

The Enemy Within

By Gore Vidal

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Gore Vidal is America's most controversial writer and a ferocious, often isolated, critic of the Bush administration. Here, against a backdrop of spreading unease about America's response to the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath, we publish Vidal's remarkable personal polemic urging a shocking new interpretation of who was to blame.

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Introduction

On 24 August, 1814, things looked very dark for freedom's land. That was the day the British captured Washington DC and set fire to the Capitol and the White House. President Madison took refuge in the nearby Virginia woods where he waited patiently for the notoriously short attention span of the Brits to kick in, which it did. They moved on and what might have been a Day of Utter Darkness turned out to be something of a bonanza for the DC building trades and up-market realtors.

One year after 9/11, we still don't know by whom we were struck that infamous Tuesday, or for what true purpose. But it is fairly plain to many civil-libertarians that 9/11 put paid not only to much of our fragile Bill of Rights but also to our once-envied system of government which had taken a mortal blow the previous year when the Supreme Court did a little dance in 5/4 time and replaced a popularly elected president with the oil and gas Cheney/Bush junta.

Meanwhile, our more and more unaccountable government is pursuing all sorts of games around the world that we the spear carriers (formerly the people) will never learn of. Even so, we have been getting some answers to the question: why weren't we warned in advance of 9/11? Apparently, we were, repeatedly; for the better part of a year, we were told there would be unfriendly visitors to our skies some time in September 2001, but the government neither informed nor protected us despite Mayday warnings from Presidents Putin and Mubarak, from Mossad and even from elements of our own FBI. A joint panel of congressional intelligence committees reported (19 September 2002, New York Times) that as early as 1996, Pakistani terrorist Abdul Hakim Murad confessed to federal agents that he was 'learning to fly in order to crash a plane into CIA HQ'.

Only CIA director George Tenet seemed to take the various threats seriously. In December 1998, he wrote to his deputies that 'we are at war' with Osama bin Laden. So impressed was the FBI by his warnings that by 20 September 2001, 'the FBI still had only one analyst assigned full time to al-Qaeda'.

From a briefing prepared for Bush at the beginning of July 2001: 'We believe that OBL [Osama bin Laden] will launch a significant terrorist attack against US and/or Israeli interests in the coming weeks. The attack will be spectacular and designed to inflict mass casualties against US facilities or interests. Attack preparations have been made. Attack will occur with little or no warning.' And so it came to pass; yet Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, says she never suspected that this meant anything more than the kidnapping of planes.

Happily, somewhere over the Beltway, there is Europe – recently declared anti-Semitic by the US media because most of Europe wants no war with Iraq and the junta does, for reasons we may now begin to understand thanks to European and Asian investigators with their relatively free media.

On the subject 'How and Why America was Attacked on 11 September, 2001', the best, most balanced report, thus far, is by Nafeez Mossadeq Ahmed ... Yes, yes, I know he is one of Them. But they often know things that we don't – particularly about what we are up to. A political scientist, Ahmed is executive director of the Institute for Policy Research and Development 'a think-tank dedicated to the promotion of human rights, justice and peace' in Brighton. His book, 'The War on Freedom', has just been published in the US by a small but reputable publisher.

Ashmed provides a background for our ongoing war against Afghanistan, a view that in no way coincides with what the administration has told us. He has drawn on many sources, most tellingly on American whistleblowers who are beginning to come forth and hear witness – like

those FBI agents who warned their supervisors that al-Qaeda was planning a kamikaze strike against New York and Washington only to be told that if they went public with these warnings they would suffer under the National Security Act. Several of these agents have engaged David P. Schippers, chief investigative counsel for the US House Judiciary Committee, to represent them in court. The majestic Schippers managed the successful impeachment of President Clinton in the House of Representatives. He may, if the Iraqi war should go wrong, be obliged to perform the same high service for Bush, who allowed the American people to go unwarned about an imminent attack upon two of our cities as pre-emption of a planned military strike by the US against the Taliban.

The Guardian (26 September 2001) reported that in July 2001, a group of interested parties met in a Berlin hotel to listen to a former State Department official, Lee Coldren, as he passed on a message from the Bush administration that 'the United States was so disgusted with the Taliban that they might be considering some military action ... the chilling quality of this private warning was that it came – according to one of those present, the Pakistani diplomat Niaz Naik – accompanied by specific details of how Bush would succeed ...' Four days earlier, the Guardian had reported that 'Osama bin Laden and the Taliban received threats of possible American military action against them two months before the terrorist assaults on New York and Washington ... [which] raises the possibility that bin Laden was launching a pre-emptive strike in response to what he saw as US threats.' A replay of the 'day of infamy' in the Pacific 62 years earlier?

