The War on Terrorism
Myth and Reality
Steven Alan Carr

Myth: September 11th was an act of war
Reality: A war involves identifiable nations with ongoing, specific injuries and grievances to which there is no other resolution or redress. As horrific as the events of September 11th were, a tragedy of this magnitude and complexity has its own unique set of circumstances requiring targeted responses. Unlike a war, no nation has taken responsibility for them and no nation has specified injuries or grievances. The events of September 11th require meeting them on their own terms, no matter how seemingly incomprehensible, and not in terms of a Cold War that the US has already won more than 10 years ago.

Myth: US motivated by desire to combat terrorism
Reality: The United States routinely opposes allies such as Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom in UN resolutions condemning terrorism, genocide, war crimes and other crimes against humanity. Many times, the US casts the sole opposing vote. See U.N. Resolution E/CN.4/1998/L.7, for example, which condemns all acts of terrorism sponsored by both Palestinians and Israelis (vote 51-1 in favor, United States opposing). In 1998, 120 nations voted in favor of an International Criminal Court capable of prosecuting cases like those of September 11th. The United States joined only 6 other countries, including China and Iraq, in opposing the Court. In order for the Court to now take effect, 60 countries must ratify the treaty. As of 28 June 2001, only 36 countries have done so (http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/icc/).

Myth: US military action motivated by concern for the good of the international community
Reality: The US routinely rejects the international community on treaties banning or curtailing anti-ballistic missiles, land mines, emissions (Kyoto Accords) and racism (World Conference in Durban).

Myth: September 11th is like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor
Reality: The hijackings and subsequent attacks represent a tragedy of enormous scale. The seriousness of these acts deserves a response appropriate to the tragedy. Unlike Pearl Harbor, not a single nation or group has claimed responsibility for the events of September 11th. The United States entered World War II, not just after Pearl Harbor, but after a yearlong public Great Debate between those who supported intervention and those who supported isolation. Today’s instant war on terrorism will occur without any meaningful national or international debate.

Myth: The US historically at odds with Bin Laden and Taliban
Reality: According to The Washington Post, President Ronald Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 166 in March 1985, which authorized laundering money from the Golden Crescent drug trade to provide stepped-up covert military aid in the form of a dramatic increase in arms supplies a steady rise to 65,000 tons annually by 1987, as well as a ceaseless stream of CIA and Pentagon specialists to Pakistani secret police. From there, Pakistan helped fund and plan operations for heavily armed Afghan mujaheddin rebels of which Bin Laden was one fighting against the former Soviet Union. In addition to arms and expertise, the effort supplied thousands of Korans as well as extremist-nationalist tracts (19 July 1992).

Myth: Clinton was soft on terrorism, necessitating the current military action
Reality: The Clinton Administration initiated and supported anti-terrorist measures, including the International Criminal Court, by attempting to work with the international community. However, the Pentagon and the Republican leadership consistently blocked these efforts, insisting upon special rights and exemptions for the United States alone (http://www.peacezine.org/Editorials/foreign_relations_at_a_crossroad.htm).

Myth: Protracted war effort is good for the economy
Reality: Today’s economy transcends national borders. While the military and defense sector may benefit from war, today’s economy has moved from a manufacturing to service base. If anything, a war effort will prove disruptive to a service-based economy. Air travel declines dramatically in time of war, for example. According to the New York Times, executives of major airlines already have announced that they expect to lay off 100,000 workers in the United States (19 Sep. 2001).
Myth: This is a war between civilization and psychopathic barbarians

Reality: Civilization has created the barbaric conditions that give rise to the Osama Bin Ladens and Saddam Husseins of the world. As historian Richard L. Rubinstein observes, the Nazi Holocaust bears witness to the advance of civilization. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, over 500,000 Iraqi children have died since the imposition of United Nations sanctions. Bin Laden, Hussein and their successors will gain access to weapons of mass destruction, regardless--perhaps even as a result--of how civilization manages to destabilize entire regions.

Myth: Arabs and/or Muslims are responsible for the attacks of September 11th.

Reality: Included as victims from 63 nations, Arabs and Muslims suffered from the attacks, an injury only compounded by reports of subsequent anti-Arab and Muslim violence in the U.S. According to the U.S. State Department, the list of missing includes 200 Pakistanis alone. Over 500 of the missing after September 11th come from Arab and/or Muslim nations about the same number as those missing from the United Kingdom (http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/terrormap.htm).

Myth: The world hates the United States because of our prosperity and freedoms.

Reality: The United States inspires both admiration and loathing throughout much of the world. Reasons for these reactions are as varied as the people who express their opinions. However, people across a diverse spectrum--including Arabs, Christians, Muslims, Israelis and American Jews--remain angry toward U.S. foreign policy and the way in which these policies treat the rest of the world. For example, sanctions against Iraq have done nothing to prevent Saddam Hussein from obtaining weapons of mass destruction, regardless of whether the Iraqi people have food on their table. Also, the U.S. has lost credibility as an honest broker of peace--even among Israelis and American Jews--since it refuses to condemn what much of the Arab world sees as Israeli-sponsored terrorism against Palestinians. Finally, U.S. foreign policy holds even its allies in contempt, while demanding that the United States answer to no one. In a speech given before the United Nations Security Council in January 2000, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jesse Helms told the body that no UN institution--not the Security Council, not the Yugoslav tribunal, not a future International Criminal Court--is competent to judge the foreign policy and national security decisions of the United States (http://www senate.gov/~foreign/minority/2000/pr012000.cfm).

Myth: Islam is more prone to fanaticism than is Christianity or Judaism.

Reality: Islam is no more prone to fanaticism than is Christianity, Judaism, or any rabid patriotism. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, a fanatic refers to anyone possessed by an excessive and irrational zeal, especially for a religious or political cause. In a 11 September Open Letter to America, Operation Rescue claims that the Lord has smitten us because the blood of over 44,000,000 pre-born children has brought this destruction to our shores (www.operationrescue.org). According to the Anti-Defamation League, the Reverend Jerry Falwell blamed pagans, pro-choice advocates, feminists, gays, the ACLU, and People for the American Way for making God mad and bringing about the attacks of September 11th. "I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped make this happen,'" Falwell stated on the television program 700 Club airing 14 September. Host Pat Robertson replied to Falwell's remarks that he "totally" concurred (http://www.adl.org/terrorism_america/saying_091401.asp) Falwell later publicly retracted his remarks.

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