimar, "Kissinger Covered Up Chile Torture," *The Observer*, February 28, 1999, p. 3.

and Colombia — they've all been the playground for covert — and overt — operations by the CIA.¹¹ Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been killed, tortured or have simply disappeared under the despotic regimes and tin-pot dictators, drug runners and arms dealers that were propped up in their countries. (Many of them learned their craft in the infamous US government funded School of Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, which has produced sixty thousand graduates.¹²) If this were not humiliation enough, the people of South America have had to bear the cross of being branded as a people who are incapable of democracy — as if coups and massacres are somehow encrypted in their genes.

This list does not of course include countries in Africa or Asia that suffered U.S. military interventions — Vietnam, Korea, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia.¹³ For how many Septembers for decades together have millions of Asian people been bombed, burned, and slaughtered? How many Septembers have gone by since August 1945, when hundreds of thousands of ordinary Japanese people were obliterated by the nuclear strikes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? For how many Septembers have the thousands who had the misfortune of surviving those strikes endured the living hell that was visited on them, their unborn children, their children's children, on the earth, the sky, the wind, the water, and all the creatures that swim and walk and crawl and fly? Not far from here, in Albuquerque, is the National Atomic Museum where Fat Man and Little Boy (the affectionate nicknames for the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) were available as souvenir earrings. Funky young people wore them. A massacre dangling in each ear. But I am straying from my theme. It's September that we're talking about, not August.

September Eleventh has a tragic resonance in the Middle East too. On the Eleventh of September 1922, ignoring Arab outrage, the British government proclaimed a mandate in Palestine, a follow up to the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which Imperial Britain issued, with its army massed outside the gates of the city of Gaza.¹⁴ The Balfour

¹¹. Among other histories, see Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, 2nd ed., trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998); Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace*, 2nd ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1985); Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (Boston: South End Press, 1983); and Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

¹². In a public relations move, the SOA renamed itself the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC) on January 17, 2001. See Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *School of Assassins: Guns, Greed, and Globalization*, 2nd ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2001); Michael Gormley, "Army School Faces Critics Who Call It Training Ground for Assassins," Associated Press, May 2, 1998; and School of the Americas Watch (<http://www.soaw.org>).

¹³. On these interventions, see, among other sources, Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, 2nd ed. (New York: New Press, 2002); Noam Chomsky, *At War With Asia* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970); and Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic Of Withdrawal*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002).

¹⁴. See Samih K. Farsoun and Christina E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p. 10.

Declaration promised European Zionists “a national home for Jewish people.”¹⁵ (At the time, the Empire on which the Sun Never Set was free to snatch and bequeath national homes like the school bully distributes marbles.) Two years after the declaration, Lord Arthur James Balfour, the British foreign secretary said, “[I]n Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country.... Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the seven hundred thousand Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”¹⁶

How carelessly imperial power decreed whose needs were profound and whose were not. How carelessly it vivisected ancient civilizations. Palestine and Kashmir are Imperial Britain’s festering, blood-drenched gifts to the modern world. Both are fault-lines in the raging international conflicts of today.

In 1937, Winston Churchill said of the Palestinians,: “I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.”¹⁷ That set the trend for the Israeli state’s attitude towards Palestinians. In 1969, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said, “Palestinians do not exist.” Her successor, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol said, “Where are Palestinians? When I came here [to Palestine] there were two hundred and fifty thousand non-Jews, mainly Arabs and Bedouins. It was desert, more than underdeveloped. Nothing.” Prime Minister Menachem Begin called Palestinians “two-legged beasts.” Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir called them “‘grasshoppers’ who could be crushed.”¹⁸ This is the language of heads of state, not the words of ordinary people.

In 1947, the UN formally partitioned Palestine and allotted fifty-five percent of Palestine’s land to the Zionists. Within a year they had captured more than seventy-six percent.¹⁹ On the Fourteenth of May 1948, the State of Israel was declared. Minutes after the declaration, the United States recognized Israel. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan. The Gaza strip came under the military control of Egypt.²⁰ Formally, Palestine ceased to exist except in the minds and hearts of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people who became refugees.

