The central fallacy of the pro-war celebrants is the equation between ‘American values’ as understood at home and the exercise of United States economic and especially military power abroad.

Following the 11 September 2001 suicide attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, US President George W. Bush has declared an open-ended ‘war on terrorism’. This war has no apparent limits, in place, time or the extent of destruction that may be inflicted. There is no telling which country may be suspected of hiding ‘terrorists’ or declared to be part of an ‘axis of evil’. The eradication of ‘evil’ could last much longer than the world can withstand the destructive force to be employed. The Pentagon is already launching bombs described as producing the effect of earthquakes and is officially considering the use of nuclear weapons, among other horrors in its constantly improved arsenal.

The material destruction envisaged is immeasurable. So is the human damage, not only in terms of lives, but also in terms of the moral desperation and hatred that are certain to be felt by millions of people who can only watch helplessly as their world is devastated by a country, the United States, which assumes that its moral authority is as absolute and unchallengeable as its military power.

We, as United States citizens, have a special responsibility to oppose this mad rush to war. You, as Europeans, also have a special responsibility. Most of your countries are military allies of the United States within NATO. The United States claims to act in self-defence, but also to defend ‘the interests of its allies and friends’. Your countries will inevitably be implicated in US military adventures. Your future is also in jeopardy.

Many informed people both within and outside your governments are aware of the dangerous folly of the war path followed by the Bush administration. But few dare speak out...
honestly. They are intimidated by the various forms of retaliation that can be taken against ‘friends’ and ‘allies’ who fail to provide unquestioning support. They are afraid of being labelled ‘anti-American’ – the same label absurdly applied to Americans themselves who speak out against war policies and whose protests are easily drowned out in the chorus of chauvinism dominating the United States media. A sane and frank European criticism of the Bush administration’s war policy can help anti-war Americans make their voices heard.

Celebrating power may be the world’s oldest profession among poets and men of letters. As supreme world power, the United States naturally attracts its celebrants who urge the nation’s political leaders to go ever farther in using their military might to impose virtue on a recalcitrant world. The theme is age-old and forever the same: the goodness of the powerful should be extended to the powerless by the use of force.

The central fallacy of the pro-war celebrants is the equation between ‘American values’ as understood at home and the exercise of United States economic and especially military power abroad. Self-celebration is a notorious feature of United States culture, perhaps as a useful means of assimilation in an immigrant society. Unfortunately, September 11 has driven this tendency to new extremes. Its effect is to reinforce a widespread illusion among United States citizens that the whole world is fixated, in admiration or in envy, on the United States as it sees itself: prosperous, democratic, generous, welcoming, open to all races and religions, the epitome of universal human values and the last best hope of mankind.

In this ideological context, the question raised after September 11, ‘Why do they hate us?’ has only one answer: ‘Because we are so good!’ Or, as is commonly claimed, they hate us because of ‘our values’.

Most United States citizens are unaware that the effect of US power abroad has nothing to do with the ‘values’ celebrated at home, and indeed often serves to deprive people in other countries of the opportunity to attempt to enjoy them should they care to do so.

In Latin America, Africa and Asia, US power has more often than not been used to prop up the remnants of colonial regimes and unpopular dictators, to impose devastating commercial and financial conditions, to support repressive armed forces, to overthrow or cripple by sanctions relatively independent governments, and finally to send bombers and cruise missiles to rain down death and destruction.

The ‘Right of Self-Defence’

Whose right? Since September 11, the United States feels under attack. As a result its government claims a ‘right to self-defence’ enabling it to wage war on its own terms, as it chooses, against any country it designates as an enemy, without proof of guilt or legal procedure.

Obviously, such a ‘right of self-defence’ never existed for countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Libya, Sudan or Yugoslavia when they were bombed by the United States. Nor will it be recognized for countries bombed by the
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United States in the future. This is simply the right of the strongest, the law of the jungle. Exercising such a ‘right’, denied all others, cannot serve ‘universal values’ but only undermines the very concept of a world order based on universal values with legal recourse open to all on a basis of equality.

A ‘right’ enjoyed only by one entity – the most powerful – is not a right but a privilege exercised only to the detriment of the rights of others.

How is the United States to ‘defend’ itself? Supposedly in self-defence, the United States launched a war against Afghanistan. This was not an action specially designed to respond to the unique events of September 11. On the contrary, it was exactly what the United States was already doing, and had already planned to do, as outlined in Pentagon documents: bomb other countries, send military forces onto foreign soil and topple their governments. The United States is openly planning an all-out war – not excluding use of nuclear weapons – against Iraq, a country it has been bombing for a decade, with the proclaimed aim of replacing its government with leaders selected by Washington.

