

The Link

*Published by Americans for
Middle East Understanding, Inc.*

Volume 34, Issue 5

November-December 2001

REFLECTIONS
ON
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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About This Issue

We asked several AMEU Board members and a number of writers whose articles have appeared in previous Links to share with us their reflections on the infamous events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The contributors to this special issue are:

- * Former U.S. Senator James G. Abourezk
- * Ali Abunimah, Media Analyst
- * Catholic Pastor, Rev. Edward J. Dillon
- * Jewish Theologian Marc Ellis, Baylor University
- * Professor Norman Finkelstein, DePaul University
- * Dr. Henry Fischer, Curator Emeritus, Metropolitan Museum of Art
- * Professor James A. Graff, University of Toronto
- * Muhammad Hallaj, Political Analyst
- * Kathy Kelly, Voices in the Wilderness
- * Robert L. Norberg, AMEU Vice President
- * Professor Ilan Pappé, Haifa University
- * Jack B. Sunderland, AMEU President
- * James M. Wall, Senior Contributing Editor, The Christian Century

Most of these reflections were written in a day's time; the others took a day or two more. They flow from the heart as much as the intellect.

AMEU has been located all its years in Manhattan. It is our City that was savaged, our neighbors who were slaughtered. Now we pass by makeshift flyers of the missing, taped up hurriedly onto walls and lampposts and tree trunks — their faces looking back at us with smiles and eyes full of promise. Whose heart would not break?

During our three decade-plus existence we have tried, as our name implies, to create a better understanding in our country of the political and cultural landscape of the Middle East. Our hope has been that a better understanding would lead to a more equitable foreign policy, which in turn would help defuse the sense of hopelessness that has been percolating in that critical part of the world, particularly among Palestinians and Iraqis. That, in turn — so we hoped — would lessen the threat of such attacks as we witnessed on September 11th.

With such hope, stronger now than ever, we face the future.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director

Muhammad Hallaj, a political analyst and member of the Palestine National Council, has authored three Links: "Palestine: the Suppression of an Idea" (vol. 15, 1982, #1), "The Resurrection of a Myth" (vol. 18, 1985, #1), and "Zionist Violence Against Palestinians" (vol. 21, 1988, #3).

The stunning events of September 11, 2001, were perhaps unprecedented in human experience. Not that greater tragedies have not happened before, because they have. Hiroshima and Nagasaki come to mind, and they are by no means the only ones. What makes the attacks of September 11 and their impact unique is the fact that they impacted the world's greatest power and played before a worldwide audience, and in real time.

The marathon non-stop media coverage of the events and their aftermath, including the heart-wrenching images, the agonizing stories of survivors, and the commentaries of officials and pundits alike made us almost participants rather than just witnesses of the experience. This impressive display of the enormous capabilities of the "information age" can easily blind us to the fact that the media coverage to which we have been subjected in the days following the attack numbs the mind more than it enlightens it, and sheds more heat than light on the issue of terrorism which suddenly gained so much prominence in our conscience and discourse.

As I sat mesmerized in front of my television, hour after hour, like millions of others everywhere, the thought that kept swirling in my mind was the familiar adage about how if you don't ask the right questions you cannot find the right answers. I kept asking myself, "Why, of all these curious journalists and intelligent, well-informed experts, is no one asking 'why?'" The discourse was so clearly unidimensional, focusing almost exclusively on the security aspects of the issue, that one is compelled to ask: "Are we not asking the right questions because we fear the answers?"

The security aspects are important: How did the hijackers manage to seize four airliners? Why did the strange and erratic flight path of the hijacked planes fail to sound the alarm? Why did the intelligence system fail so miserably in detecting warning signs? What airport and airline security precautions are needed to ensure that this sort of thing would not happen again in the future? How do we respond to the attack? How should we deal with the perpetrators and their protectors? All of these and other security-related questions need to be asked and answered. But stopping there is like building half a bridge to the objective we seek. The task is incomplete without asking and

honestly and fearlessly answering the "why" questions: "Why are there people who are driven to hurt us so?" "Have we done anything to them to explain such unreasoning rage?"

If we are to succeed in the objective of protecting America and its citizens from future acts of terrorism, we need to know why, even though we may not like the answer. It is counterproductive to stubbornly cling to the customary notion that terrorism is an unjustifiable crime and, therefore, we should not concern ourselves with explanations of its causes and motives.

The recent tragedy is proof of the failure of the long held view that terrorism is nothing more than a law enforcement problem requiring only security responses. If we persist in this mode of denial, we will only perpetuate the problem.

Every phenomenon has an explanation, and every event has a cause. To treat terrorism as an exception to this rule, by holding to the view that it is something to be fought but not understood, may be daring or brave (or foolhardy), but it is not intelligent.

The act of killing innocent people is unforgivable, but that is not the same thing as saying that we can wisely dispense with the need to understand the reasons why it happens. We don't need to justify the reasons in order to understand them. But we need to understand them if we are to deal with the problem.

The assumption that terrorism happens because there are fanatics in the world is an evasion of the issue. Even fanatics need reasons to expose themselves as well as others to deadly peril. Blaming Islam betrays ignorance not only of Islam but also of history. If Islam is the source of fanaticism, then how come the Middle East (which has been Muslim for more than a thousand years) did not become a problem for America until Israel arrived fifty years ago and contaminated Arab-American relations, which until then had been nearly exemplary?

One would like to believe that even when people are provoked, they are not justified in taking innocent life. Granted. But the point is not whether terrorism is justified or not, the point is, will it happen? The events of September 11 show that it will, regardless of how we feel about it. The claims of television evangelists notwithstanding, evil does not go away when it is reprimanded.

Security precautions are important. But the amelioration of grievances is more effective. Until we reassess the way our government behaves in the world, particularly in the Middle East, our quest for safety will continue to have a fatal flaw.

* * *

Bob Norberg is vice president of AMEU and assists in the production of *The Link*. His sister told him that her daughter, Willow, 24, a college student in Indiana, was having a difficult time with the emotions and fears that terrorism's shockwaves had produced. "Write to her," she told Bob.

Dear Willow,

What to think, what to do as we deal with the aftermath of such a premeditated attack on thousands of innocent people? No one appointed me Room Captain, but I have some recommendations:

The general idea is: Think small. Grasp what you can do yourself. Grab a lever, not a crutch. Look to what you can do for friends, colleagues and even strangers around you rather than recirculating the images of violence internally. Think of the future as the next few days or weeks of what YOU do. But be practical. Save the world in increments.

