

**Afghanistan and Beyond  
Views from the  
Quaker United Nations Office –NY**

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***“[The UN] provides the forum necessary for building a universal coalition and can ensure global legitimacy for the long-term response to terrorism. United Nations conventions already provide a legal framework for many of the steps that must be taken to eradicate terrorism.***

***...Terrorism threatens every society. As the world takes action against it, we have all been reminded of the need to address the conditions that permit the growth of such hatred and depravity. We must confront violence, bigotry and hatred even more resolutely. The United Nations’ work must continue as we address the ills of conflict, ignorance, poverty and disease.***

***...[I]f the world can persevere in creating a stronger, more just, more benevolent and more genuine international community across all lines of religion and race, then terrorism will have failed.”***

***- Secretary-General Kofi Annan, United Nations,  
New York Times op-ed, September 21, 2001***

## A US Perspective – Jack Patterson

There is no one “experience” of 9/11 that can adequately capture the sense of surprise, invasion, and vulnerability touched in all of us. Perhaps we were naïve in believing we could forever dodge the bullet of “terrorism” -- no stranger to the rest of world. Indeed, in the moment, most of us forgot that the next worst such disaster in the US – Oklahoma City -- was homegrown – a product of our own American fanaticism and estrangement from society.

- **Through the Media Lens:** In the days immediately following 9/11, most Americans asked “Why us? Why do they hate us?” A question arising for most out of honest bewilderment. For a decade all the major network managers discouraged international news with only one network having an anchor with any real foreign journalistic experience. The result: a US public ignorant of the world in which they lived and ready to be led around by the nose by an administration controlling the news output and a compliant media anxious for ratings. “A zillion channels to tune out the world.”
- **Through the lens of public opinion:** The September/October issue of *Foreign Policy* had an article entitled “What do Americans Really Want: A Virtual Interview” by Steven Kull. Kull argues that the “average American” defies simple labels, largely because they refuse to submit to simplistic choices. Concern for problems at home did not diminish their sense that “withdrawal” from the world was possible or desirable. They were reluctant to cast the US in the role of “world leader” or “world’s policeman.” They like the UN, though not perfect, and think the US government is probably even more wasteful and inefficient. Did that all change on 9/11? Probably not, but in the short run the combination of a wish for unity in the face of adversity, a White House propaganda machine emphasizing either/or choices in the fight against “evil”, and a media that has virtually buckled under the label of an “America United,” has created a false sense of unanimity for Administration policies that cannot last.
- **Through the Lens of the White House:** Bush said in his speech before Congress that his “War Against Terrorism” would be a new kind of war like no other and lengthy in duration. Perhaps Bush, the Pentagon, and we ourselves were caught equally flatfooted by the speed with which the combination of bombing and special forces on the ground seemingly succeeded in routing the Taliban from Kabul and power. Old Afghanistan hands were less surprised, as much of their history has been one of transfers of power by “arrangements” rather than fighting. It’s the Afghan way. Cokie Roberts on NPR expressed the behind the scenes disquiet in high places these days that while the Taliban, and by extension, al Qaeda, have been routed, they may simply have withdrawn to regroup and fight another day when the odds are more favorable.
- **Through the Lens of Shortsightedness:** While the White House sought to project a sense it had a plan to pursue the perpetrators of the WTC attacks, there is much evidence behind the scenes that its’ first moves were taken in a panic and that each step was taken in isolation of the next with little consideration of consequences in the short or the long run. To some extent this is understandable given our unpreparedness and the colossal intelligence blunders that preceded 9/11. But in a larger sense, it is a reflection and product of the lack of a coherent post-Cold War foreign policy throughout the Bush/Clinton years. Our collective failure to give shape to a new worldview that was inclusive of others in its scope and multilateral in its methods.

- **Through the Lens of US History:** The price of unenlightened self-interest and expediency, historically, is that we later repeat the same behaviors that contributed to the crisis at hand – with the same or similar results. This is classically illustrated in US policy towards Afghanistan during the Cold War, when the CIA recruited, trained, armed and funded “mujahadin” fighters against the Soviet takeover of that country (including building the very fortified tunnels we are now destroying). The idea that shortsighted actions can have long-term unanticipated consequences is called “blowback”, a CIA term for missions gone horribly awry. Another current example of “blowback” comes in the revelation that the anthrax linked to the recent deaths here in the US appears to be a strain initially developed by the US military during the Cold War and shared with some allies.
- **Through the Lens of the Majority World:** Not unlike the reaction to the verdict of the OJ Simpson trial, one has only to travel abroad, as we did last weekend, to realize how profoundly different the rest of the world sees the US and this conflict. For us it is “good guys and bad guys,” while for most abroad, and certainly in the region of conflict it is more like the Hatfields and McCoys. For much of the world the issue is not isolationism vs. internationalism, but rather multilateralism vs. unilateralism. After 9/11 and Bush’s early caution, many hoped the US would see “light” and back-off its near universal hostility to multilateral concerns and negotiations. That has not happened, indeed the Administration seems inclined even more than before to a modified “Fortress America” approach to world affairs.