Precisely what is being ‘defended’? What is being defended is related to what was attacked.

Traditionally, ‘defence’ means defence of national territory. On September 11, an attack actually took place on and against United States territory. This was not a conventional attack by a major power designed to seize territory. Rather, it was an anonymous strike against particular targeted institutions. In the absence of any claim of responsibility, the symbolic nature of the targets may have been assumed to be self-explanatory. The World Trade Centre clearly symbolised United States global economic power, while the Pentagon represented United States military power. Thus, it seems highly unlikely that the September 11 attacks were symbolically directed against ‘American values’ as celebrated in the United States.

Rather, the true target seems to have been United States economic and military power as it is projected abroad. According to reports, 15 of the 19 identified hijackers were Saudi Arabians hostile to the presence of US military bases on Saudi soil. September 11 suggests that the nation projecting its power abroad is vulnerable at home, but the real issue is United States intervention abroad. Indeed the Bush wars are designed precisely to defend and strengthen United States power abroad. It is US global power projection that is being defended, not domestic freedoms and way of life.

In reality, foreign wars are more likely to undermine the domestic values cherished by civilians at home than to defend or spread them. But governments that wage aggressive wars always drum up domestic support by convincing ordinary people that war is necessary to defend or to spread noble ideas. The principal difference between the imperial wars of the past and the global thrust of the United States today is the far greater means of destruction available. The disproportion between the material power of destruction and the constructive power of human wisdom has never been more dangerously unbalanced. Intellectuals today have the choice of joining the chorus of those who celebrate brute force by rhetorically attaching it to ‘spiritual values’, or taking up the more
difficult and essential task of exposing the arrogant folly of power and working with the whole of humanity to create means of reasonable dialogue, fair economic relations and equal justice.

The right to self-defence must be a collective human right. Humanity as a whole has the right to defend its own survival against the ‘self-defence’ of an unchecked superpower. For half a century, the United States has repeatedly demonstrated its indifference to the collateral death and destruction wrought by its self-proclaimed efforts to improve the world. Only by joining in solidarity with the victims of US military power can we in the rich countries defend whatever universal values we claim to cherish.

The initial signatories to this appeal include:
Norman Birnbaum, Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University Law Centre
Helen Caldicott, paediatrician, author, founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility
Edward S. Herman, economist and media analyst, Philadelphia
Diana Johnstone, journalist, Paris
Harry Magdoff, co-editor, Monthly Review, New York City
James Petras, State University of New York, Binghamton
Paul M. Sweezy, co-editor, Monthly Review, New York City
Gore Vidal, writer, Los Angeles
Howard Zinn, writer, Boston, Massachusetts
A full list appears on page 15.

When the Russell Foundation received this Appeal, we circulated it throughout the European Network for Peace and Human Rights, and among a number of longstanding contributors to The Spokesman. We think that the responses we have received are interesting, and here we feature some of them.

From the journalist Felicity Arbuthnot
Mesopotamia – ‘Axis of evil’

Luay was ten years old when he found the head, during the Gulf War. He told his story to Professor Magne Raundalen, founder of the Centre for Crisis Studies, in Bergen, Norway and one of the world’s foremost experts on the trauma of children in war.

Luay had joined a ‘neighbourhood watch’ scheme – groups who tried to rescue people from bombed buildings. Since he was small, he could reach places that others couldn’t. Crawling into one building, he told Raundalen, he had found the body of ‘a mother’. Crawling further on, he found the body of her baby. He described how he had crawled back through the rubble and placed the baby on the mother’s breast and wrapped her still warm arms round him. ‘That is your worst memory?’ asked Raundalen; no his ‘worst memory was the head’. 
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Crawling back, he had found a jacket, and under it was a head. He dreamed every night that he was taking the head from his jacket pocket and handing it to the rescuers to try and identify it for a bereaved family and a dignified burial.

In surveys, Raundelen found that up to eighty per cent of children felt they would not live to grow up and he found, in Iraq, ‘the most traumatised child population’ he had ever encountered.

Luay will now be twenty-two – if he has not become one of the up to eleven thousand a month who die of ‘embargo related causes’. Five to six thousand of those are under five. If he has survived the grinding misery of the most draconian siege ever administered by the United Nations, he will now be conscripted into Iraq’s decimated army and probably end his lost youth as cannon fodder for a smart or truly dumb missile.

