

Few writers describe the ongoing madness as well as India's Arundhati Roy -- who is currently being dragged into court for her trouble. As she connects the dots between the obsession with Saddam, think about the millions Bush and Cheney are raising for the GOP in the November election -- who's doing the giving and why?

The following is mirrored from its source at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,799850,00.html>

Tomorrow thousands of people will take to the streets of London to protest against an attack on Iraq. Here, the distinguished Indian writer Arundhati Roy argues that it is the demands of global capitalism that are driving us to war.

Not again

by Arundhati Roy

27 September 2002

The Guardian

Recently, those who have criticised the actions of the US government (myself included) have been called "anti-American". Anti-Americanism is in the process of being consecrated into an ideology. The term is usually used by the American establishment to discredit and, not falsely -- but shall we say inaccurately -- define its critics. Once someone is branded anti-American, the chances are that he or she will be judged before they're heard and the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised national pride.

What does the term mean? That you're anti-jazz? Or that you're opposed to free speech? That you don't delight in Toni Morrison or John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean you don't admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean that you hate all Americans?

This sly conflation of America's music, literature, the breathtaking physical beauty of the land, the ordinary pleasures of ordinary people with criticism of the US government's foreign policy is a deliberate and extremely effective strategy. It's like a retreating army taking cover in a heavily populated city, hoping that the prospect of hitting civilian targets will deter enemy fire.

There are many Americans who would be mortified to be associated with their government's policies. The most scholarly, scathing, incisive, hilarious critiques of the hypocrisy and the contradictions in US government policy come from American citizens. (Similarly, in India, not hundreds, but millions of us would be ashamed and offended, if we were in any way implicated with the present Indian government's fascist policies.)

To call someone anti-American, indeed, to be anti-American, is not just racist, it's a failure of the imagination. An inability to see the world in terms other than those that the

establishment has set out for you: If you don't love us, you hate us. If you're not good, you're evil. If you're not with us, you're with the terrorists.

Last year, like many others, I too made the mistake of scoffing at this post-September 11 rhetoric, dismissing it as foolish and arrogant. I've realised that it's not. It's actually a canny recruitment drive for a misconceived, dangerous war. Every day I'm taken aback at how many people believe that opposing the war in Afghanistan amounts to supporting terrorism. Now that the initial aim of the war -- capturing Osama bin Laden - seems to have run into bad weather, the goalposts have been moved. It's being made out that the whole point of the war was to topple the Taliban regime and liberate Afghan women from their burqas. We're being asked to believe that the US marines are actually on a feminist mission. (If so, will their next stop be America's military ally, Saudi Arabia?) Think of it this way: in India there are some pretty reprehensible social practices, against "untouchables", against Christians and Muslims, against women. Pakistan and Bangladesh have even worse ways of dealing with minority communities and women. Should they be bombed?

Uppermost on everybody's mind, of course, particularly here in America, is the horror of what has come to be known as 9/11. Nearly 3,000 civilians lost their lives in that lethal terrorist strike. The grief is still deep. The rage still sharp. The tears have not dried. And a strange, deadly war is raging around the world. Yet, each person who has lost a loved one surely knows that no war, no act of revenge, will blunt the edges of their pain or bring their own loved ones back. War cannot avenge those who have died. War is only a brutal desecration of their memory.

To fuel yet another war -- this time against Iraq -- by manipulating people's grief, by packaging it for TV specials sponsored by corporations selling detergent or running shoes, is to cheapen and devalue grief, to drain it of meaning. We are seeing a pillaging of even the most private human feelings for political purpose. It is a terrible, violent thing for a state to do to its people.

The US government says that Saddam Hussein is a war criminal, a cruel military despot who has committed genocide against his own people. That's a fairly accurate description of the man. In 1988, he razed hundreds of villages in northern Iraq and killed thousands of Kurds. Today, we know that that same year the US government provided him with \$500m in subsidies to buy American farm products. The next year, after he had successfully completed his genocidal campaign, the US government doubled its subsidy to \$1bn. It also provided him with high-quality germ seed for anthrax, as well as helicopters and dual-use material that could be used to manufacture chemical and biological weapons.