Some small steps:

1. If you are young and healthy, give blood. Don't rush to do it now as blood has an expiry date. Make one or more appointments into the future as a commitment not just to current victims but to human beings in general. Or send checks to the Red Cross, no matter the size.

2. Speak pacifism, not revenge. If you are unfamiliar with the concepts of pacifism and passive resistance, study them—again as a conscious and constructive effort to ward off "inward thinking."

3. Dare to be the different voice amongst your peers -- the one that questions whether "reciprocal violence" accomplishes the objective of eliminating terrorism or whether it is merely political pandering to those who lust for revenge. YOU can help stop the cycle of violence.

4. Trade places in your mind with what your life might have been if God had put you in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Northern Ireland. Think about your family life there, as an Iraqi mother or father, and of your uncles, aunts, cousins. Mull the words "collateral damage," which in military speak means we are sorry we had to kill all those civilians. Think of your "options" under an oppressive regime—rebellious, acquiescent, ambitious? Try to step into the shoes of the

"other," the unknown, anonymous people you may fear.

5. Reach out. Any Muslim or Arab-American friends or acquaintances that you have are now extremely fearful that they will be judged by the acts of terrorist extremists who may be found to be Muslim and/or Arabs. Make a specific effort to approach and remind them that in America we do not judge people by their color, religion or ethnicity. Use your influence to get others to do the same.

6. Study--and this means study, not a cursory look at today's mainstream media--the grievances real and imagined that manifest themselves in such unspeakable killing of innocents. This is not to excuse the barbarity, but to examine what we might have done to alter the trajectory of history that has now reached New York and Washington with such devastation--and how we might initiate new Middle East policies to avoid a recurrence.

Small steps taken by many "small" people can make the world safer not only for Americans but for terrorized and oppressed people everywhere.

One last point: Do not expect your elected officials to lead. They follow the polls. If the polls tilt for revenge and war, young people will be the ones to send up the missiles and shoulder the rifles. Reservists are being called at this very moment. In taking small steps, don't forget an email to your Congressman. Tell him or her you believe that better Middle East policies are preferable to having American kids fight in Afghanistan.

Uncle Robbie

* * *

Norman Finkelstein teaches at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. His *Link* articles include: "A Reply to Henry Kissinger and Fuad Ajami" (vol. 25, 1992, #5), "The Fate of the Cherokee and Today's Palestinians" (vol. 32, 1999, #5).

I was pained and anguished by the ghastly and colossal crimes committed in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. Many of my former students worked in the World Trade Center and likely now lay dead in the rubble. There are my friends who I've been unable to reach, the neighbors in my building—the World Trade Center was a very tall building and the inventory of

my connections with it commensurately long. Apart from reacting with altogether justifiable anger and sorrow, however, it is our responsibility to think through what happened – to make sense of what happened – and to do what’s within our power to prevent a recurrence of this horror.

Many people may not like what I am about to say. But the stakes are too high for telling lies. Now, more than ever, we must tell the truth, as we understand it, regardless of the consequences.

The easy answer to Tuesday is simply to shake our heads in disbelief at these crazed-lunatic-fanatic-fundamentalist-Middle-Eastern-Arabic-Islamic-whatever. To write them off as a species apart from – indeed, several rungs below – ourselves. The tougher answer is to recognize the humanity in these people, to acknowledge their suffering and degradation – and toughest of all – to take a hard look at ourselves and the responsibility *we* bear for their torment.

Like most every year, this past June I visited Palestinian friends in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza. For the first time in more than a decade of traveling there, I took notice of a qualitative change in popular sentiments. My Palestinian friends – with only a couple of exceptions – now supported terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians. (I arrived soon after the disco bombing in Tel Aviv.) Unable to go along with this change of heart – I could understand but never support the targeting of civilians – I also warned that this was a disaster on practical grounds. Palestinian terror attacks would eventually bring forth a crushing Israeli retaliatory strike. Palestine would be no more. After decades of unendurable suffering, these Palestinians no longer cared. My premonition didn’t frighten. One Palestinian in the Rafah refugee camp kept repeating: “It’s ‘to be or not to be.’” Another invoked Samson and the Temple. They were prepared to die – and to take along as many of their Israeli oppressors as they could with them. Is this so hard to understand?

My late mother was a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and Maidanek concentration camp. I once asked her what she thought as news filtered back during the war that the Russians were indiscriminately bombing German cities with a massive toll of civilian lives. “I wanted the Germans to die,” she replied without hesitation. “I knew I wouldn’t live, so I wanted them to die, too. We cheered the Russians. We wanted them to destroy anything and everything German. We wished them death every second of the day because we faced death every second of the day.”

The United States government, a government the re-

sponsibility for which we all share, directly and indirectly inflicts misery and horror on large parts of humanity. For most of us, this misery and horror – whether the systematic destruction of Lebanon in 1982 or Iraq in 1991 or Serbia more recently – possessed all the reality of a video game. It was mass murder without consequence; it was almost fun. Now we reap the terrifying whirlwind that we have sown.

Since the end of World War II the U.S. has not faced any real enemies – or, at any rate, sustained threats to its “national interest.” The Soviet Union was basically a conservative and – as becomes depressingly clearer each day – basically a stabilizing force in world affairs. In Southeast Asia and Central America we fought wars and proxy wars but no vital American interest was at stake. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the official enemies of the U.S. – Iraq, Libya, narco-terrorists – have been phantoms and figments of our own conjuring to justify, inter alia, ever-escalating military budgets.

The U.S. gloated over its new status as the sole superpower, carrying on with breathtaking arrogance and swagger. Just in recent memory the U.S. rejected an international war crimes tribunal and a treaty on germ warfare, walked out of the Kyoto agreement and the Durban conference, sought to dismantle the ABM treaty, and on and on – the list is quite long. The assumption hitherto has been that there was no price to be had for being the sole superpower: one could do as one pleased with complete impunity. Washington will now have to rethink that assumption.

But it is not only our leaders in Washington who must engage in some serious and tough reflection. All of us must also think hard about our lives. Most of us have carried on like there was no world out there. Everyone else wanted to be like us so – except as a potential vacation spot – we didn’t need to know or worry about the world beyond the tips of our noses. We didn’t bother to read newspapers. We certainly didn’t waste time learning foreign languages. Doesn’t everyone speak English? (Only a country intoxicated by hubris could hatch a movement of self-willed ignorance called not “English First” but “English *Only*”.) We had far too many problems of our own to worry about the problems of “them.” But on Tuesday the world came crashing in. Now we really better worry about the problems of “them” – not as an act of charity but as a necessity for survival.