On one visit to Iraq, I asked young people, at random, from all backgrounds, of their hopes dreams and fears. None had a dream. ‘I am too tired to dream’, said an eighteen year old who had once dreamed of being a doctor. He was working in a smelter, to support his family, in the searing heat of Baghdad, as it paid pitifully, but relatively well in a land where a kilo of meat – due to stratospheric inflation – at that time, exceeded a university professor’s monthly salary. A young woman dreamed ‘of having enough milk for my baby’. Another waited till her mother left the room and whispered: ‘nothing awaits us, only death.’ She was eighteen.

Forgotten, too, are the numerous bombings by Britain and the United States – unsanctioned by the United Nations and the trauma they continue to heap on this shattered, damaged youth, in the land where Abraham was born at Ur, which brought the world writing, mathematics, algebra, record keeping, and the first domestic laws were written before the birth of Christ. Where the Garden of Eden flourished, and the site of the hanging gardens of Babylon can still be visited.

A friend, who arranged for all the neighbourhood children to come to his house when there was a bombing, in peer support, hesitated, before saying: ‘I hope you won’t be offended, when I tell you that, when the bombing stops, we are left, in the dark, surrounded by pools of urine and faeces, from the terror of the children.’ In Orwell-speak of the Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon, like Luay’s head: ‘collateral damage’.

In February 1998, when the world was certain Iraq was going to be bombed again, I was in Baghdad and went to visit a woman with another tragic tale to tell. Like many, she had sold all her furniture to survive. As we talked in her large, bare room, it began to fill with children – a stranger in this isolated land is a rare treat. They sat, perhaps fifty in all, aged between perhaps three and thirteen, quiet as mice, watching every move of my pen.

When I got up to leave, dusk was falling and they followed me out and as I got into the battered car, they surrounded it, laughing, waving and blowing kisses. As we moved off, they ran beside us, still laughing, smiling and blowing kisses. When we were moving too fast I looked back and they were standing in a knot in the road, still, laughing and blowing kisses. It was the darkest night, the
night all the military experts said Iraq would be bombed again. I went back to my
hotel, lay on the bed and wept.

Public opinion prevented the February bombing. Instead, in December Prime
Minister Blair stood in front of his resplendent Christmas tree and announced we
were bombing (in time for Christmas and Ramadan.)

If this illegal, immoral, tragi-ridiculous ‘war on terrorism’ continues, not
alone the Middle East, but most of the world will erupt; we are truly looking into
the abyss. That ‘history will slaughter those responsible’ to quote distinguished
former UN Under Secretary General, Denis Halliday, will be of no comfort to the
traumatised children of Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and wherever else this
feckless, reckless policy leads.

From Tony Benn

The statement issued by American intellectuals should be widely welcomed as a
confirmation of what most thoughtful people in the world know to be true,
namely that the policies of the United States administration do not represent
the view of many millions of Americans. Links between us across the Atlantic and
across the world are essential if we are to build a mass popular movement – as
we must – for Peace and Social Justice.

From John Berger

I endorse this statement wholeheartedly and I salute the lucidity and courage of
its authors.

From Peter Cadogan, London Alliance

As I write this I am aware that the big demonstration at the White House is at this
moment building up for its 1pm start. That build-up has been going on for
months. This could be a critical day. The action is organised by an ad hoc
association – ANSWER – bringing all sorts together to get maximum impact.

The whole world is at threat as never before – this time from US military and
financial arrogance without precedent. There is no way our traditional peace
movement can cope with this. Effective resistance has already begun in at least
two and a half quarters. They are (in no particular order):

First, from the American people themselves – witness today’s demonstration.
And this includes from within the United States Government where, notoriously,
different Departments pursue different and even contrary policies.

Second, the European Union – which has yet to get its act together over
foreign policy and defence, but where a first line of resistance is already apparent
in the demand that all United States action shall be first cleared by the United
Nations Security Council. This could be good.

Third, resistance from the indigenous peoples of the world, led by those of
Latin America – in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and elsewhere.

Fourth, the special case of involvement of Arab peoples and Muslims more
widely, arising out of the immediate concentration of US indirect attack on
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Palestine (via Sharon) and the continued intention to invade Iraq. This attack, it seems, has been put back for at least twelve months and even longer. Saudi Arabia has already started to put its foot down and the United States has been obliged to move its main military base from Saudi Arabia to Qatar.

Fifth, resistance from our kind of peace and human rights movement throughout the world.

There are doubtless dozens of other elements involved. This is only a start in their analysis. Is there a pecking order? Is there a cutting edge? My hunch is that the ultimate key to resistance has to be in the United States. If that is the case the vital matter is that everyone lines up in its support, starting from today. But we have to watch points daily and rethink as need be. This could be the big one.