Why the US Needed a Eurasian Adventure

On 9 September 2001, Bush was presented with a draft of a national security presidential directive outlining a global campaign of military, diplomatic and intelligence action targeting al-Qaeda, buttressed by the threat of war. According to NBC News: 'President Bush was expected to sign detailed plans for a worldwide war against al-Qaeda ... but did not have the chance before the terrorist attacks ... The directive, as described to NBC News, was essentially the same war plan as the one put into action after 11 September. The administration most likely was able to respond so quickly ... because it simply had to pull the plans "off the shelf".'

Finally, BBC News, 18 September 2001: 'Niak Naik, a former Pakistan foreign secretary, was told by senior American officials in mid-July that military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October. It was Naik's view that Washington would not drop its war for Afghanistan even if bin Laden were to be surrendered immediately by the Taliban.'

Was Afghanistan then turned to rubble in order to avenge the 3,000 Americans slaughtered by Osama? Hardly. The administration is convinced that Americans are so simple-minded that they can deal with no scenario more complex than the venerable lone, crazed killer (this time with zombie helpers) who does evil just for the fun of it 'cause he hates us, 'cause we're rich 'n free 'n he's not. Osama was chosen on aesthetic grounds to be the most frightening logo for our long contemplated invasion and conquest of Afghanistan, planning for which had been 'contingency' some years before 9/11 and, again, from 20 December, 2000, when Clinton's out-going team devised a plan to strike at al-Qaeda in retaliation for the assault on the warship Cole. Clinton's National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, personally briefed his successor on the plan but Rice, still very much in her role as director of Chevron-Texaco, with special duties regarding Pakistan and Uzbekistan, now denies any such briefing. A year and a half later (12 August, 2002), fearless Time magazine reported this odd memory lapse.

Osama, if it was he and not a nation, simply provided the necessary shock to put in train a war of conquest. But conquest of what? What is there in dismal dry sandy Afghanistan worth conquering? Zbigniew Brzezinski tells us exactly what in a 1997 Council on Foreign Relations study called 'The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives'.

The Polish-born Brzezinski was the hawkish National Security Advisor to President Carter. In 'The Grand Chessboard', Brzezinski gives a little history lesson. 'Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some 500 years ago, Eurasia has been the centre of world power.' Eurasia is all the territory east of Germany. This means Russia, the Middle East, China and parts of India. Brzezinski acknowledges that Russia and China, bordering oil-rich central Asia, are the two main powers threatening US hegemony in that area.

He takes it for granted that the US must exert control over the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, known to those who love them as 'the Stans': Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan all 'of importance from the standpoint of security and historical ambitions to at least three of their most immediate and most powerful neighbours – Russia, Turkey and Iran, with China signaling'. Brzezinski notes how the world's energy consumption keeps increasing; hence, who controls Caspian oil/gas will control the world economy. Brzezinski then, reflexively, goes into the standard American rationalization for empire: We want nothing, ever, for ourselves, only to keep bad people from getting good things with which to hurt good people. 'It follows that America's primary interest is to help ensure that no single [other] power comes to control the geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it.'

Brzezinski is quite aware that American leaders are wonderfully ignorant of history and geography so he really lays it on, stopping just short of invoking politically incorrect 'manifest

destiny'. He reminds the Council just how big Eurasia is. Seventy-five percent of the world's population is Eurasian. If I have done the sums right, that means that we've only got control, to date, of a mere 25 percent of the world's folks. More! 'Eurasia accounts for 60-per cent of the world's GNP and three-fourths of the world's known energy resources.'

Brzezinski's master plan for 'our' globe has obviously been accepted by the Cheney-Bush junta. Corporate America, long over-excited by Eurasian mineral wealth, has been aboard from the beginning.

Ahmed sums up: 'Brzezinski clearly envisaged that the establishment, consolidation and expansion of US military hegemony over Eurasia through Central Asia would require the unprecedented, open-ended militarisation of foreign policy, coupled with an unprecedented manufacture of domestic support and consensus on this militarisation campaign.'

Afghanistan is the gateway to all these riches. Will we fight to seize them? It should never be forgotten that the American people did not want to fight in either of the twentieth century's world wars, but President Wilson maneuvered us into the First while President Roosevelt maneuvered the Japanese into striking the first blow at Pearl Harbor, causing us to enter the Second as the result of a massive external attack. Brzezinski understands all this and, in 1997, he is thinking ahead – as well as backward. 'Moreover, as America becomes an increasingly multicultural society, it may find it more difficult to fashion a consensus on foreign policy issues, except in the circumstance of a truly massive and widely perceived direct external threat.' Thus was the symbolic gun produced that belched black smoke over Manhattan and the Pentagon.

