

The Empire has no clothes.

By Jorge R. Mancillas

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It was more, much more, than the twin towers of the World Trade Center which collapsed on September 11. It was the illusory clothing that cover the naked American body.

This ruthless terrorist attack exposed cracks in American society, for too long a virtual island blind to international realities and to the devastating consequences for other societies of the operations of rapacious American-based global corporations and of our Government's foreign policy, as well as the rage it breeds. Absorbed by the fantasies of a television-centered culture and the drives of a consumerist society, it took the criminal actions of a band of ruthless terrorists to push the reality of much of the world into American TV screens and into the lives of thousands of New Yorkers.

The attack exposed our vulnerability. Over and over, it was stated without grounds that the attack had to be the action of a sophisticated group with abundant resources. They could not accept the simple elegant effectiveness, brilliant in its perversity, of an attack carried out with tools as simple as knives, with no automatic weapons or explosives. Their main weapons were surprise and fear, turning --with their choice of targets, disregard for human life and their willingness to sacrifice their own-- civilian airplanes into virtual bombs.

Totally useless were our nuclear missiles, any missile shield, our mighty armed forces with powerful high-tech weapons, our intelligence services with their \$30 billion annual budget and 20,000 employees. So was the FBI, law enforcement agencies, metal detectors and other make believe "security" measures. What was exposed is the fact that we have no national security policy. No chest pounding and threats of revenge can hide that fact. Programs which carry that name, --in the current global reality--, are primarily military programs to extend and protect the economic and political interests of global corporations. Where is the policy to protect the American population?

Americans have a right to feel angry, but we should be smart enough to place some of the blame where it belongs: on a political leadership which has shown --with its economic, foreign, environmental and now security policies--, that its priorities lie not in protecting the interests of the majority of the population. After the Lockerbie disaster, \$3 billion was spent upgrading airport security in other countries. In the United States, the FAA conducted a cost-benefit analysis that put a price tag on human life and reached different conclusions than elsewhere. The result was a system that relied on poorly paid, poorly trained airport guards, lax background checks of those employees and high turnover. Even then, enforcement was poor. Both airlines - United and American - have been fined \$400,000 and \$500,000 over the past year for security lapses.

Exposed was the inadequacy of our political leadership. While a gray cloud of ash and dust advanced over southern Manhattan, extending fear, confusion and chaos, President Bush was whisked into safety, flown from Florida to Louisiana, and then Nebraska, offering empty statements along the way and showing his complete inability to lead the nation. When he finally returned to the White House at the end of the day, the country had managed without him or his cabinet. Gripped by fear --at best needless caution-- taking measures which disrupted normal activities, like shutting down government buildings, universities, skyscrapers, thus extending the economic damage caused by the terrorists attacks. There was no national policy in place which relied on the best available information transmitted through an emergency network to policy makers, together with a host of recommendations. When Bush emerged from his helicopter as darkness descended, he walked alone and in silence, with a somber and lost expression in his face. The brief message without a message he sent to the nation that evening only reinforced his image of incapacity. The intense PR damage containment campaign he has engaged since will only partially erase those initial images, and only because Americans are in a generous mood.

The repetition of empty phrases about the virtues of our nation by political "leaders" only tacitly admitted that they were somehow in question. When what the terrorists had attacked, without regard for innocent victims, were symbols of American military and financial might. Congress could offer no better than the sorry spectacle of over a hundred of them singing "God Bless America," an image that was reminiscent of the orchestra on the deck of the Titanic on that fateful night when the "unsinkable" disappeared into the darkness of the Atlantic.

Interpretation of ongoing events was left to --as it has become the norm-- , television anchors, reporters and commentators, who were the only ones to provide some perspective.

Over and over again, commentators compared the terrorist attacks

with Pearl Harbor. But the only similarities lay in the element of surprise and the magnitude of the damages. The great difference is the nature of the enemy. No, to find better parallels, we must go back to the successful attacks against the capitol of the decaying Roman empire by the Visigoth Alaric in 410 AD or its sacking by the Vandals led by Gaeseric in 455.

Symbols --like the unsinkable Titanic--, of our groundless sense of invulnerability the twin towers of the World Trade Center are now but mounds of rubble and ashes and an ignoble cemetery for hundreds of precious human beings, innocent victims to the blindness of power as much as to the inhumanity of the terrorists.

What a tragedy it would be if we allow ourselves to fall into the grip of fear and insecurity. What a tragedy, however, if we don't take a good look at ourselves and all that has been exposed by these events.

We must not forget that, like many others who later came back to haunt us, Osama Bin Laden once received training and support from our intelligence agencies,when it suited their purposes. The faceless terrorists that organized this attack may have been "inhuman" monsters like the androids who spread fear in the prophetic film "Blade Runner." But we must also search beyond, and recognize their creators in the midst of our powerful elites.

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