#### **US Focused Actions Recommended:**

- Encourage everyone you know to expand their information to include foreign sources on a regular basis. Read foreign papers, watch foreign TV news (BBC, ITN), use the web to get Arab, Muslim and other views:
 

The Guardian [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)  
 The Financial Times [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com)  
 The BBC [www.bbc.uk](http://www.bbc.uk)  
 Al-Ahram [www.ahram.org.eg/weekly](http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly)  
 Boston public radio station [www.wbur.org](http://www.wbur.org)  
 The Toronto Globe and Mail [www.globeandmail.ca](http://www.globeandmail.ca).
- Do everything FCNL asks you to do...and more! Congress is cowed, beaten, and with few exceptions have checked their backbones in the cloakroom. They need to hear from all of us – that is each one of us – YOU! – that current policies do not represent us. Go to the FCNL website at [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org) for everything you need to know to make your voice heard.
- Initiate dialogues in your communities to educate about US policy, past and present, where people can feel safe raising questions and criticisms. Invite media and policymakers to join the conversations.

## A UN Perspective – Bridget Moix

Looking at the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the ongoing aftermath from a UN, rather than a U.S. perspective, yields a quite different picture.

- A UN lens includes 189 different country perspectives – developed and developing countries, rich and poor, Muslim and Western, global North and global South. It begins from a much more complicated point and demands a much more complex examination of the issues.
- A UN lens sees September 11 not simply as an isolated, devastating terrorist attack on the U.S. (which it was), but as an act of terrorism within an international history of terrorist acts and movements around the world. The UN has been working for decades to counter terrorism, since the early airline hijackings of the 60s and 70s. Through the UN the global community has created 12 different treaties on terrorism, and since September 11 a 13<sup>th</sup> is under creation. Despite decades of deliberation, however, a common definition of terrorism has never been agreed upon.
- A UN lens sees terrorism as a global problem, not simply a threat against U.S. national security. As a global problem, it needs a global solution, not a unilateral one. The international coalition that the Bush Administration began to shore up early after September 11 has already begun to fracture, as it becomes more and more evident that the U.S. is still bent on pursuing its own national interests at all costs and unwilling to strengthen global mechanisms that might help prevent future terrorist attacks (witness the death of the Biological Weapons Convention and the recent Senate resolution against the International Criminal Court).
- A UN lens views the global problem of terrorism as needing a long-term legal response not a short-term military one. The UN was established to prevent wars, to create structures and processes through which the international community can work through the problems it faces cooperatively, in dialogue, and with particular attention to international treaties and laws. Although its Charter does support the right of self-defense of individual countries and it has on occasion sanctioned the use of force, the UN is designed “to bring about *by peaceful means*, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of peace.” In recent years, its emphasis has shifted to focus particular attention on addressing root causes of war. From such a perspective, one might ask what are the root causes of terrorism and how might they be addressed?
- A UN lens sees global poverty, inequitable distribution of resources, discrimination and intolerance, oppression of human rights, and environmental degradation as important roots of conflict which need to be examined for the relationships they might play in global conflicts. A UN perspective also sees the U.S. as an obstacle in many of the international community’s attempts to deal with these issues, defining the boundaries and limits of global agreements based on its own national interests and disregarding international treaties as it wishes (ie, Kyoto Treaty, Ottawa Landmines Ban, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ABM Treaty, World Conference Against Racism, Financing for Development, etc.).

- A UN lens, over the past decades, has also seen U.S. domination – politically, financially, and militarily - of the global community and the UN (particularly the Security Council), U.S. neglect and lack of support for enhancing international cooperation to address international problems, a growing U.S. unilateralist or “selective multilateralist” approach to the rest of the world, and U.S. intervention – covert and overt – around the world (the CIA in Afghanistan during the Cold War for instance) with utter impunity.
- A UN lens also sees clearly the tightrope it must walk as it struggles to address the global problem of terrorism through a global legal response and still ensure U.S. political and financial investment in the most democratic arena for international cooperation and problem-solving that the world has available to it.
- Finally, a UN lens on the war in Afghanistan understands the long-haul reconstruction, peacebuilding, resettlement and recovery effort that it will have to play once “the elephants have finished trampling.” It is doubtful that the U.S. will invest the post-war resources – political, human, and financial – necessary to preserve a fragile peace and rebuild a more democratic, less conflict-prone Afghanistan. More likely, the U.S. will move on to its next campaign – signs are pointing to Iraq – and leave the long-term business of clean-up and rebuilding to the UN (under-funded and under-supported as it is).