Since the Iran-Iraq wars, Islam has been demonized as a Satanic terrorist cult that encourages suicide attacks – contrary, it should be noted, to the Islamic religion. Osama has been portrayed, accurately, it would seem, as an Islamic zealot. In order to bring this evil-doer to justice ('dead or alive'), Afghanistan, the object of the exercise was made safe not only for democracy but for Union Oil of California whose proposed pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Indian Ocean port of Karachi, had been abandoned under the Taliban's chaotic regime. Currently, the pipeline is a go-project thanks to the junta's installation of a Unocal employee (John J Maresca) as US envoy to the newly born democracy whose president, Hamid Karzai, is also, according to Le Monde, a former employee of a Unocal subsidiary. Conspiracy? Coincidence!

Once Afghanistan looked to be within the fold, the junta, which had managed to pull off a complex diplomatic-military caper, – abruptly replaced Osama, the personification of evil, with Saddam. This has been hard to explain since there is nothing to connect Iraq with 9/11. Happily, 'evidence' is now being invented. But it is uphill work, not helped by stories in the press about the vast oil wealth of Iraq which must – for the sake of the free world – be reassigned to US and European consortiums.

As Brzezinski foretold, 'a truly massive and widely perceived direct external threat' made it possible for the President to dance a war dance before Congress. 'A long war!' he shouted with glee. Then he named an incoherent Axis of Evil to be fought. Although Congress did not give him the FDR Special – a declaration of war – he did get permission to go after Osama who may now be skulking in Iraq.

Bush and the Dog That Did Not Bark

Post-9/11, the American media were filled with pre-emptory denunciations of unpatriotic 'conspiracy theorists', who not only are always with us but are usually easy for the media to discredit since it is an article of faith that there are no conspiracies in American life. Yet, a year or so ago, who would have thought that most of corporate America had been conspiring with accountants to cook their books since – well, at least the bright days of Reagan and deregulation. Ironically, less than a year after the massive danger from without, we were confronted with an even greater enemy from within: Golden Calf capitalism. Transparency? One fears that greater transparency will only reveal armies of maggots at work beneath the skin of a culture that needs a bit of a lie-down in order to collect itself before taking its next giant step which is to conquer Eurasia, a potentially fatal adventure not only for our frazzled institutions but for us the presently living.

Complicity. The behavior of President George W. Bush on 11 September certainly gives rise to all sorts of not unnatural suspicions. I can think of no other modern chief of state who would continue to pose for 'warm' pictures of himself listening to a young girl telling stories about her pet goat while hijacked planes were into three buildings.

Constitutionally, Bush is not only chief of state, he is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Normally, a commander in such a crisis would go straight to headquarters and direct operations while receiving the latest intelligence.

This is what Bush actually did – or did not do – according to Stan Goff, a retired US Army veteran who has taught military science and doctrine at West Point. Goff writes, in 'The So-called Evidence is a Farce': 'I have no idea why people aren't asking some very specific questions about the actions of Bush and company on the day of the attacks. Four planes get hijacked and deviate from their flight plan, all the while on FAA radar.'

Goff, incidentally, like the other astonished military experts, cannot fathom why the government's automatic 'standard order of procedure in the event of a hijacking' was not followed. Once a plane has deviated from its flight-plan, fighter planes are sent up to find out why. That is law and does not require presidential approval, which only needs to be given if there is a decision to shoot down a plane. Goff spells it out: 'The planes were hijacked between 7:45 and 8:10am. Who is notified? This is an event already that is unprecedented. But the President is not notified and going to a Florida elementary school to hear children read.

'By around 8:15am it should be very apparent that something is terribly wrong. The President is glad-handling teachers. By 8:45am, when American Airlines Flight 11 crashes into the North Tower, Bush is settling in with children for his photo op. Four planes have obviously been hijacked simultaneously and one has just dived into the twin towers, and still no one notifies the nominal Commander-in-Chief.

'No one has apparently scrambled [sent aloft] Air Force interceptors either. At 9:03, Flight 175 crashes into the South Tower. At 9:05 Andrew Card, the Chief of Staff whispers to Bush [who] "briefly turns somber" according to reporters. Does he cancel the school visit and convene an emergency meeting? No. He resumes listening to second-graders ... and continues the banality even as American Airlines Flight 77 conducts an unscheduled point turn over Ohio and heads in the direction of Washington DC.

'Has he instructed Card to scramble the Air Force? No. An excruciating 25 minutes later, he finally deigns to give a public statement telling the United States what they have already figured out – that there's been an attack on the World Trade Centre. There's a hijacked plane bee-lining to Washington, but has the Air Force been scrambled to defend anything yet? No.