Indeed, it seems to me we really need to ask the very toughest questions about ourselves. Isn’t there something fundamentally wrong when a small handful of people are bloated with so much wealth that they’re practically ready to explode while so much of humanity is reduced to a

dog's existence? In fact, that metaphor isn't exactly right since canines in the U.S. generally receive more concern and care than the half million or so Iraqi children who've died on account of U.S. sanctions.

There's no simple answer to what happened on Tuesday. After the first atomic device was detonated it was, if I'm not mistaken, Einstein who said that everything has changed except man's way of thinking. This I'm afraid is the biggest danger now confronting us. Washington's response to what happened will likely be yet more of the same: retaliatory strikes of a devastating magnitude; new national security measures that will further erode our basic freedoms. Leaving aside moral and libertarian concerns, does anyone really believe this will stop terrorist attacks?

The only hope is if, after the horrors of Sept. 11th, our way of thinking also changes.

* * *

Ilan Pappé teaches at Haifa University, Israel. His article "What Really Happened 50 Years Ago?" appeared in our January-March 1998 Link (vol. 31, #1).

The billions and billions of dollars poured by a shocked American Congress on an already over-budgeted American military machine is one of many instinctive, and in some cases cynical, American reactions to the catastrophic terror attack on New York and Washington. Like the money, the recruitment of reserves, the rhetoric of war from the President down to Tom Friedman in the New York Times and his likes in CNN International, all are transparent precursors and clear-cut indicators of an imminent massive American military response to the attacks.

It is impossible to predict what form an American

reprisal would take. But it would be military, directed against a state, a society, as well as against groups of radicals, fanatics or terrorists, all representing, and residing in, the Third World.

It will not be the first American blow to the impoverished, oppressed and marginalized two-thirds of the global population. Starting with the successful overthrow of the Syrian government in 1949 through the toppling of the Mossaddeq government in Iran in 1951, the abortive attempts to overthrow Nasser and Castro, the successful removal of Allende in Chile and the staging of the Contra war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, American might was employed to determine who would lead the world in every corner which interested the Americans for whatever reasons.

In some cases, as in Southeast Asia, the power and will, turned nations and their lands into ashes. In a similar way, the American might and relentless support for Israel destroyed any hope for the Palestinian people in their struggle for independence and their desire for restitution. The same might was employed to solidify those in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin and Central America who stood at the head of authoritarian and capitalist regimes that perpetuated hunger, poverty and injustice.

This might was also used to defeat the Nazis in the Second World War, and no one should or does forget it. The President, the administration and the media in the U.S. would like us to believe that this is a similar case. We are being told that America and "Civilization" are facing "New Nazis" on the horizon and should brace themselves

Denial

BY HENRY FISCHER

As we lick our wounded pride
And mourn thousands who have died,
Few can bring themselves to think
That there is any kind of link
Between the hate that's toppled towers
And any policy of ours.

Instead of which, we're told that we
Cause some to hate because we're free,
And that the cause of their assaults
Lies in our virtue, not our faults;
We're strong enough to match their acts,
But lack the strength to face the facts.

For if we did, we'd see the core
Of this lies in another war,
A war in which we have denied
That we are siding with either side,
While one side's clearly in our pay
To take the other's land away.
We arm the predators to prey
On those who must be kept at bay.

So as we raise our battle cry,
It seems to say: "Deny, deny"!

Dr. Henry Fischer, the author of several books of poetry, is Curator Emeritus, Department of Egyptian Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Vice President of AMEU and occasional book reviewer for The Link.

for a “clash of civilizations,” as predicted by Samuel Huntington’s insipid, but nonetheless attractive, theorization and justification for a continued American control in the world.

The present crisis does not lend itself to “solution” by either the typical American clandestine operation or open attack, nor can the response be passed off as a chivalrous America rescuing the world. Ultimately, the response is likely to be yet another, this time even more devastating, American assault. And once again, the onslaught will be carried out in the third world, the south, the periphery—a term that in any event will describe a part of the world and society that was colonized, imperialized and oppressed in the 19th century, and into which decolonization, social democracies and independence had introduced scant improvement by the time the 20th century had ended.

The attack, wherever it will take place, and whatever form it will assume, will quite probably breed a counterattack. But the Americans can erase Afghanistan from the face of the the earth and kill bin Laden along with his disciples and family members near and far, but this will only double or triple the motivation and zeal of eager successors to the Talibans and bin Ladens, who will command as much diabolic inventiveness when it comes to terror and destruction.

There is another way. If only a fifth, or even less, of the money that is being given for a new American war machine would be devoted to rethinking within the American administration, at every juncture and nerve center where policy is formulated and executed, then the question that would be asked in such a brainstorming process would be: why is the U.S. a target for so much hate and animosity among two-thirds of the world’s population? This may lead to reevaluation of the biased and one-sided American support for Israel in the Palestine conflict, to reassessment of the double standard in the treatment of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait compared to the American invasion of Granada, and Israel’s occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territory.

At the end of the day, Americans as much as anyone else in the world should realize that not only is there no “clash of civilizations” but this is one world and one culture as so succinctly argued by Edward Said in his “Culture and Imperialism” and by Nawal al-Saadawi in many of her writings. Past evil and present misbalances are integral parts of it. The oppressed, “the wretched of the earth” — not surprisingly a term used both by Franz Fanon and the Muslim Sunni militia in Lebanon to whom one of the hijackers belonged—grew and continue to grow in numbers, as does their desperation, which in very few, but

significant cases, turns into violence.

Only a fundamental shift in American financial and strategic policy can help to create a different environment that would not produce such vile acts as we have seen on September 11— a shift that should be visible in American global policy in general and in Middle Eastern policy in particular. Only this kind of revision can avoid another war and a cycle of violence to which the last attack on the U.S. would pale in comparison.

* * *

Edward J. Dillon is pastor of St. Francis Catholic church in Phelps, New York, and author of two Links: “Prisoners of Israel” (vol. 17, 1983, #3) and “Today’s Via Dolorosa” (vol. 34, 2001, #2).

Eventually, of course, we Americans will have to face the awful words of Malcolm X on the occasion of JFK’s assassination: “The chickens have come home to roost.”