From Liz Davies, Chairperson, Socialist Alliance

The attitude of the United States and British governments towards the murderous policies of the Israeli state has thrown into sharp relief the hypocrisy of their self-proclaimed ‘war on terrorism’. The United States government invoked the right of nations to self-defence in support of its attack on Afghanistan. Yet, when the Palestinians are attacked and murdered and when Arafat is held prisoner in his own office, the United States and British governments refuse to condemn Israel’s actions, and continue to sell arms to Israel. Without the support of the United States and British governments, Israel would be internationally isolated and unable to continue its assault on the Palestinians.

The so-called ‘war on terrorism’ was a convenient opportunity for the United States, British and other governments. Civil liberties in the States, Britain, India and elsewhere have been restricted. In Britain, New Labour was only too delighted to use 11 September as a pretext to introduce arbitrary detention of foreign nationals – a measure specifically prohibited by the European Convention of Human Rights which Britain signs up to.

The peace movement in Europe has grown extensively since 11 September. In Britain, public opinion is opposed to an invasion of Iraq – over 100,000 people demonstrated against the war in Afghanistan last November. There have been anti-war demonstrations in all the major European cities. At first, those of us opposed to the war in Afghanistan were accused of being ‘anti-American’. We are not anti-American; however, we are opposed to American foreign policy and in particular to the United States government’s attempt to police the world in the interests of the rich and powerful of the West, and in the interests of globalisation.

From Carol Fox, co-founder of the Peace and Neutrality Alliance; co-founder of US Citizens in Ireland for Alternatives to War

‘A Letter from United States Citizens to Friends in Europe’ is to be strongly welcomed and supported. This appeal gives the lie to the claim that Americans are fully backing President Bush in his Crusade against terrorism and global evil. I am writing as a US Citizen who has lived for nearly thirty years in Ireland, so
I identify very much with the Appeal’s statement that both Europeans and US citizens have a ‘special responsibility to oppose this mad rush to war’. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation is to be thanked for providing this forum.

There are no borders or limits set to the War Against Terrorism. The Bush Administration has taken the gloves off in terms of the types of weapons it’s willing to deploy (nuclear included) and in terms of obeying the rules of the game. The Bush Rule Book has constructed a lawless model of international behaviour which has already bred chaos and bloodshed and given licence to such horrors as the Israelis’ levelling of Palestinian towns to Ground Zero scenes of rubble, death and destruction.

As firm friends of the United States, Ireland is one of those countries (as the appeal puts it) ‘implicated in US military adventures’. Ireland is more than implicated. Although still technically a neutral country and not in NATO, Ireland has provided airport facilities at Shannon Airport and transit rights to United States warplanes and soldiers in the war against Afghanistan, and given full diplomatic backing to the War Against Terrorism. The anti-war movement in Ireland – including a group called ‘U.S. Citizens in Ireland for Alternatives to War’ – has highlighted these issues and opinion polls show a majority of Irish people are opposed to Shannon Airport being used in the war effort. There is no doubt that opposition will continue to grow and that the Irish Government and other European Union States will have to respond to a public opinion that will not support an open-ended US war effort. US Citizens speaking out on this issue, and appealing to Europeans for backing, helps immensely to counter the charges of anti-Americanism.

From Pierre Galand, Forum Nord-Sud, Belgium

No, I am not anti-american, nor anti-semitic, and I admire all those who, in Israel and in the United States, raise their voices to announce their objections to and their fears about the bellicose and domineering attitudes of the Bush and Sharon governments.

These people, intellectuals and peace activists, are the resistance who safeguard human dignity and make us want to share with them the fight to protect our common heritage: humanity.

‘We live in a period full of twilight’, said a biologist friend recently. But I am convinced that another world is possible. We will build it together.

From Johan Galtung, Transcend

There seem to be three discourses, competing for attention, to accommodate September 11 (terrorism in New York/Washington, killing about 3,000) and October 7 2001 (state terrorism in Afghanistan, killing about 5,000).

The first is the terrorist discourse. Dominated by fundamentalist Islam and the shahadah (‘I testify that there is no God but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is his prophet’) and by the sword; the flag of Saudi Arabia is the perfect symbol. Bringing Allah’s justice to America is one element. Another, emphasised by bin Laden, is revenge for humiliation: ‘What America is tasting now is something
insignificant compared to what we have tasted for scores of years. Our nation has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years’.