'At 9:35, this plane conducts another turn, 360 [degrees] over the Pentagon, all the while being tracked by radar, and the Pentagon is not evacuated, and there are still no fast-movers from the Air Force in the sky over Alexandria and DC. Now the real kicker: a pilot they want us to believe was trained at a Florida puddle-jumper school for Piper Cubs and Cessnas, conducts a well-controlled downward spiral descending the last 7,000 feet in two-and-a-half minutes, brings the plane in so low and flat that it clips the electrical wires across the street from the Pentagon, and flies it with pinpoint accuracy into the side of the building at 460 knots.

'When the theory about learning to fly this well at the puddle-jumper school began to lose ground, it was added that they received further training on a flight simulator. This is like saying you prepared your teenager for her first drive on the freeway at rush hour by buying her a video driving game ... There is a story being constructed about these events.'

There is indeed, and the more it is added to the darker it becomes. The nonchalance of General Richard B. Myers, acting Joint Chief of Staff, is as puzzling as the President's campaigning-as-usual act. Myers was at the Capitol chatting with Senator Max Cleland. A sergeant, writing later in the AFPS (American Forces Press Service) describes Myers at the Capitol. 'While in an outer office, he said, he saw a television report that a plane had hit the World Trade Centre. "They thought it was a small plane or something like that," Myers said. So the two men went ahead with the office call.'

Whatever Myers and Cleland had to say to each other (more funds for the military?) must have been riveting because, during their chat, the AFPS reports, 'the second tower was hit by another jet. "Nobody informed us of that," Myers said. "But when we came out, that was obvious. Then, right at that time, somebody said the Pentagon had been hit." Finally, somebody 'thrust a cellphone in Myers' hand' and, as if by magic, the commanding general of Norad – our Airspace Command – was on the line just as the hijackers mission had been successfully completed except for the failed one in Pennsylvania. In later testimony to the Senate Armed Forces Committee, Myers said he thinks that, as of his cellphone talk with Norad, 'the decision was at that point to start launching aircraft'. It was 9:40am. One hour and 20 minutes after air controllers knew that Flight 11 had been hijacked; 50 minutes after the North Tower was struck.

This statement would have been quite enough in our old serious army/air force to launch a number of courts martial with an impeachment or two thrown in. First, Myers claims to be uninformed until the third strike. But the Pentagon had been overseeing the hijacked planes from at least the moment of the strike at the first tower: yet not until the third strike, at the Pentagon, was the decision made to get the fighter planes up. Finally, this one is the dog that did not bark. By law, the fighters should have been up at around 8:15. If they had, all the hijacked planes might have been diverted or shot down. I don't think that Goff is being unduly picky when he wonders who and what kept the Air Force from following its normal procedure instead of waiting an hour and 20 minutes until the damage was done and only then launching the fighters. Obviously, somebody had ordered the Air Force to make no move to intercept those hijackings until ... what?

On 21 January 2002, the Canadian media analyst Barry Zwicker summed up on CBC-TV: 'That morning no interceptors responded in a timely fashion to the highest alert situation. This includes the Andrews squadrons which ... are 12 miles from the White House ... Whatever the explanation for the huge failure, there have been no reports, to my knowledge, of reprimands. This further weakens the "Incompetence Theory". Incompetence usually earns reprimands. This causes me to ask whether there were "stand down" orders.'?? On 29 August 2002, the BBC reports that on 9/11 there were 'only four fighters on ready status in the north-eastern US'. Conspiracy? Coincidence? Error?

It is interesting how often in our history, when disaster strikes, incompetence is considered a better alibi than ... well, yes, there are worse things. After Pearl Harbor, Congress moved to find out why Hawaii's two military commanders, General Short and Admiral Kimmel, had not anticipated the Japanese attack. But President Roosevelt pre-empted that investigation with one of his own. Short and Kimmel were broken for incompetence. The 'truth' is still obscure to this day.

The Media's Weapons of Mass Distraction

But Pearl Harbor has been much studied. 11 September, it is plain, is never going to be investigated if Bush has anything to say about it. In January 2002, CNN reported that 'Bush personally asked Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle to limit the Congressional investigation into the events of 11 September ... The request was made at a private meeting with Congressional leaders ... Sources said Bush initiated the conversation ... He asked that only the House and Senate intelligence committees look into the potential breakdowns among federal agencies that could have allowed the terrorist attacks to occur, rather than a broader inquiry .. Tuesday's discussion followed a rare call from Vice President Dick Cheney last Friday to make the same request ...'

