

The unfolding design

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Beyond the common condemnation of, and horror about, the tragedies of September 11th in New York and Washington there has emerged a serious political divide in India concerning the American proposals and preparations for fighting ‘international terrorism’ through an international coalition of states led by itself. This is not the usual divide between Left and Right (though one can easily imagine where each would line up) but essentially between those who are morally and politically cynical and selective about defining the agents of international terrorism and therefore about fighting them, and those who insist on a moral-political universalism and impartiality. That is to say, between those who prioritise the application of uniform principles of international justice above other considerations, and those who prioritise foreign policy interests, i.e. seeking ‘advantage’ out of current United States policy preoccupations.

The latter talk of eliminating Islamic and other terrorist groups and of certain selected countries (like Pakistan) being terrorist states because they sponsor cross-border terrorism. But of course, state terrorism is only selectively identified. The Indian state’s repressions in Kashmir or the Northeast are not considered. The government which has no remote rival in the number of civilians (in the millions) it has killed outside its own borders, or in the scale of its use of nuclear (in Japan), chemical (in Vietnam), biological (in Cuba) weapons, or in the frequency with which it has flouted international norms and rulings, is the United States. But since the Indian state and its supporting chorus which make up so much of the ‘foreign policy establishment’ are so keen to become strategic allies of the United States, how can it dare to accuse the US of terrorism? Besides, wouldn’t it be insensitive to do so at this juncture?

In fact, this precisely is the time when the United States must be so reminded and

criticised for its own atrocious record of terrorism; when it must be declared that the fight against terrorism must include the indictment of all states as well of sub-state agencies which are guilty. At a time when the United States along with selected allies is making itself an international anti-terrorist task force, it must be announced as widely as possible that the elementary principles of justice are flouted when agencies of terrorism, themselves unpunished and unrepentant, are not only allowed to become the judges and policemen of terrorism, but actually hailed and legitimised for playing this role. Any commitment to principles of moral and legal impartiality has to insist that the task of adjudicating on and enforcing any sentence regarding the international crime committed on September 11 must fall on an international mechanism like the International Criminal Court (whose setting up has been opposed by the United States and India) and through appropriate procedures involving an unmanipulated United Nations.

Opposing the United States effort to set up an international concert of nations behind it to justify its waging war on Afghanistan is all the more imperative because there is a much deeper design behind it all. In declaring that when it comes to retaliation there will be no distinction between the specific agency of terrorism and the country harbouring such agents, and that the USA's response to what is effectively an international crime must be a long-term war, Washington has calculatedly sought to massively extend the scope of its reaction in keeping with its much larger strategy for furthering its global aims behind the mask of 'fighting international terrorism'. It is extraordinary that so many in India have failed to understand this. The United States is demanding through its unfolding 'long term programme of 8-10 years to fight terrorism' an effective *carte blanche* to militarily-politically intervene in any country which it deems to be providing a 'safe haven' for any 'terrorists' identified as such by the US alone. Washington has also put the world on warning that it feels free to topple regimes it considers to be supporting the 'world-wide network of terrorism'. Indeed, toppling the Taliban regime establishes a vital precedent for the United State's longer term perspectives.

What the United States is doing is thus another systematic step forward in a longer game plan that has unfolded since the end of the Cold War. In 1991, quite unexpectedly, the United States found itself dominant in the system of nation states in a way that has never existed for any single country in over a century. During the first half of the twentieth century the eminence of Britain was being challenged by the United States, Germany and Japan. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union challenged the United States. After 1991, in the beginning uncertainly, later on more clearly and determinedly, the United States has gone about extending and consolidating this unique situation of its uncontested global pre-eminence on all fronts — economic, cultural, political and military. The 1991 Gulf War became the excuse for Washington to reinforce control over the Middle East and its oil. Afghanistan and Central Asia have been throughout the nineties an arena in which the United States has sought an increasing influence for itself

and for its multinationals, given the oil-gas potential of the region. This has required wooing the Central Asian Republics away from Russian dominance and considering ways of expanding its influence in Afghanistan itself. Thus on three occasions the US considered recognising the Taliban regime in return for concessions concerning the building of oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to more amenable seaboard. They have by no means lost sight of this issue of strengthening American control of energy resources in this region in this current 'war against terrorism'.

In Europe, the central issue posed after the Cold War was what would be the shape of the new security architecture? Here there were three alternatives — strengthening the European Union's/Western European Union's independent defence force or the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OCSE) or NATO. The first two approaches would have involved the diminution of American, and the expansion of German and Russian influence in Europe. The sub-text of the Balkans conflict (Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia) was the emergence of the United States as the principal arbiter of European affairs. Along with the consolidation and expansion of NATO, the pre-eminence of the United States in Europe was thereby established. The ascendancy of the distinctively Anglo-American form of contemporary capitalist globalisation called neo-liberalism reflects the success of the United States in clawing back part of the economic ground lost earlier to Germany and Japan. The National Missile Defence programme represents the United States search for nuclear dominance and eventual control of space so as to establish a unilateral military supremacy over the globe. The one big US failure in the post-Cold War era was its inability to drive a wedge between the Ukraine and Russia, the two most powerful countries to emerge from the wreckage of the former Soviet Union.

The Balkans also provided precedents for American expansion through manipulation of the universal human rights discourse. And now in this 'war against terrorism', once again through a manipulation of a crucial human rights issue, the United States seeks to establish a flexibility and freedom for conventional military intervention (including the right to topple regimes) throughout the world that is truly unprecedented. And any number of countries for parochial and short-sighted gains are even prepared to be part of a coalition legitimising this effort! That the Indian Government backed by its usual set of factotums, courtiers and salespersons (i.e. the 'foreign policy establishment') is desperate to join this coalition is testimony not only to its moral hypocrisy in the fight against international terrorism but also to its incredible political naivety regarding the larger scheme of things.