In the summer of 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Settlers were offered state subsidies and development aid to move into the occupied territories. Almost every day more Palestinian families are forced off their lands and driven into

¹⁵. The Balfour Declaration is included in Farsoun and Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, Appendix 2, p. 320.

¹⁶. Quoted in Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), p. 90.

¹⁷. Quoted in Editorial, “Scurrying Towards Bethlehem,” *New Left Review* 10, 2nd series (July / August 2001), p. 9, n. 5.

¹⁸. Quoted in Farsoun and Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, pp. 10 and 243.

¹⁹. Farsoun and Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, pp. 111 and 123.

²⁰. Farsoun and Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, p. 116.

refugee camps. Palestinians who continue to live in Israel do not have the same rights as Israelis and live as second class citizens in their former homeland.²¹

Over the decades there have been uprisings, wars, *intifadas*. Thousands have lost their lives.²² Accords and treaties have been signed. Cease-fires declared and violated. But the bloodshed doesn't end. Palestine still remains illegally occupied. Its people live in inhuman conditions, in virtual Bantustans, where they are subjected to collective punishments, twenty-four hour curfews, where they are humiliated and brutalized on a daily basis. They never know when their homes will be demolished, when their children will be shot, when their precious trees will be cut, when their roads will be closed, when they will be allowed to walk down to the market to buy food and medicine. And when they will not. They live with no semblance of dignity. With not much hope in sight. They have no control over their lands, their security, their movement, their communication, their water supply. So when accords are signed and words like "autonomy" and even "statehood" are bandied about, it's always worth asking: What sort of autonomy? What sort of state? What sort of rights will its citizens have?

Young Palestinians who cannot contain their anger turn themselves into human bombs and haunt Israel's streets and public places, blowing themselves up, killing ordinary people, injecting terror into daily life, and eventually hardening both societies' suspicion and mutual hatred of each other. Each bombing invites merciless reprisals and even more hardship on Palestinian people. But then suicide bombing is an act of individual despair, not a revolutionary tactic. Although Palestinian attacks strike terror into Israeli civilians, they provide the perfect cover for the Israeli government's daily incursions into Palestinian territory, the perfect excuse for old-fashioned, nineteenth-century colonialism, dressed up as a new-fashioned, twenty-first century "war."

Israel's staunchest political and military ally is and always has been the US government. The US government has blocked, along with Israel, almost every UN resolution that sought a peaceful, equitable solution to the conflict.²³ It has supported almost every war that Israel has fought. When Israel attacks Palestine, it is American missiles that smash through Palestinian homes. And every year Israel receives several billion dollars from the United States.²⁴

What lessons should we draw from this tragic conflict? Is it really impossible for Jewish people who suffered so cruelly themselves — more cruelly perhaps than any

²¹. See Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 103–107, 118–32, and 156–60.

²². From 1987 to 2002, alone, more than 2,000 Palestinians have been killed. See B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), "Palestinians Killed in the Occupied Territories," Table (http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Total_Casualties.asp).

²³. See Naseer H. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Cambridge: South End Press, forthcoming); Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²⁴. In addition to more than \$3 billion annually in official Foreign Military Financing (FMF), the U.S. government supplies Israel with economic assistance, loans, technology transfers, and arms sales. See Nick Anderson, "House Panel Increases Aid for Israel, Palestinians," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 2002, p. A1; Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, Appendix 1 and Appendix 2; and Anthony Arnove and Ahmed Shawki, "Foreword," *The Struggle for Palestine*, ed. Lance Selfa (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2002), p. xxv.

other people in history — to understand the vulnerability and the yearning of those whom they have displaced? Does extreme suffering always kindle cruelty? What hope does this leave the human race with? What will happen to the Palestinian people in the event of a victory? When a nation without a state eventually proclaims a state, what kind of state will it be? What horrors will be perpetrated under its flag? Is it a separate state that we should be fighting for, or the rights the rights to a life of liberty and dignity for everyone regardless of their ethnicity or religion?