The excuse given, according to Daschle, was that 'resources and personnel would be taken' away from the war on terrorism in the event of a wider inquiry. So for reasons that we must never know, those 'breakdowns' are to be the goat. That they were more likely to be not break – but 'stand-downs' is not for us to pry. Certainly the one-hour 20 minute failure to put fighter planes in the air could not have been due to a breakdown throughout the entire Air Force along the East Coast. Mandatory standard operational procedure had been told to cease and desist.

Meanwhile, the media were assigned their familiar task of inciting public opinion against bin Laden, still not the proven mastermind. These media blitzes often resemble the magicians classic gesture of distraction: as you watch the rippling bright colours of his silk handkerchief in one hand, he is planting the rabbit in your pocket with the other. We were quickly assured that Osama's enormous family with its enormous wealth had broken with him, as had the royal family of his native Saudi Arabia. The CIA swore, hand on heart, that Osama had not worked for them in the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Finally, the rumour that Bush family had in any way profited by its long involvement with the bin Laden family was – what else? – simply partisan bad taste.

But Bush Jr's involvement goes back at least to 1979 when his first failed attempt to become a player in the big Texas oil league brought him together with one James Bath of Houston, a family friend, who gave Bush Jr. \$50,000 for a 5 per cent stake in Bush's firm Arbusto Energy. At this time, according to Wayne Madsen ('In These Times' – Institute for Public Affairs No. 25), Bath was 'the sole US business representative for Salem bin Laden, head of the family and a brother (one of 17) to Osama bin Laden... In a statement issued shortly after the 11 September attacks, the White House vehemently denied the connection, insisting that Bath invested his own money, not Salem bin Laden's, in Arbusto. In conflicting statements, Bush at first denied ever knowing Bath, then acknowledged his stake in Arbusto and that he was aware Bath represented Saudi interests ... after several reincarnations, Arbusto emerged in 1986 as Harken Energy Corporation.'

Behind the Junior Bush is the senior Bush, gainfully employed by the Carlyle Group which has ownership in at least 164 companies worldwide, inspiring admiration in that staunch friend to the wealthy, the Wall Street Journal, which noted, as early as 27 September 2001, 'If the US boosts defence spending in its quest to stop Osama bin Laden's alleged terrorist activities, there may be one unexpected beneficiary: bin Laden's family ... is an investor in a fund established by Carlyle Group, a well-connected Washington merchant bank specialising in buyouts of defence and aerospace companies ... Osama is one of more than 50 children of Mohammed bin Laden, who built the family's \$5 billion business.'

But Bush pere et fils, in pursuit of wealth and office, are beyond shame or, one cannot help but think, good sense. There is a suggestion that they are blocking investigation of the bin Laden connection with terrorism. Agent France Press reported on 4 November 2001: 'FBI agents probing relatives of Saudi-born terror suspect Osama ... were told to back off soon

after George W. Bush became president ...' According to BBC TV's Newsnight (6 Nov 2001), '... just days after the hijackers took off from Boston aiming for the Twin Towers, a special charter flight out of the same airport whisked 11 members of Osama's family off to Saudi Arabia. That did not concern the White House, whose official line is that the bin Ladens are above suspicion.' 'Above the Law' (Green Press, 14 February 2002) sums up: 'We had what looked like the biggest failure of the intelligence community since Pearl Harbor but what we are learning now is it wasn't a failure, it was a directive.' True? False? Bush Jr will be under oath during the impeachment interrogation. Will we hear 'What is a directive? What is is?'

Although the US had, for some years, fingered Osama as a mastermind terrorist, no serious attempt had been made pre-9/11 to 'bring him to justice dead or alive, innocent or guilty', as Texan law of the jungle requires. Clinton's plan to act was given to Condeleezza Rice by Sandy Berger, you will recall, but she says she does not.

As far back as March 1996 when Osama was in Sudan, Major General Elfatih Erwa, Sudanese Minister for Defence, offered to extradite him. According to the Washington Post (3 October 2001), 'Erwa said he would happily keep close watch on bin Laden for the United States. But if that would not suffice, the government was prepared to place him in custody and hand him over ... [US officials] said, "just ask him to leave the country. Just don't let him go to Somalia", where he had once been given credit for the successful al-Qaeda attack on American forces that in '93 that killed 18 Rangers.' Erwa said in an interview, 'We said he will go to Afghanistan, and they [US officials] said, "Let him."'

In 1996 Sudan expelled Osama and 3,000 of his associates. Two years later the Clinton administration, in the great American tradition of never having to say thank you for Sudan's offer to hand over Osama, proceeded to missile-attack Sudan's al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory on the grounds that Sudan was harboring bin Laden terrorists who were making chemical and biological weapons when the factory was simply making vaccines for the UN.