Or the inelegant wisdom of our urban neighborhoods: “What goes around comes around.”

But now is the time for mourning, for remembering those who died in New York, in Washington, and in the fields of Pennsylvania. And for remembering the bereaved, those whose loved ones are still unaccounted for.

Perhaps the best place to start is with the heroism of the many who rushed to the rescue, risking and giving their lives. These are the ones I call the martyrs for love, as opposed to martyrs for hate. The whole world recognizes these men and women and so honors them.

One elderly New Yorker, after she was rescued and still in shock, described the rescuers who rushed into the doomed towers. They were young, she said, and full of life, and so beautiful.

Now, as I write, 300 firefighters and 67 police officers in NYC are still unaccounted for.

These martyrs for love are as diverse, I would guess, as the incredible city they serve—a city that belongs to the world and not just to America. They include Christians, Muslims, and Jews. And people of other religions too, and of no religion. From every race, color and ethnic background. They represent the greatest hope for the human family.

Not everything presented in the media was equally impressive. I was bitterly disappointed by Fox Network’s repeated showing of Palestinian crowds cheering. The effect of this was hardly offset by the comments of Colin Powell and others of the great outpouring of sorrow and

sympathy from Palestinians, including telegrams and flowers at the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem.

Recently, as I was leaving the hospital in my village after a pastoral call, I heard a group of workers saying: "Who were those awful people cheering?" The answer came: "The Palestinians." And another quiet voice said: "They're the people behind all this."

I suspect that that is what the Fox Network intended them to think.

But, of course, misguided rage goes beyond the Palestinians. In a neighboring town, St. Michael Orthodox Church is preparing to celebrate their Middle Eastern Festival. A friend told me that a store in the area decided to take the church's promotional signs down from its windows. They can't afford to offend their patrons. It would be bad for business. Another area store continued to post the signs in its entry way windows, until a shot from an apparent BB gun damaged the glass just below the sign.

The media event that most stirred my cynicism was the interview between Dan Rather of CBS and Shimon Peres of Israel.

Do you think, Dan Rather asked, that the root cause of this catastrophe is America's long-lasting friendship with Israel?

And the Israeli luminary solemnly responded: I can only say that today every Israeli considers himself an American.

Israeli propagandists have long sought to forge an identification between their country and ours. We're both democracies, they say – while the truth is, Israeli Palestinians, by law, are second class citizens. Now, we both know the scourge of terrorism, they say – while the truth is, nearly three million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem have known only Israeli state-sponsored terrorism for the past three generations.

My fondest hope is that Americans will begin to understand the plight of the Palestinians, recalling the words President Kennedy once spoke about changing our relations with Latin American countries: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable."

* * *

Kathy Kelly is founder of *Voices in the Wilderness* and author of our *Link*, "The Children of Iraq: 1990-1997" (vol. 30, 1997, #1).

From August 6 – September 14, 2001, 12 Voices in the Wilderness members fasted and held vigils

across from the U.N. in New York City, as part of a campaign we called "Breaking Ranks: A Fast to End the Siege of Iraq." Each week, we carried a simple meal of uncooked lentils and rice, along with a jug of untreated water, to the steps of the U.S. Mission to the U.N. We invited any staff member there to share the meal with us—but not the untreated water, which we included only to clarify that Iraqi people don't want contaminated water any more than we do. We also asked that someone from the U.S. Mission discuss with us our concern for the thousands of nameless, faceless Iraqis who have suffered and died because of the U.N./U.S. economic sanctions. Each week, our invitation was declined. Instead, we were arrested and charged with criminal trespass and obstruction.

The final week of our fast coincided with the terrible suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. With heavy hearts, we quietly finished the fast, groping for words to express our sorrow, but thinking it best not to resume our public vigil.

It's sadly ironic that the "attack on America" has caused a bereavement which is mirrored in cities, towns, and villages across Iraq, where targeted civilians have endured 11 years of cruel attacks and a devastating siege. Nothing, nothing justifies the September 11 attacks. Nothing I've ever seen in Iraq could excuse it. But the security that Americans now crave requires a deeper understanding of what ordinary people have endured in countries where U.S. policies have claimed thousands of victims.

What I'm suggesting is that in the weeks to come we could gently ask our friends, co-workers, neighbors and family members to consider what we now have in common with ordinary Iraqi families and children who have, for 11 years, helplessly suffered repeated bombardment while watching an economic siege destroy their culture and kill their most vulnerable people: over a half-million of their children.

Recalling our feelings when we watched buildings collapse, saw bodies dragged from the ruins, learned that thousands of innocents were instantly incinerated, can we possibly think that Iraqi people have felt differently when they've been attacked?

How horrified and offended we would be if another country, much less all the assembled nations of the U.N., were to tell residents in New York or in Washington, DC, that they will simply not be allowed to rebuild, that they cannot communicate or trade with the wider world, that they can never again adequately care for their children? Isn't it unimaginable that, instead of aggrieved international support, we would awaken to ostracism, shunning, and a long, slow, unrelenting deterioration.

Unthinkable, yes. But isn't this what happened to Iraqi people in the cruel aftermath of the Gulf War?

Listen to the anguished isolation of a teenage girl from the Dijla school in Baghdad: "You come and you say you will do, you will do," said a young woman whom I met in May 1999. "But nothing changes. Me, I am 16. Can you tell me what is the difference between me and someone who is 16 in your country? I'll tell you. Our emotions are frozen. We cannot feel."

Hear a young lad's bitter resolve in Fallujah, just outside of Baghdad: He stared pensively at me while our team met with a small crowd that had gathered near the market place. "Ahmed," I asked our translator, "please, could you ask that boy what he is thinking?" Ahmed posed the question and the boy squared his shoulders, and said, "I am a scholar of the faith." "Yes, I persisted, but please, ask him what he is thinking." The boy never took his eyes away from mine. "Tell her," he said, "that I am thinking of how when I grow up I will become a fighter pilot and bomb the United States."

It's hard to hear these voices. Their cries have been muted by our mightiness. But now we are wounded, scarred. Perhaps now we can hear far away voices of people previously forgotten and invisible, people who can help us see that our security won't lie in being able to frighten, threaten, coerce and kill other people. Rather, a safe and livable future will lie in our ability to forge bonds of understanding and compassion with other people.