Palestine was once a secular bulwark in the Middle East. But now the weak, undemocratic, by all accounts corrupt but avowedly non-sectarian PLO, is losing ground to Hamas, which espouses an overtly sectarian ideology and fights in the name of Islam. To quote from their manifesto: “we will be its soldiers and the firewood of its fire, which will burn the enemies.”²⁵

The world is called upon to condemn suicide bombers. But can we ignore the long road they have journeyed on before they arrived at this destination? September Eleventh 1922 to September Eleventh 2002 — eighty years is a long long time to have been waging war. Is there some advice the world can give the people of Palestine? Some scrap of hope we can hold out? Should they just settle for the crumbs that are thrown their way and behave like the grasshoppers or two-legged beasts they’ve been described as? Should they just take Golda Meir’s suggestion and make a real effort to not exist?

In another part of the Middle East, September Eleventh strikes a more recent chord. It was on the Eleventh of September 1990 that George W. Bush Sr., then president of the United States, made a speech to a joint session of Congress announcing his government’s decision to go to war against Iraq.²⁶

The US government says that Saddam Hussein is a war criminal, a cruel military despot who has committed genocide against his own people. That’s a fairly accurate description of the man. In 1988, he razed hundreds of villages in northern Iraq and used chemical weapons and machine-guns to kill thousands of Kurdish people. Today we know that that same year the US government provided him with five hundred million dollars in subsidies to buy American agricultural products. The next year, after he had successfully completed his genocidal campaign, the US government doubled its subsidy to one billion dollars.²⁷ It also provided him with high quality germ seed for anthrax, as well as helicopters and dual-use material that could be used to manufacture chemical and biological weapons.²⁸

So it turns out that while Saddam Hussein was carrying out his worst atrocities, the US and the UK governments were his close allies. Even today, the government of Turkey which has one of the most appalling human rights records in the world is one of the US government’s closest allies. The fact that the Turkish government has oppressed and murdered Kurdish people for years has not prevented the US government from

²⁵. Article 27 of the Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), quoted in Farsoun and Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, Appendix 13, p. 339.

²⁶. George W. Bush, “Text of the Bush’s Speech: ‘It Is Iraq Against the World,’” *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1990, p. A7.

²⁷. See Glenn Frankel, “Iraq Long Avoided Censure on Rights,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 1990, p. A1.

²⁸. See Christopher Dickey and Evan Thomas, “How Saddam Happened,” *Newsweek*, September 23, 2002, pp. 35–37.

plying Turkey with weapons and Development Aid.²⁹ Clearly it was not concern for the Kurdish people that provoked President Bush's speech to Congress.

What changed? In August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. His sin was not so much that he had committed an act of war, but that he acted independently, without orders from his masters. This display of independence was enough to upset the power equation in the Gulf. So it was decided that Saddam Hussein be exterminated, like a pet that has outlived its owner's affection.

The first Allied attack on Iraq took place in January 1991. The world watched the prime-time war as it was played out on TV. (In India those days, you had to go to a five star hotel lobby to watch CNN.) Tens of thousands of people were killed in a month of devastating bombing.³⁰ What many do not know is that the war did not end then. The initial fury simmered down into the longest sustained air attack on a country since the Vietnam War. Over the last decade American and British forces have fired thousands of missiles and bombs on Iraq. Iraq's fields and farmlands have been shelled with three hundred tons of depleted uranium.³¹ In their bombing sorties, the Allies targeted and destroyed water treatment plants, aware of the fact that they could not be repaired without foreign assistance.³² In southern Iraq there has been a fourfold increase in cancer among children. In the decade of economic sanctions that followed the war, Iraqi civilians have been denied food, medicine, hospital equipment, ambulances, clean water — the basic essentials.³³

About half a million Iraqi children have died as a result of the sanctions. Of them, Madeleine Albright, then US ambassador to the United Nations, famously said, "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it."³⁴ "Moral equivalence" was the term that was used to denounce those who criticized the war on Afghanistan. Madeleine Albright cannot be accused moral equivalence. What she said was just straight forward algebra.