Four years later, John O'Neill, a much admired FBI agent, complained in the Irish Times a month before the attacks, 'The US State Department – and behind it the oil lobby who make up President Bush's entourage – blocked attempts to prove bin Laden's guilt. The US ambassador to Yemen forbade O'Neill (and his FBI team) ... from entering Yemen in August 2001. O'Neill resigned in frustration and took on a new job as head of security at the World Trade Centre. He died in the 11 September attack.' Obviously, Osama has enjoyed bipartisan American support since his enlistment in the CIA's war to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. But by 9/11 there was no Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, indeed there was no Soviet Union.

A World Made Safe for Peace and Pipelines

I watched Bush and Cheney on CNN when the Axis of Evil speech was given and the 'long war' proclaimed. Iraq, Iran and North Korea were fingered as enemies to be clobbered because they might or might not be harbouring terrorists who might or might not destroy us in the night. So we must strike first whenever it pleases us. Thus, we declared 'war on terrorism' – an abstract noun which cannot be a war at all as you need a country for that. Of course, there was innocent Afghanistan, which was levelled from a great height, but then what's collateral damage – like an entire country – when you're targeting the personification of all evil according to Time and the NY Times and the networks?

As it proved, the conquest of Afghanistan had nothing to do with Osama. He was simply a pretext for replacing the Taliban with a relatively stable government that would allow Union Oil of California to lay its pipeline for the profit of, among others, the Cheney-Bush junta.

Background? All right. The headquarters of Unocal are, as might be expected, in Texas. In December 1997, Taliban representatives were invited to Sugarland, Texas. At that time, Unocal had already begun training Afghan men in pipeline construction, with US government approval. BBC News, (4 December 1997): 'A spokesman for the company Unocal said the Taliban were expected to spend several days at the company's [Texas] headquarters ... a BBC regional correspondent says the proposal to build a pipeline across Afghanistan is part of an international scramble to profit from developing the rich energy resources of the Caspian Sea.' The Inter Press Service (IPS) reported: 'some Western businesses are warming up to the Taliban despite the movement's institutionalisation of terror, massacres, abductions and impoverishment.' CNN (6 October 1996): 'The United States wants good ties [with the Taliban] but can't openly seek them while women are being oppressed.'

The Taliban, rather better organised than rumoured, hired for PR one Leila Helms, a niece of Richard Helms, former director of the CIA. In October 1996, the Frankfurter Rundschau reported that Unocal 'has been given the go-ahead from the new holders of power in Kabul to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan ..' This was a real coup for Unocal as well as other candidates for pipelines, including Condoleezza's old employer Chevron. Although the Taliban was already notorious for its imaginative crimes against the human race, the Wall Street Journal, scenting big bucks, fearlessly announced: 'Like them or not, the Taliban are the players most capable of achieving peace in Afghanistan at this moment in history.' The NY Times (26 May 1997) leapt aboard the pipeline juggernaut. 'The Clinton administration has taken the view that a Taliban victory would act as counterweight to Iran ... and would offer the possibility of new trade routes that could weaken Russian and Iranian influence in the region.'

But by 1999, it was clear that the Taliban could not provide the security we would need to protect our fragile pipelines. The arrival of Osama as warrior for Allah on the scene refocused, as it were, the bidding. New alliances were now being made. The Bush administration soon buys the idea of an invasion of Afghanistan, Frederick Starr, head of the Central Asia Institute at Johns Hopkins University, wrote in the Washington Post (19 December 2000): 'The US has quietly begun to align itself with those in the Russian government calling for military action against Afghanistan and has toyed with the idea of a new raid to wipe out bin Laden.'

Although with much fanfare we went forth to wreak our vengeance on the crazed sadistic religious zealot who slaughtered 3,000 American citizens, once that 'war' was under way, Osama was dropped as irrelevant and so we are back to the Unocal pipeline, now a go-project. In the light of what we know today, it is unlikely that the junta was ever going to capture Osama alive: he has tales to tell. One of Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's best numbers now is: 'Where is he? Somewhere? Here? There? Somewhere? Who knows?' And

we get his best twinkle. He must also be delighted – and amazed – that the media have bought the absurd story that Osama, if alive, would still be in Afghanistan, underground, waiting to be flushed out instead of in a comfortable mansion in Osama-loving Jakarta, 2,000 miles to the East and easily accessible by Flying Carpet One.

Many commentators of a certain age have noted how Hitlerian our junta sounds as it threatens first one country for harbouring terrorists and then another. It is true that Hitler liked to pretend to be the injured – or threatened – party before he struck. But he had many great predecessors not least Imperial Rome. Stephen Gowan's *War in Afghanistan: A \$28 Billion Racket* quotes Joseph Schumpeter who, 'in 1919, described ancient Rome in a way that sounds eerily like the United States in 2001: "There was no corner of the known world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack. If the interests were not Roman, they were those of Rome's allies; and if Rome had no allies, the allies would be invented ... The fight was always invested with an aura of legality. Rome was always being attacked by evil-minded neighbours.'" We have only outdone the Romans in turning metaphors such as the war on terrorism, or poverty, or Aids into actual wars on targets we appear, often, to pick at random in order to maintain turbulence in foreign lands.

As of 1 August 2002, trial balloons were going up all over Washington DC to get world opinion used to the idea that 'Bush of Afghanistan' had gained a title as mighty as his father's 'Bush of the Persian Gulf' and Junior was now eager to add Iraq-Babylon to his diadem. These various balloons fell upon Europe and the Arab world like so many lead weights. But something new has been added since the classic Roman Hitlerian mantra, 'they are threatening us, we must attack first'. Now everything is more or less out in the open. The *International Herald Tribune* wrote in August 2002: 'The leaks began in earnest on 5 July, when the *New York Times* described a tentative Pentagon plan that it said called for an invasion by a US force of up to 250,000 that would attack Iraq from the north, south and west. On 10 July, the *Times* said that Jordan might be used as a base for the invasion. The *Washington Post* reported, 28 July, that "many senior US military officers contend that Saddam Hussein poses no immediate threat ..." And the status quo should be maintained. Incidentally, this is the sort of debate that the founding fathers intended the Congress, not military bureaucrats, to conduct in the name of we the people. But that sort of debate has, for a long time, been denied us.

One refreshing note is now being struck in a fashion unthinkable in imperial Rome: the cheerful admission that we habitually resort to provocation. The *Tribune* continues: 'Donald Rumsfeld has threatened to jail any one found to have been behind the leaks. But a retired army general, Fred Woerner, tends to see a method behind the leaks. "We may already be executing a plan," he said recently. "Are we involved in a preliminary psychological dimension of causing Iraq to do something to justify a US attack or make concessions? Somebody knows.' That is plain.

Elsewhere in this interesting edition of the *Herald Tribune* wise William Pfaff writes: 'A second Washington debate is whether to make an unprovoked attack on Iran to destroy a nuclear power reactor being built with Russian assistance, under inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency, within the terms of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty of which Iran is a signatory ... No other government would support such an action, other than Israel's (which) would do so not because it expected to be attacked by Iran but because it, not unjustifiably, opposes any nuclear capacity in the hands of any Islamic government.'

Suspect States and the Tom-Toms of Revenge

'Of all the enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it compromises and develops the germ of every other. As the parent of armies, war encourages debts and taxes, the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few. In war, too, the discretionary power of the executive is extended ... and all the means of seducing the minds, are added to those of subduing the force, of the people ...' Thus, James Madison warned us at the dawn of our republic.

Post 9/11, thanks to the 'domination of the few', Congress and the media are silent while the executive, through propaganda and skewed polls, seduces the public mind as hitherto unthinkable centers of power like Homeland Defence (a new Cabinet post to be placed on top of the Defence Department) are being constructed and 4 per cent of the country has recently been invited to join Tips, a civilian spy system to report on anyone who looks suspicious or ... who objects to what the executive is doing at home or abroad?

Although every nation knows how – if it has the means and the will – to protect itself from thugs of the sort that brought us 9/11, war is not an option. Wars are for nations not root-less gangs. You put a price on their heads and hunt them down. In recent years, Italy has been doing that with the Sicilian Mafia; and no one has yet suggested bombing Palermo.

But the Cheney-Bush junta wants a war in order to dominate Afghanistan, build a pipeline, gain control of the oil of Eurasia's Stans for their business associates as well as to do as much damage to Iraq and Iran on the grounds that one day those evil countries may carpet our fields of amber grain with anthrax or something.

The media, never much good a analysis, are more and more breathless and incoherent. On CNN, even the stolid Jim Clancy started to hyperventilate when an Indian academic tried to explain how Iraq was once our ally and 'friend' in its war against our Satanic enemy Iran. 'None of that conspiracy stuff,' snuffed Clancy. Apparently, 'conspiracy stuff' is now shorthand for unspeakable truth.

As of August, at least among economists, a consensus was growing that, considering our vast national debt (we borrow \$2 billion a day to keep the government going) and a tax base seriously reduced by the junta in order to benefit the 1 per cent who own most of the national wealth, there is no way that we could ever find the billions needed to destroy Iraq in 'a long war' or even a short one, with most of Europe lined up against us. Germany and Japan paid for the Gulf War, reluctantly – with Japan, at the last moment, irritably quarrelling over the exchange rate at the time of the contract. Now Germany's Schroder has said no. Japan is mute.