This will indeed require sacrifice. We'll need to learn about living more simply, to teach our children to love service and abhor exploitation, to prize just and fair exchanges with other people, and to practice forgiveness akin to that of the young Iraqi mother I met in July 2000. Moments after her six-month-old son, Hassan, died for lack of an antibiotic, she murmured, "I pray this will never happen to a mother in your country."

* * *

Ali Abunimah, *media analyst and vice president of the Arab-American Action Network*, wrote our Dec. 1998 *Link*, "Dear NPR News" (vol. 31, #5).

I arrived in New York City on Friday night, three days after the disaster. I drove all day from Chicago with a friend. As we crossed the George Washington Bridge from New Jersey into upper Manhattan we could see that it was true. Down towards the end of the island, a huge cloud hung, lit yellowish by the lights of the city, above the space where the towers once soared. It gave the impression of a mouth that had just lost a tooth violently.

Looking south on Church Street in the morning, I count eight blocks to the smoking remains of the Twin Towers. The only people in the street are rescue workers, walking away from the scene in pairs or resting in small groups. I overhear one rescuer say to another, "It's like Home Depot down there, there's everything, food, water, tools, masks."

Downtown Manhattan has always struck me as one of the places in the world furthest from the cares and afflictions of the world. SoHo with its art galleries, designer furniture and fashion; Tribeca with its astronomical rents, its restaurants and cafes.

Now, it has been transformed. Violence as brutal as anything that afflicted Lebanon or Bosnia has come here, and it interacts with the city in incongruous ways. A cafe on a deserted street in the closed zone featuring delicate French pastries from Balthazar offers them free to rescue workers. The Eden Day Spa has posted flyers inviting rescue workers to use all their facilities and services--the showers, the lounge, the therapeutic massages. The closest store from which we can carry groceries is the Gourmet Garage, offering everything of the rarest and finest from all over the world. Things that mere days ago represented the height of frivolity and luxury have now been enlisted in the elemental struggle for survival as soldiers in combat gear patrol the streets and military helicopters circle overhead.

If you look at the lampposts, you begin to understand what five thousand people look like. Everywhere there are flyers with photos of people who are missing. It reminds me of pictures I have seen of the Amariyah bomb shelter in Baghdad. The same photos and flowers line the wall of the memorial to the more than four hundred women and children incinerated by two American-made "smart bombs" that destroyed the facility in a middle class neighborhood of the Iraqi capital on February 12, 1991.

The day after September 11, I wrote an essay that I called "A Few Words," giving my reactions to both the bombing and some of the hate mail and threats that I and other Arab-Americans and Muslims were receiving. Never has anything I have written produced such a reaction. To date I have received over seven hundred personal emails in direct response to this essay, the overwhelming majority of them expressing solidarity and the strongest condemnation of any scapegoating of Arabs generally. Yes, there were some serious incidents of violence against Arabs, Muslims and anyone else who appeared too "foreign," and countless incidents of harassment have been reported. But the overwhelmingly decent side of America has let it be known that this is not done in its name.

The media says that America wants retribution. I am

sure that sentiment is out there, but I personally have not encountered this, and many of the messages I got displayed a thirst for understanding, not a desire for blood. I sense that many people are asking questions and searching for answers that CNN is not equipped or willing to give them. Karen from Illinois emailed me: "I don't know what kind of military response would be appropriate and just, but I firmly believe that any U.S. response MUST INCLUDE a sincere and concerted effort to reach out to our Arab and Muslim brothers. It is all well and good for politicians to stand up and instruct Americans not to typecast Arabs as terrorists, but if we don't start looking each other in the eye and listening with our mind and heart to the stories of injustice our Arab friends have to tell, we will always remain US and THEM. Without this effort, we will never be able to stand united against terror and injustice."

Brock wrote:

I don't understand a few things about Islam. How is it these guys like bin Laden think of this as a holy war. What in Islam suggests to suicide bombers that their acts will deliver them to Allah or make Allah smile on them? I have heard that Islam encourages revenge. I know in the Bible there is the passage about an eye for an eye is there something like this in the Koran that these fanatics embrace? I suppose it is as if the weird fundamentalist Christians of Ruby Ridge and Waco were to get control of a country, but I got to tell you that if these things about Islam aren't true, honest Muslims aren't doing a very good job telling the rest of the world what Islam is really about.

These are honest questions from honest people. This decency and sense of fairness is America's greatest strength, but it has also been a weakness. Americans want to think of themselves as a benign nation that stands for the downtrodden against the strong, and for right against wrong. This has sometimes made it much harder to make people see the distortions that their government's policies have produced over decades in the Middle East and other parts of the world—that the America that they believe in and strive for, the America of decency and freedom, is not the same America experienced by millions of people whose lives are ruined by U.S.-backed dictators and despots, who see their loved ones incinerated by "smart bombs" and wasted by sanctions.

People are sometimes unwilling to see an image in the mirror that they do not like. The America that wrote to reassure me and other Arab Americans that I am safe at home here is not the same America that with unconditional support sentences my cousins to a life of brutality and violence under endless Israeli occupation. But it is the

America that can and must act to stop it.

There is nothing on earth that the United States could do anywhere that would ever justify or excuse what was done on September 11. Whoever did it, if they did have links to the Middle East, did not do it in the name of peace or in the name of Arabs and Muslims. It was an act of pure, unremitting evil. But this horrifying act must not now be used to silence or delegitimize criticism of U.S. policy in the Middle East. It will be more important than ever for Americans to interrogate and understand their relationship to a region of the world of which many of them have little knowledge or interest but in which their government is deeply mired. Arab-Americans and Muslims must be ready to be a part of this discussion and with patience and forbearance face increased hostility from some quarters and increased questions from others.

Nothing will ever be the same after September 11. That can be good or bad. I do not expect the coming "war" being advertised by President Bush to be the conventional type. If Osama bin Laden and his followers are indeed behind this outrage, sending an American army into Afghanistan would be both useless and suicidal as well as a gift to those who would welcome the opportunity to kill more Americans on their terms and terrain. Listening to President Bush ratchet up his promises is worrying. Unless the goal is simple retribution against anyone or anything, there is no obvious conventional war scenario that would be anything but counterproductive, do anything but feed a cycle of death and violence with no logical end.

On the shoulders of the decent America that emerged from the destruction of September 11 is an enormous responsibility to this country and to the world. It is a responsibility made all the harder to bear when the smoke literally has not yet cleared from the skies of Manhattan, the grieving has barely begun, and the hounds of war are straining at the leash.