The second is the state terrorist discourse, most clearly articulated by fundamentalist USA. In the words of W. J. Bennett, on behalf of Americans for Victory over Terrorism: ‘We are a target not because of anything we have done, but because of who we are, what we stand for, what we believe, and what our nation was founded upon: the twin principles of liberty and equality’. Charles Krauthammer in the Washington Post: ‘America won the Cold War, pocketed Poland and Hungary and the Czech Republic as door prizes, pulverized Serbia and Afghanistan and – highlighted Europe’s irrelevance with a display of vast military superiority’. Behind this geo-fascism one can sense Zbigniew Brzezinski’s The Grand Chess-Board: America’s Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives. And underlying that, in turn, one senses ‘a nation under God’.

Acquaintance with these discourses is indispensable to understand the mental frameworks within which the motivations – and capabilities! – emerge. As pointed out in the opening of the manifesto by 120+ American intellectuals, ‘The central fallacy of the pro-war celebrants is the equation between “American values” as understood at home and the exercise of United States economic and especially military power abroad.’

And this is where the third discourse takes off. That discourse will include diagnosis of why 11 September and 7 October happened as parts of a retaliation cycle, but also to use that revenge for other purposes. It would include prognosis of what will happen, such as rejection of fundamentalism on both sides, and of United States policy, not because of overreach relative to military capability, but because of too high military capability. And it would include suggestions for therapy, for instance culturally as dialogue between moderates on all sides; economically by playing down the axis of evil to most people in the world, which is the World Bank-International Monetary Fund-World Trade Organisation triad, as Le Monde Diplomatique puts it; diplomatically through conflict resolution in the Middle-East/West Asia; and militarily through United States defence of homeland security, at home.

Washington and Islamic fundamentalists today suffer rapidly growing opposition, governmental and non-governmental, in the West and in the Islamic world. When these forces find each other things will change. (For continuation see www.transcend.org)

From the playwright Trevor Griffiths
Thank you for the statement by American intellectuals on the War on Peace. Let me say at once I endorse both the arguments made and the conclusions drawn in the American document, which I find very inspiring. Rather than pen a few paragraphs of general support, I propose sending you a ten-minute play called Camel Station, which I wrote last Fall (see page 16). It was given – along with other pieces by Pinter, Tariq Ali et al – a public reading at the Cooper Hall, New York City before an audience of more than a thousand.
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From Caroline Lucas MEP

At this time of increasing global insecurity it is ever more urgent that we stand up to plans for a National Missile Defence programme which is being hatched on both sides of the Atlantic. There’s nothing defensive about this programme – it is a deeply offensive weapons system, specifically designed to bring about fear and instability, which will trigger a major new arms race. It is the military wing of the globalisation project, driven by corporate interests and concerns, to maintain their global control.

True security doesn’t lie in National Missile Defence systems, or ever greater military hardware, or ever increasing defence budgets. We will only be more secure when poverty and injustice are eradicated. Until we understand the violence of our economic policies, our military policies, and our foreign policies, we will continue to foster the conditions that make terrorism possible.

Martin Luther King said: ‘A time has come when silence is betrayal. That time is now.’ Only if we stand up and speak out will we make a difference.

I was very inspired by the letter from the US citizens. Only if we work together globally will we defeat the increasing militarisation which is threatening people and planet.

from Dr A. Sivanandan Director, Institute of Race Relations; Editor, Race & Class

The world is in danger from America – economically, politically and, now, militarily. Globalisation has engendered a monolithic economic system governed by American corporations that hold nation states in thrall. September 11 has engendered a monolithic political culture that holds that those who are not pro-American are either terrorists or value-less and, therefore, surplus to civilisation. Together, they signal the end of civil society and the beginnings of a new imperialism, brutal and unashamed.

On a more philosophical level, one would have expected that the suffering inflicted on the American people on September 11 would have sensitised them to the suffering of the poor and the deprived of the world. But, alas, they have had the experience and missed the meaning. Worse, they have denied all meaning to their own suffering by inflicting it on others.

We are connected to one another, in the deepest sense, through our common pain. When we lose that connection we lose our humanity.

from Rae Street, former Vice Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

It is heartening to read this statement from the 120 – and we know there are thousands more who share the view across the United States. These are the United States friends with whom we stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’; those who are opposing the new world order as interpreted by the Bush ‘corporate’ government. We certainly support all their outspoken criticism of those forces in the United States (often supported by the United Kingdom) which are bringing increasing global instability, and will provoke further acts of terrorism such as were seen on
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September 11th.

The anything-is-justified foreign policy has now led to the unabashed statement that the United States government is prepared to use nuclear weapons – provoking terror and similar assertions by other aggressive leaders from Pakistan to (almost unbelievably) Japan. Let us hope that the statement of our friends in the United States is widely read across Europe, from Ireland to Russia.

Initial signatories to the United States Appeal were: