



A prophetic voice in Jewish, multireligious, and American life



"Are they bombing Disneyland?": The Children's Truth

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Ched Myers

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By Ched Myer

A friend of mine who teaches in the local public school reported that this was the first question asked her by third graders the morning of September 11th, as the news of the terrorist attacks filtered out across the social landscape of America.

Reflecting on that throughout the following days, I concluded that once again the children have pointed us to the truth.

Insofar as "the magic Kingdom" can stand in as a preeminent metaphor for the insular fantasy of American innocence and denial our myth of the nation as Adventureland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland all at once, the happiest place on earth then Disneyland truly did suffer indelible destruction. But what world lies outside our shattered dream of ourselves?

Among those who have been trying to be introspective rather than vengeful over the last ten days, one question has recurred, and it is an important one: What has the U.S. done that some people would hate us so much to do this to our people? It takes courage to ask this, and even more courage to consider possible answers.

Predictably, the New York Times on Sept. 16 asserted that the terrorists acted out of "hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage." This self-congratulatory line of the dominant media pretends no knowledge of U.S. policy and practices over the last two decades that might be at issue.

A very different perspective is given by Chalmers Johnson, president of the Japan Policy Research Institute, who wrote the following prescient words in an important but largely overlooked book published last year entitled *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Henry Holt, 2000):

"Terrorism strikes at the innocent in order to draw attention to the sins of the invulnerable. The innocent of the twenty-first century are going to harvest unexpected blowback disasters from the imperialist escapades of recent decades. Although most Americans may be largely ignorant of what was, and still is, being done in their names, all are likely to pay a steep price individually and collectively for their nation's continued efforts to dominate the global scene."

Chalmers reminds us that there is a context for these actions that cannot be ignored:

"What U.S. officials denounce as unprovoked terrorist attacks on its innocent citizens are often meant as retaliation for previous American imperial actions. Terrorists attack innocent and undefended American targets precisely because American soldiers and sailors firing cruise missiles from ships at sea or sitting in B-52 bombers at extremely high altitudes or supporting brutal and repressive regimes from Washington seem invulnerable."

USC professor Ronald Steel, in a September 14th New York Times editorial, calls such terrorism a struggle "in which the weak have turned the guns of the strong against them," and points out that it has characterized many modern politico-military resistance movements: from southern Africa to Ireland, from Basque separatists to Saudi dissidents, and from Palestine to Afghanistan.

Neither Steel nor Chalmers are justifying terrorist attacks, but they are trying to understand the new postmodern condition of international politics that has seen a steady stream of ever more destructive attacks on U.S. people and property and that of its allies at home and abroad over the last twenty years. Chalmers draws our attention to the term "blowback," "which officials of the Central Intelligence Agency first invented for their own internal use":

"It refers to the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people. What the daily press reports as the malign acts of "terrorists" or "drug lords" or "illegal arms merchants" often turn out to be blowback from earlier American operations."

In the present case one can point to the legacy of what Fred Halliday called "the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA," which throughout the 1980s, and with the cooperation of Pakistan, funded, trained, armed and provided political cover for the Mujahideen in their struggle against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

More than 35,000 Muslim radicals from forty countries made up this force being, among whom (as is now widely acknowledged) was Osama bin Laden, as well as others who were subsequently suspected of attacks on the U.S. An excellent overview of that chapter of U.S. covert intervention, including the role of the Golden Triangle drug trade in funding it, is available from University of Ottawa professor Michel Chossudovsky at:
<http://globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO109C.print.html>.

Bin Laden and many others trained in terrorist and guerilla tactics turned against the U.S. in 1990 at the point that the Pentagon established permanent military bases in Saudi Arabia in preparation for the Gulf War. This was seen as an analogous occupation to that of the Soviets in Afghanistan, and particularly odious in the land of Mecca. This antipathy, widely shared by Saudi dissidents and other Muslim nationalists, was intensified by other U.S. actions: the slaughter of Iraqi civilians during and after the Gulf War; ongoing support for Israel in the construction of Palestinian apartheid; the bombing of the Sudan, and even U.S. involvement in the Balkans.

At issue also is the (correct) perception that U.S.-sponsored economic globalization means cultural destruction for all traditional societies. Meanwhile, veterans of the Mujahideen also continued to struggle against other hostile forces, such as Russian imperialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union (for example in the war in Chechnya). In 1995 they succeeded in setting up the fascist Taliban regime in Afghanistan, whose brutal rule has until last week been tolerated by the U.S. State Dept.

Of course most Americans don't want to be confused by such geopolitical and ideological complexity, particularly when trying to generate war fever between the forces of good and evil.

Nevertheless, even a Pentagon study (a 1997 Defense Science Board report) admitted "historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States." Chalmers concludes:

"For any empire, including an unacknowledged one, there is a kind of balance sheet that builds up over time. Most Americans are probably unaware of how Washington exercises its global hegemony, since so much of this activity takes place either in relative secrecy or under comforting rubrics.

"But only when we come to see our country as both profiting from and trapped within the structures of an empire of its own making will it be possible for us to explain many elements of the world that otherwise perplex us."

Or, as Steel puts it: "We proudly declare that we are the world's undisputed Number one. Then we are surprised that others might hold us responsible for all that they find threatening in the modern world."

Innocent lives were lost in the attacks of last week, and for this we rightly mourn and are justified in seeking to bring the perpetrators to justice. But the national response of outraged victimhood presumes that the U.S. itself is innocent. To insist on that is to continue to live inside the insular (though now breached) walls of "Disneyland."

If we do not have the courage to face our own imperial policies and practices, and how these "sins of the invulnerable" are perceived among many of the wretched of the earth, we will never be able to "root out" terrorist attacks because we have

not addressed their true genesis. So with Jesus we may weep over our cities, but we will not yet "know the things that make for peace" (Lk 19:41-43)

This article first appeared on the sojourners Website, www.soho.net (<http://www.soho.net>) Ched Myers writes often for Sojourners, a progressive Christian Magazine. He is part of

Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries

706 Burwood Terrace

Los Angeles, CA 90042

Tel: 323-256-5748

Fax: 323-256-6655

Correspondence: chedmyers@igc.org

Scheduling: scheduling@bcm-net.org

On the web: <http://www.bcm-net.org> (<http://www.bcm-net.org>)

The Shalom Center / web: theshalomcenter.org / email: office@theshalomcenter.org
mail: 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19119, USA / tel: (215) 844-8494