* * *

James G. Abourezk *was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970, and to the U.S. Senate in 1972; in 1980, he founded the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, now the largest Arab-American organization in the United States. His Link article, "History of the Middle East Conflict," appeared in 1974 (vol. 7, #2).*

We do not yet know who was behind the bombings in New York and Washington and, without exception, all of us hope that whoever it was, they will be brought to justice sooner rather than later. Allowing such terror to continue cannot

be tolerated. Neither, however, should we blindly bomb civilians in retaliation, most of whom are already suffering at the hands of dictatorial regimes that, interestingly, the United States government has supported.

Before now, I had always felt a bit nervous about traveling in the Middle East and in Europe—nervous, because I knew that, at some point, someone would assess a random and deadly accounting against Americans as revenge for our government's policies overseas. As someone recently pointed out in an analysis of the horrible terrorist attack against New York and Washington, most American citizens happily go about their business believing that, because we have the best of intentions, other people love and respect us. Of course, the reality is different. Unknown to most of us, our government promotes in our names the darkest of policies overseas, and those who are made to pay for those policies are innocent Americans—civilians for the most part.

The CIA would likely term what happened last week as, "blowback," a word the agency uses to describe an operation that has gone sour with negative results to the United States. We not only have supported the most repressive of dictatorial regimes against their own citizens, but our leaders and our media try to make us forget that our government itself has terrorized and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

It is always done in the name of something outwardly honorable. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Baghdad, Beirut, Dresden, Panama, Afghanistan, Libya, have been bombed by our direct hand, and indirectly through Israel's hand—Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad, Qana, Gaza City, the South of Lebanon, and most of the West Bank are some of the death-receiving targets that come to mind.

General Pinochet in Chile, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the Shah of Iran all have bloodied their own people with our support and assistance and those countries are, among others, potential places to look for terrorist revenge against Americans. We even supported and trained the Mujahadeen when they were fighting our enemy, the Soviets. They have, of course, turned that training and support against us on more than one occasion.

At this time, we have no idea what the bombings were in retaliation for, but we do know that we Americans now have felt, for the first time on our soil, the grief and terror that result from indiscriminate death and destruction. I, for one, and I believe the rest of the nation as well, want to see no more of it. We hope now that our government will be less indiscriminate the next time it wants to force another country to bend to our will, and that our President will not resort to carpet bombing of foreign cities to satisfy the bloody cries of revenge being urged by some in this

country. What most of us want is the perpetrators of this act of murderous terrorism first to be identified, then brought to justice. We do not want civilians in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or elsewhere to suffer for the actions of their own leaders or of the terrorists.

The hijackers in New York and Washington did the Palestinians no favors if they committed the murders in their name, an act that will set back their cause a great number of years. The Israelis, experienced masters of political propaganda, are making the most of this American tragedy by trying to link the hapless Palestinians with our society's most current demon, Osama bin Laden. Small newspaper articles, buried among the larger headlines of our tragedy, have been, since last Tuesday, describing the deliberate acceleration of the Israeli slaughter of West Bank Palestinians. Requests by the Israelis for even more American taxpayers' money no doubt will be granted without a second thought. Not much different from before, I grant you, but much easier nevertheless.

No matter who is found to have been behind the terrorism, there seems to be little doubt that the attack was directed at American power, for years much misused by our leaders all over the world.

We have an opportunity now, at the unthinkable cost of death and suffering by the victims and their families, to make corrections in our government's foreign policies that are in the interests of the people of America, not of American multinational corporations that seek to establish economic empires overseas at the cost of human freedom, and not in the interests of American political leaders who seek to make themselves famous by misusing the power given to them by the people.

It is time to stop Israel from using our weapons and our money to occupy Palestine.

It is time to stop giving unconditional support to dictatorships all over the world that oppress their own people.

It is time to make our government's foreign policies a more accurate reflection of the majority of the people of the United States, a people who are just and decent.

* * *

Marc H. Ellis is University Professor of American and Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University. His *Link* article, "Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," appeared in 1991 (vol. 24, #2).

Less than a week after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Jews around the world enter into the most difficult and somber holy days

of the Jewish calendar. The time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as the Days of Awe and Repentance. In the shadow of destruction and death, the timing could not be more appropriate.

Like clergy of all faiths, rabbis prepare their sermons in advance. Before these tragic events, most were preparing to speak to their congregations about the need for Jews to remain unified behind the state of Israel, especially in light of the negative publicity surrounding the continued Israeli suppression of the Al Aqsa intifada and the recently-concluded U.N. conference on racism held in South Africa.

Despite their proximity in time, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and the Durban conference are, at least for the moment, distant in thought and emotion. All is in the shadow of the destruction and death relived endlessly on television. What, then, will the rabbis now emphasize in their sermons? What lessons can be drawn?

Some will highlight a connection between these events, for Americans now understand the violence and sorrow that terrorism leaves in its wake, known intimately by Israelis. Perhaps now America and Israel are drawn even closer together, for they hold in common the values of decency and democracy. Do we not now share the common war against the forces that threaten civilization? Rabbis will reinforce the need for Jewish and American unity in the broader arc of dramatic religious rhetoric. Contrasting the forces of good and evil, dividing humanity into the civilized and uncivilized, demanding before God that the line be drawn as to who is for life and who is for death, Muslims will be called to join in this war. Rabbis will emphasize that the "real" Islam is, like "authentic" Judaism, a religion of peace and justice. They will call on Muslims – and Christians for that matter – to condemn terrorism as their ticket to the club of the civilized.

Yet this club is haunted by unanswered and, for the most part, unasked questions. Are the solidarity of America and Israel and the fraternity of the civilized the only lessons to be learned during these days in which images of destruction are omnipresent? Is repentance to be demanded only of the "other"? Are America and Israel innocent? Do the "real" Judaism, Islam and Christianity project civilization and righteousness and nothing else? Do "they" – violent and shadowy terrorists – only symbolize darkness and chaos?

To see the lesson of the Jewish day of atonement in a rote manner – that Jews, as victims of terrorism and disapprobation, can now support Israel and America without thought of misdeeds and culpability – is simplistic. The systematic assassination of Palestinian leaders and the invasion of Palestinian territory by Israel, using helicopter

gunships built in America and funded by American taxpayers, can hardly be justified as a war for civilization.