### **UN Focused Recommendations**

- Support an international legal response to September 11 by opposing U.S. military tribunals and calling for an international tribunal created through the UN to try suspects involved in the attacks. (Write Pres. Bush and your congressional representatives.)
- Support the strengthening of international law and longer-term legal responses to terrorism by advocating the creation of the International Criminal Court, with or without US participation. (Visit [www.iccnw.org](http://www.iccnw.org) for more information.)
- Initiate dialogue and information sharing between friends, neighbors, family and colleagues to share ideas on alternatives to military intervention and the root causes of terrorism and violent conflict, and to promote and support the United Nations as the organization best equipped to combat terrorism.

## An Islamic Impression – by Tariq Remtulla

Islam is a diverse, complex religion with a number of denominations and sects. In this respect Islam is very much like Christianity. In our attempts at better understanding and appreciating the feelings and perceptions of Muslims in light of the current situation, we in the U.S. have to try to view the issues from their perspective.

- Acts of terrorism are in no way advocated or tolerated within Islam. The two principle authorities which constitute the Shari'ah (Islamic law), the Qu'ran (holy book of the Muslims) and the Sunnah (the sayings, practices, and living habits of Prophet Muhammad), in no way condone such violent acts. In fact, the word "Islam" means "peace" and so these acts can be labeled as un-Islamic.
- Muslims throughout the world have denounced the terrorist attacks on the U.S. and have actively provided support to the U.S. in its time of need. Countless Muslim organizations have raised thousands of dollars for the victims of the attacks and their families. Muslims, particularly those in the West, have been sincere in showing their concern and sympathy.
- There exists no single Muslim perspective. There are Muslims who have condemned the terrorist attacks, those who view them as justifiable, and still others who wish not to take a stance. We must make an effort to appreciate where these people are coming from, particularly those who feel the attacks on the U.S. were not without provocation. Such individuals view the U.S. as a powerful and arrogant force that is only looking out for its own well-being (as evidenced by U.S. foreign policy). There is a depth of feelings involved here on many levels and these must be acknowledged.
- The terrorist attacks have resulted in some Muslims being used as scapegoats and many Muslims have adopted a low profile in the last few months, not out of choice but because of fear. Some have even been the victims of violent hate crimes because they are assumed to be the enemy in this "war" against terrorism. Muslim mosques have also been targets for hate crimes perpetrated in a number of cities in Canada and the U.S.
- Muslims throughout the world view the response by the U.S. in Afghanistan as an attack against Islam, not simply a war against terrorism. The actions of a few individuals who claim to be doing something in the name of a religion does not mean that the religion is at fault. In addition, with regard to the Middle East, most Muslims believe the U.S. is always looking for secular solutions to the problems, as if it is the religion itself that is at the root of the problem. In this way, the bitterness of Muslims towards the West might be increasing now that the U.S. is waging its war in Afghanistan.
- Muslims are upset that their religion is always placed in the context of other religions, namely Christianity. Larry King on CNN referred to the Qu'ran as the "Muslim Bible," which many Muslims found to be an arrogant and ignorant statement. Moreover, people in the U.S. often refer to Islamic places of worship as "churches" rather than using the correct term: "mosque." Even Islamic holidays and celebrations are put into the context of Christian holidays (e.g. Eid =Christmas, Ramadhan =Lent).
- The language used to describe certain Islamic concepts and ideas can at times lead to an interpretation that is incorrect. For example, while some extremists have used the term

“jihad” as meaning “holy war,” jihad, in actuality, has to do with the idea of struggle, and the majority of Muslims practice this in a peaceful way. Moreover, the term “fundamentalism” when used by the U.S. to describe certain Islamic political orientations is incorrect. The more appropriate term is extremist or radical. Muslims would argue that every “good” Muslim is a fundamentalist - someone who believes in the basic tenets of the religion.

- The current U.S. government policy of arresting suspected terrorists and holding them indefinitely without trial or access to legal representation has outraged many Muslims, who feel that this is ethnic profiling. Thousands of young Muslim men have been questioned in the last three months because they have Muslim names and come from the Middle East. What is worse is the proposals by the U.S. State Department for dealing with suspected terrorists, which would make it legal to tape conversations between suspected terrorists and lawyers, and possibly set up military tribunals where suspected terrorists would be tried by a set of 3 judges (no jury). In some cases, those detained would not even be able to choose their own legal representation.

### **What can we do in the U.S. to build better relations with Muslims?**

- Reach out to our Muslim friends, coworkers, and neighbors and let them know that you are not “against” them and that you wish to support them in any way you can. Ask them what you can do. Do not assume anything as this can be perceived as condescending. Support Muslim restaurants and other businesses that may be experiencing difficulties in attracting patrons right now.
- Learn more about Islam. The best sources tend to be books written by Islamic scholars. Useful websites include: [www.islam.org](http://www.islam.org) (for a comprehensive view of Islam and Muslims) and [www.islamworld.net](http://www.islamworld.net) (for basic information on Islam).
- Actively work on promoting civil liberties for all people in this country, including Muslims. Information and action suggestions can be obtained from the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) website at [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org).
- More generally, this is the time to engage in a dialogue with others about the issues. No matter how they feel, it is important that they know there are people who want to listen and understand the full range of perspectives.