A decade of bombing has not managed to dislodge Saddam Hussein, the "Beast of Baghdad." Now, almost twelve years on, President George Bush Jr. has ratcheted up the rhetoric once again. He's proposing an all out war whose goal is nothing short of a "regime change." The *New York Times* says that the Bush administration is "following a meticulously planned strategy to persuade the public, the Congress and the allies of the need to confront the threat of Saddam Hussein." Andrew H. Card, Jr., the White House chief of staff, described how the administration was stepping up its war plans for the fall: "From a marketing point of view," he said, "you don't introduce new products in August."³⁵ This time the catch-phrase for Washington's "new product" is not the plight

²⁹. See Anthony Arnove, Introduction, *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, 2nd ed., ed. Anthony Arnove (Cambridge: South End Press; London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 20.

³⁰. See Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*, pp. 221–22.

³¹. See Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*, pp. 17, 205.

³². See Thomas J. Nagy, "The Secret Behind the Sanctions How the US Intentionally Destroyed Iraq's Water Supply," *The Progressive* 65: 9 (September 2001).

³³. See Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*, pp. 121 and 185–203. See also Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Stones of Baghdad," *New York Times*, October 4, 2002, p. A27.

³⁴. Leslie Stahl, "Punishing Saddam," produced by Catherine Olian, CBS, *60 Minutes*, May 12, 1996.

³⁵. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush Aides Set Strategy to Sell Policy on Iraq," *New York Times*, September 7, 2002, p. A1.

of Kuwaiti people but the assertion that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Forget “the feckless moralizing of ‘peace’ lobbies,” wrote Richard Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board, the U.S. will “act alone if necessary” and use a “pre-emptive strike” if it determines its in US interests.³⁶

Weapons inspectors have conflicting reports about the status of Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, and many have said clearly that its arsenal has been dismantled and that it does not have the capacity to build one.³⁷ However, there is no confusion over the extent and range of America’s arsenal of nuclear and chemical weapons. Would the US government welcome weapons inspectors? Would the UK? Or Israel?

What if Iraq *does* have a nuclear weapon, does that justify a pre-emptive US strike? The US has the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world. It’s the only country in the world to have actually used them on civilian populations. If the US is justified in launching a pre-emptive attack on Iraq, why, then any nuclear power is justified in carrying out a pre-emptive attack on any other. India could attack Pakistan, or the other way around. If the US government develops a distaste for the Indian Prime Minister, can it just “take him out” with a pre-emptive strike?

Recently the United States played an important part in forcing India and Pakistan back from the brink of war. Is it so hard for it to take its own advice? Who is guilty of feckless moralizing? Of preaching peace while it wages war? The U.S., which George Bush calls “a peaceful nation,” has been at war with one country or another every year for the last fifty years.³⁸

Wars are never fought for altruistic reasons. They’re usually fought for hegemony, for business. And then of course there’s the business of war. Protecting its control of the world’s oil is fundamental to U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. government’s recent military interventions in the Balkans and Central Asia have to do with oil. Hamid Karzai, the puppet president of Afghanistan installed by the U.S., is said to be a former employee of Unocal, the American-based oil company.³⁹ The U.S. government’s paranoid patrolling of the Middle East is because it has two-thirds of the world’s oil reserves.⁴⁰ Oil keeps America’s engines purring sweetly. Oil keeps the Free Market rolling. Whoever controls the world’s oil controls the world’s market. And how do you control the oil?

Nobody puts it more elegantly than the *New York Times*’ columnist Thomas Friedman. In an article called “Craziness Pays” he says “the US has to make clear to Iraq and US allies that ... America will use force, without negotiation, hesitation, or UN

³⁶. Richard Perle, “Why the West Must Strike First Against Saddam Hussein,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), August 9, 2002, p. 22.