But the tom-toms keep beating revenge; and the fact that most of the world is opposed to our war seems only to bring hectic roses to the cheeks of the Bush administration (Bush Snr of the Carlyle Group, Bush Jnr formerly of Harken, Cheney, formerly of Halliburton, Rice, formerly of Chevron, Rumsfeld, formerly of Occidental). If ever an administration should recuse itself in matters dealing with energy, it is the current junta. But this is unlike any administration in our history. Their hearts are plainly elsewhere, making money, far from our mock Roman temples, while we, alas, are left only with their heads, dreaming of war, preferably against weak peripheral states.

Mohammed Heikal is a brilliant Egyptian journalist-observer, and sometime Foreign Minister. On 10 October 2001, he said to the Guardian: 'Bin Laden does not have the capabilities for an operation of this magnitude. When I hear Bush talking about al-Qaeda as if it were Nazi Germany or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, I laugh because I know what is there. Bin Laden has been under surveillance for years: every telephone call was monitored and al-

Qaeda has been penetrated by US intelligence, Pakistani intelligence, Saudi intelligence, Egyptian intelligence. They could not have kept secret an operation that required such a degree of organisation and sophistication.

The former president of Germany's domestic intelligence service, Eckehardt Werthebach (American Free Press, 4 December 2001) spells it out. The 9/11 attacks required 'years of planning' while their scale indicates that they were a product of 'state-organised actions'. There it is. Perhaps, after all, Bush Jnr was right to call it a war. But which state attacked us?

Will the suspects please line up. Saudi Arabia? 'No, no. Why we are paying you \$50 million a year for training the royal bodyguard on our own holy if arid soil. True the kingdom contains many wealthy well-educated enemies but ...' Bush Snr and Jnr exchange a knowing look. Egypt? No way. Dead broke despite US baksheesh. Syria? No funds. Iran? Too proud to bother with a parvenu state like the US. Israel? Sharon is capable of anything. But he lacks the guts and the grace of the true Kamikaze. Anyway, Sharon was not in charge when this operation began with the planting of 'sleepers' around the US flight schools 5 or 6 years ago. The United States? Elements of corporate America would undeniably prosper from a 'massive external attack' that would make it possible for us to go to war whenever the President sees fit while suspending civil liberties. (The 342 pages of the USA Patriot Act were plainly prepared before 9/11.) Bush Snr and Jnr are giggling now. Why? Because Clinton was president back then. As the former president leaves the line of suspects, he says, more in anger than in sorrow: 'When we left the White House we had a plan for an all-out war on al-Qaeda. We turned it over to this administration and they did nothing. Why?' Biting his lip, he goes. The Bushes no longer giggle. Pakistan breaks down: 'I did it! I confess! I couldn't help myself. Save me. I am an evil-doer!'

Apparently, Pakistan did do it – or some of it. We must now go back to 1997 when 'the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA' was launched in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Central Asia specialist Ahmed Rashid wrote (Foreign Affairs, November-December 1999): 'With the active encouragement of the CIA and Pakistan's ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) who wanted to turn the Afghan jihad into a global war, waged by all Muslim states against the Soviet Union, some 35,000 Muslim radicals, from 40 Islamic countries joined Afghanistan's fight between 1982 and '92 ... more than 100,000 foreign Muslim radicals were directly influenced by the Afghanistan jihad.' The CIA covertly trained and sponsored these warriors.

In March 1985, President Reagan issued National Security Decision Directive 166, increasing military aid while CIA specialists met with the ISI counterparts near Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Jane's Defence Weekly (14 September 2001) gives the best overview: 'The trainers were mainly from Pakistan's ISI agency who learnt their craft from American Green Beret commandos and Navy Seals in various US training establishments.' This explains the reluctance of the administration to explain why so many unqualified persons, over so long a time, got visas to visit our hospitable shores. While in Pakistan, 'mass training of Afghan [zealots] was subsequently conducted by the Pakistan army under the supervision of the elite Special Services ... In 1988, with US knowledge, bin Laden created al-Qaeda (The Base); a conglomerate of quasi-independent Islamic terrorist cells spread across 26 or so countries. Washington turned a blind eye to al-Qaeda.'

When Mohamed Atta's plane struck the World Trade Centre's North Tower, George W. Bush and the child at the Florida elementary school were discussing her goat. By coincidence, our word 'tragedy' comes from the Greek: for 'goat' tragos plus oide for 'song'. 'Goat-song'. It is highly suitable that this lament, sung in ancient satyr plays, should have been heard again at the exact moment when we were struck by fire from heaven, and a tragedy whose end is nowhere in sight began for us.