Terrorism that turns civilians into targets and commercial airliners into missiles deserves condemnation. But the dichotomies of innocence and guilt, civilized and uncivilized, do not serve us well. They do not bode well for the clarion call to eliminate terrorism from the face of the earth, or raise the central question facing Jews as a people. And they do not fulfill the demands of the Days of Awe and Repentance – to reflect anew, to turn away from injustice, to confess our sins as individuals, as a community and as a nation. We too are part of the cycle of violence that we condemn so easily when the burden is so dramatically placed on another people or nation.

We can condemn terrorism and still make our confession: That no matter the reasons with regard to Jewish history, what Israel has done and what Israel is doing today to Palestinians is wrong. We can question the singling out of Jews and Israel at the conference on racism and still affirm that American Jews benefit from racism towards other minority groups. We can still acknowledge that far too many Jews in America and in Israel have racist attitudes toward Palestinians and Arabs in general. We can stand with America without confusing an essential American goodness with innocence.

The criticisms of Israel, Jews and America, while too broadly drawn, retain a kernel of truth. They are essential to our own "teshuvah," the turning back to the deepest sense of oneself and to God, and to "tikkun olam," the repair of a broken world. Both resonate with the demands of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Like our politicians and commentators who have filled the airwaves over the last days, only a small number of rabbis will wrestle with these difficult and complex issues. In light of these tragic events, the Days of Awe and Repentance, always difficult and demanding, are made more so. Affirming one's identity as Jewish and American and thus innocent is too easy. Identifying a way forward which is self-critical and inclusive involves a confession central to the days Jews observe so soberly. Amid the ruins, we have little choice.

* * *

James M. Wall is Senior Contributing Editor of *The Christian Century* magazine. His previous *Link* article, "'On the Jericho Road'" appeared in our September-October 2000 *Link* (vol. 33, #2). These reflections are reprinted with permission from *The Christian Century*.

In the final days of Jesus's ministry so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another in their desire to hear him. Luke reports that Jesus spoke first to his small group of disciples and said, Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. There is, he warned, a larger truth than the one we think we know.

This made no more sense to Peter, his lead disciple, than it does to us today. So Peter asks, is everyone going to understand what you are saying, or is it meant just for us, presumably the disciples? Jesus answers with another series of parables which say, in effect, there is no us or them. There are only those who hear and those who see.

Then Jesus gives his famous weather example:

When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, A shower is coming; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say There will be scorching heat; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

What keeps the vast majority of Americans from interpreting what is happening in the horror that struck this nation on September 11? We see only the obvious, and we are angry and overwhelmed with grief, as indeed we should be. We see the ugly, calculated assault that leads to more than 5,000 deaths and billions of dollars lost. We respond, under the rhetorical guidance of our President, with a determination to go to war against the wrongdoers.

But those are the obvious responses. Surface data evokes immediate, predictable and understandable responses. We prepare for the rain and the heat by hauling out the umbrellas and moving into the shade. But we do not take the next step and interpret the present time. Why not? Because we are trapped in the narrow and limited vision of our own narrow perspective.

A crime has been committed against our people and our nation. Many of those responsible for these crimes died in the plane crashes. Others remain behind and justice demands that they be held accountable. But justice is not served through retaliation. We retaliate only because we want to lash out to satisfy our hunger for revenge. Such hunger will not be satisfied.

At the beginning of the National Cathedral service three days after September 11, the dean of the cathedral spoke carefully and adroitly, considering that he spoke in a moment of a national surge of patriotism, mourning and anger, when he said: ". . . the evil hand of hate and cowardly aggression which has devastated the innocent in so many other lands has visited America this week and too many of her children are no more."

Very few in the national audience that heard the words, "in so many other lands," turned their thoughts to the homes, the villages, the police stations, the hospitals, and the people of Palestine who have suffered constant attacks from Israeli military assaults over many years. Few would have considered the number of Iraqi citizens who are deprived of basic medical care, whose land remains devastated by a U.S.-sponsored war and its ugly aftermath.

Perhaps some in the national audience might have thought of the suffering of the Israeli citizens who live in constant fear of suicide bombers. But such thoughts would have come from those whose perspective embraces these sufferers as members of our international family. But that family is larger than the one embraced by our narrow perspective.

George Semaan, editor of the Arab newspaper Al Hayat, wrote a few days after September 11, that the U.S. will not be able to uproot terrorism "unless it changes its perspective on how it builds its interests and how it defends them, by building a network of relationships that takes into consideration the interest of others, who are weak and who have rights but are incapable of imposing these interests or these rights."

Let those who have ears to hear, hear; and those who have eyes to see, see. Retaliation of any magnitude will solve nothing. Only a change in perspective that will embrace those who are weak and who have rights will move us out of our warring madness.

* * *

James A. Graff teaches at the University of Toronto, Canada, and wrote our vol. 23, 1993, #2 Link "An Open Letter to Mrs. Clinton."

How could any sane human being butcher and devastate American lives on the scale of the horror witnessed September 11th? The terrorists must have viewed the U.S. as the incarnation of evil, and the deaths of its citizens and the devastation of their loved ones' lives as "just punishment" or "acceptable collateral damage" in a war to bring the triumph of good over evil.

This is the kind of thinking that in the last decade alone fuel ed genocide in former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda and the former Zaire. It is, however, echoed by those Americans and Canadians who call for massive retaliation against "the Arabs," "the Muslims," or "the Afghans" and by those who have assaulted or terrorized fellow citizens who they thought had the wrong ancestry or the wrong faith. And echoes of this kind of thinking can be heard in President Bush's vows to wage a war against "terrorists" and against those countries which support, aid or harbor

them—a war, he assures us, in which good will prevail over evil.

Those who are demanding blood for blood, or calling for a crusade against the Islamic world will be satisfied, it seems, with nothing less than the infliction of massive suffering within the borders of one or more Arab or Muslim states. For some, the people of those countries—from newborns to the aged and infirm—are somehow responsible, somehow guilty, somehow legitimately made to die, to suffer grievously, because of the real or alleged sins of some, perhaps a handful, of their number.

One can identify the savagery of such thoughts by identifying the Evil to be so massively assaulted with a demonic individual, an Osama bin Laden, Yasir Arafat, or Saddam Hussein, whose destruction, however regrettable, converts the slaughter of the innocents into a military and political necessity. No doubt, this is exactly how some of the terrorists who wreaked such havoc in New York and Washington thought about Americans.

If it passes quickly, thinking that way is simply a mark of mindless rage. If, however, it shapes one's understanding of the human world, it is both crazed and unconscionable. In either case, it is unconscionable for individuals or governments to act on such conceptions of collective punishment.