³⁷. See Alan Simpson and Glen Rangwala, “The Dishonest Case for a War on Iraq,” September 27, 2002 (<http://traprockpeace.org/counter-dossier.html>) and Glen Rangwala, “Notes Further to the Counter-Dossier,” September 29, 2002 (<http://traprockpeace.org/counter-dossier.html#notes>).

³⁸. George Bush, “Bush’s Remarks on U.S. Military Strikes in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2001, p. B6.

³⁹. See Paul Watson, “Afghanistan Aims to Revive Pipeline Plans,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2002, p. A1; Ilene R. Prusher, Scott Baldauf, and Edward Girardet, “Afghan Power Brokers,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 10, 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁰. See Lisa Fingeret et al., “Markets Worry That Conflict Could Spread in Area That Holds Two-Thirds of World Reserves,” *Financial Times* (London), April 2, 2002, p. 1.

approval.”⁴¹ His advice was well taken. In the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in the almost daily humiliation the US government heaps on the UN. In his book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman says, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas.... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.”⁴²

Perhaps this was written in a moment of vulnerability, but it’s certainly the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read.

After September Eleventh 2001 and the War Against Terror, the hidden hand and fist have had their cover blown — and we have a clear view now of America’s other weapon — the Free Market — bearing down on the Developing World, with a clenched unsmiling smile. The Task That Does Not End is America’s perfect war, the perfect vehicle for the endless expansion of American Imperialism. In Urdu, the word for Profit is *fayda*. *Al Qaida* means The Word, The Word of God, The Law. So, in India some of us call the War Against Terror, *Al Qaida Vs Al Fayda* — The Word Vs The Profit (no pun intended).

For the moment it looks as though *Al Fayda* will carry the day. But then you never know...

In the last ten years of unbridled corporate globalization, the world’s total income has increased by an average of two and one-half percent a year. And yet the numbers of the poor in the world has increased by one hundred million. Of the top hundred biggest economies, fifty-one are corporations, not countries. The top one percent of the world has the same combined income as the bottom fifty-seven percent and the disparity is growing.⁴³ Now, under the spreading canopy of the War Against Terrorism, this process is being hustled along. The men in suits are in an unseemly hurry. While bombs rain down on us, and cruise missiles skid across the skies, while nuclear weapons are stockpiled to make the world a safer place, contracts are being signed, patents are being registered, oil pipelines are being laid, natural resources are being plundered, water is being privatized and democracies are being undermined.

In a country like India, the “structural adjustment” end of the corporate globalization project is ripping through people’s lives. “Development” projects, massive privatization, and labor “reforms” are pushing people off their lands and out of their jobs, resulting in a kind of barbaric dispossession that has few parallels in history. Across the world as the “free market” brazenly protects Western markets and forces developing countries to lift their trade barriers, the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer. Civil unrest has begun to erupt in the global village. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia, India the resistance movements against corporate globalization are growing. To contain them, governments are tightening their control. Protestors are being labeled “terrorists” and then being dealt with as such. But civil unrest does not only mean marches and demonstrations and protests against globalization. Unfortunately, it also means a desperate downward spiral into crime and chaos and all

⁴¹. Thomas L. Friedman, “Craziness Pays,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1998, p. A21.

⁴². Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999), p. 373.

⁴³. Statistics from Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 5; Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: The Rule of Law in World Affairs* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), p. 214; and Noreena Hertz, “Why Consumer Power Is Not Enough,” *New Statesman*, April 30, 2001.

kinds of despair and disillusionment which, as we know from history (and from what we see unspooling before our eyes), gradually becomes a fertile breeding ground for terrible things — cultural nationalism, religious bigotry, fascism and of course, terrorism.

All these march arm in arm with corporate globalization.