To their credit, both the U.S. and Canadian leadership seem to have distanced themselves from such moral madness by condemning those who have blamed, vilified, or attacked Arab and Muslim fellow citizens. Will those condemnations be reflected in the rhetoric, planning and prosecution of the promised "war on terrorism"?

So far, the rhetoric focuses on destroying Osama bin Laden's terrorist bases and support in Afghanistan and elsewhere as the first order of business in a protracted war of the civilized countries of the world against terrorism. Planners, we are told, are calculating how much "collateral damage" to inflict in order to rid the world of Osama and his terrorist cells. Those who committed the atrocities of September 11 may have harbored similar thoughts about using and targeting Americans when seeking to destroy major symbols of American military and economic hegemony in what they perceived as a prolonged struggle against Evil.

Those who think this way accept the legitimacy, however, regrettable, of treating people as expendable instruments, and their deaths and sufferings as acceptable "collateral damage" in the violent prosecution of a morally compelling cause. This is precisely how the murderous suicide pilots treated thousands of Americans on September 11th.

It is also what the U.S.-trained and funded Contras did in Nicaragua, when they targeted noncombatants, especially teachers, healthcare workers, union organizers, and suspected Sandinista supporters. And butchering, torturing and terrorizing civilians, ordinary folk, mostly of Indian extraction, is what protégés of the U.S. did during the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and what they are doing now in Colombia. It is what U.S. forces themselves did when bombing the barrios of Panama City when they overthrew and captured General Noriega, and when they selected some clearly civilian targets in the war they led to overthrow Milosovic and expel Serbian forces from Kosovo.

It is the targeting of noncombatants, of civilians, of third parties to some conflict, of those who have nothing to do with the shedding of blood, of those on the periphery of a political struggle, which renders it terrorism, a crime against humanity, and utterly unconscionable.

That is why those who are responsible for such acts should be brought to justice as criminals, why steps should be taken to prevent terrorism and to deal with the conditions that lead people to accept or embrace it. But that means, among other things, insuring that recourse to violence for political objectives really is both a matter of self-defense and a last resort. It means setting a very, very high threshold for resorting to arms and for the selection of acceptable targets in armed conflicts. In evaluating the use of armed force, the lower the threshold for recourse to arms or for what would count as "acceptable collateral damage," the more clearly would its use qualify as an act of terrorism.

That is why President Bush seems to be setting the stage for massive, repeated, U.S.-conducted, U.S.-orchestrated, U.S.-supported state terrorism, whose first victims will be the already stricken Afghani people, all in the name of a war against terrorism. It will be a war of terror against terror, in which super-powerful state terrorists will try to destroy whoever is prepared to attack or to resist them by "fair means or by foul." What looms before us is the threat of an age of techno-barbarism, whose scope and scale we cannot now predict.

This is because terrorism breeds vengeful terrorism. How many of the Palestinian "children of the stones," whose families, friends, or who themselves were victims of the Israeli army or Israeli settler terror during the first intifada became or supported suicide terror attacks on Israeli civilians? How many of the victims of a highly selective terrorist war "against terrorism" will survive to avenge its victims? And just where will the new techno-barbarism lead us? From continent to continent, mass grave to mass grave, victims to victims, until, exhausted, a

21st century version of the Peace of Westphalia will bring the horrors to an end? Is this what America wants?

If the world is to be rid of the scourge of terrorism, leaders and citizens alike must purge themselves of notions of collective guilt, of wars to insure that Good prevails over Evil, and of human beings as legitimate targets, or their deaths and suffering as acceptable "collateral damage" in such struggles. We must, in short, purge ourselves of the mentality of terrorists.

We also must address the very real injustices, deprivations, oppression and suffering which make terrorism an option, and for some, the apparently sole option to bring redress or relief, if not now, then in some distant future.

Finally, we must bring terrorists to justice, including those among us who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in our names, even in the name of fighting terrorism itself.

* * *

Jack B. Sunderland *has been president of AMEU since 1968.*

As I was composing my thoughts on the tragic events of September 11, I happened to come across a letter to the editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune from a Mark Vaughan.

Mr. Vaughan's words struck me so vividly that I phoned him. In an ironic way, I told him, he had poignantly described the reason we founded AMEU some 34 years ago.

I asked him if he would like to receive a complimentary copy of The Link. He said he would. I asked, too, if he would tell us what he thought about it. He agreed.

AMEU has a wide circulation, but it was built up one subscriber at a time. I hope our Link readers might be inspired by Mr. Vaughan's letter to the point that they will send us the names and addresses of *anyone* they think may be interested in receiving our publication. To as many names as you give us, the AMEU office will send a complimentary copy of The Link.

Mr. Vaughan's letter follows:

Saturday, September 15, 2001

To the Editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune:

While there is much sentiment for retaliation, I am struck with two questions. The first is, "Who did this?"

We cannot be hasty here. We must know with certainty.

The second is, "Why?" It's not something we should assume, nor is it a rhetorical question.

What was the motivation? What could be so bad that these people would give their lives and risk the wrath of a superpower?

In some small way, I feel partly responsible. I am ignorant of the plight of those in the Middle East. I know just the barest of facts regarding the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. I do not understand the Taliban, nor do I understand Islamism (sic).

I have been content to skip that part of the newspaper and go to the sports section instead. Is it possible that the situation is so bad that these people felt the only way to draw attention to it was to do what they did?

Some have said we need to retaliate and fight terrorism in the same way. This is insane.

For most of us, our religion does not condone terrorism and killing of innocents. We would be trying to fight foes using methods they are better at than we are.

Some have said we need to wipe out whole countries or races if necessary. History has proven that this is neither wise, nor even possible.

Ultimately, we must truly understand our enemies. All of us need to work toward understanding.

I am not talking about sound-bite information from network television. I am talking about making it a point to learn enough so we do not make the same mistakes again when dealing with a people, or religion or state.

We are, and have been, missing something here. No rational beings would do what they did to a power much bigger and stronger unless they felt there was no other way.

How can we have let this get this far? How can we have failed to understand the seriousness of their resolve?

"Insanity" is a word I have heard often the past few days. I am reminded of one definition of it: "Doing the same thing over and over, yet expecting different results."

It would be insane to move forward blinded by rage and retaliate against someone without understanding why we were attacked to begin with. — **Mark Vaughan, Encinitas, California**

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