There is a notion gaining credence that the Free Market breaks down national barriers, and that corporate globalization's ultimate destination is a hippie paradise where the heart is the only passport and we all live together happily inside a John Lennon song (*Imagine there's no country...*) This is a canard.

What the Free Market undermines is not national sovereignty, but *democracy*. As the disparity between the rich and poor grows, the hidden fist has its work cut out for it. Multinational corporations on the prowl for "sweetheart deals" that yield enormous profits cannot push through those deals and administer those projects in developing countries without the active connivance of state machinery — the police, the courts, sometimes even the army. Today corporate globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws, and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that its only money, goods, patents and services that are globalized — not the free movement of people, not a respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical and nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, or god forbid, justice.⁴⁴ It's as though even a *gesture* towards international accountability would wreck the whole enterprise.

Close to one year after the War Against Terror was officially flagged off in the ruins of Afghanistan, in country after country freedoms are being curtailed in the name of protecting freedom, civil liberties are being suspended in the name of protecting democracy.⁴⁵ All kinds of dissent is being defined as "terrorism." All kinds of laws are being passed to deal with it. Osama bin Laden seems to have vanished into thin air. Mullah Omar is said to have made his escape on a motor-bike.⁴⁶ (They could have sent Tin-Tin after him.) The Taliban may have disappeared but their spirit, and their system of summary justice is surfacing in the unlikeliest of places. In India, in Pakistan, in Nigeria, in America, in all the Central Asian republics run by all manner of despots, and of course in Afghanistan under the US-backed Northern Alliance.⁴⁷

⁴⁴. Among the many treaties and international agreements the United States has not signed, ignores, violates, or has broken are: UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); agreements setting the jurisdiction for the International Criminal Court (ICC); the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia; the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); and the Kyoto Protocol regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

⁴⁵. See David Cole and James X. Dempsey, *Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security* (New York: New Press, 2002).

⁴⁶. Luke Harding, "Elusive Mullah Omar 'Back in Afghanistan,'" *Guardian* (London), August 30, 2002, p. 12.

⁴⁷. See Human Rights Watch, "Opportunism in the Face of Tragedy: Repression in the Name of Anti-Terrorism"

(<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/september11/opportunismwatch.htm>).

Meanwhile down at the Mall there's a mid-season sale. Everything's discounted — oceans, rivers, oil, gene pools, fig wasps, flowers, childhoods, aluminum factories, phone companies, wisdom, wilderness, civil rights, ecosystems, air — all four thousand six hundred million years of evolution. It's packed, sealed, tagged, valued and available off the rack. (No returns). As for justice — I'm told it's on offer too. You can get the best that money can buy.

Donald Rumsfeld said that his mission in the War against Terror was to persuade the world that Americans must be allowed to continue their way of life.⁴⁸ When the maddened King stamps his foot, slaves tremble in their quarters. So, standing here today, it's hard for me to say this, but "The American Way of Life" is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

Fortunately power has a shelf life. When the time comes, maybe this mighty empire will, like others before it, overreach itself and implode from within. It looks as though structural cracks have already appeared. As the War Against Terror casts its net wider and wider, America's corporate heart is hemorrhaging. For all the endless empty chatter about democracy, today the world is run by three of the most secretive institutions in the world: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, all three of which, in turn, are dominated by the United States. Their decisions are made in secret. The people who head them are appointed behind closed doors. Nobody really knows anything about them, their politics, their beliefs, their intentions. Nobody elected them. Nobody said they could make decisions on our behalf. A world run by a handful of greedy bankers and CEOs who nobody elected can't possibly last.

Soviet-style communism failed, not because it was intrinsically evil but because it was flawed. It allowed too few people to usurp too much power. Twenty-first century market-capitalism, American-style, will fail for the same reasons. Both are edifices constructed by human intelligence, undone by human nature.

The time has come, the Walrus said. Perhaps things will get worse and then better. Perhaps there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.

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⁴⁸. See "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" in Arundhati Roy, *Power Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2001).