It turns out that while Saddam was carrying out his worst atrocities, the US and UK governments were his close allies. So what changed?

In August 1990, Saddam invaded Kuwait. His sin was not so much that he had committed an act of war, but that he acted independently, without orders from his masters. This display of independence was enough to upset the power equation in the Gulf. So it was decided that Saddam be exterminated, like a pet that has outlived its owner's affection.

A decade of bombing has not managed to dislodge him. Now, almost 12 years on, Bush Jr is

ratcheting up the rhetoric once again. He's proposing an all-out war whose goal is nothing short of a regime change. Andrew H Card Jr, the White House chief-of-staff, described how the administration was stepping up its war plans for autumn: "From a marketing point of view," he said, "you don't introduce new products in August." This time the catchphrase for Washington's "new product" is not the plight of people in Kuwait but the assertion that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Forget "the feckless moralising of the 'peace' lobbies," wrote Richard Perle, chairman of the Defence Policy Board. The US will "act alone if necessary" and use a "pre-emptive strike" if it determines it is in US interests.

Weapons inspectors have conflicting reports about the status of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and many have said clearly that its arsenal has been dismantled and that it does not have the capacity to build one. What if Iraq does have a nuclear weapon? Does that justify a pre-emptive US strike? The US has the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world. It's the only country in the world to have actually used them on civilian populations. If the US is justified in launching a pre-emptive attack on Iraq, why, any nuclear power is justified in carrying out a pre-emptive attack on any other. India could attack Pakistan, or the other way around.

Recently, the US played an important part in forcing India and Pakistan back from the brink of war. Is it so hard for it to take its own advice? Who is guilty of feckless moralising? Of preaching peace while it wages war? The US, which Bush has called "the most peaceful nation on earth", has been at war with one country or another every year for the last 50 years.

Wars are never fought for altruistic reasons. They're usually fought for hegemony, for business. And then, of course, there's the business of war. In his book on globalisation, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Tom Friedman says: "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps." Perhaps this was written in a moment of vulnerability, but it's certainly the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalisation that I have read.

After September 11 and the war against terror, the hidden hand and fist have had their cover blown -- and we have a clear view now of America's other weapon -- the free market -- bearing down on the developing world, with a clenched, unsmiling smile. The Task That Never Ends is America's perfect war, the perfect vehicle for the endless expansion of American imperialism. In Urdu, the word for profit is fayda. Al-qaida means the word, the word of God, the law. So, in India, some of us call the War Against Terror, Al-qaida vs Al-fayda -- The Word vs The Profit (no pun intended). For the moment it looks as though Al-fayda will carry the day. But then you never know...

In the past 10 years, the world's total income has increased by an average of 2.5% a year. And yet the numbers of the poor in the world has increased by 100 million. Of the top 100 biggest economies, 51 are corporations, not countries. The top 1% of the world has the same combined income as the bottom 57%, and the disparity is growing. Now, under the spreading canopy of the war against terror, this process is being hustled along. The men in suits are in an unseemly hurry. While bombs rain down, contracts are being signed, patents registered, oil pipelines laid, natural resources plundered, water privatised and democracies undermined.

But as the disparity between the rich and poor grows, the hidden fist of the free market has its work cut out. Multinational corporations on the prowl for "sweetheart deals" that yield enormous profits cannot push them through in developing countries without the active connivance of state machinery -- the police, the courts, sometimes even the army. Today, corporate globalisation needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, preferably authoritarian governments in poorer countries, to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws, and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that its only money, goods, patents and services that are globalised -- not the free movement of people, not a respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical and nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, or, God forbid, justice. It's as though even a gesture towards international accountability would wreck the whole enterprise.

Close to one year after the war against terror was officially flagged off in the ruins of Afghanistan, in country after country freedoms are being curtailed in the name of protecting freedom, civil liberties are being suspended in the name of protecting democracy. All kinds of dissent is being defined as "terrorism". Donald Rumsfeld said that his mission in the war against terror was to persuade the world that Americans must be allowed to continue their way of life. When the maddened king stamps his foot, slaves tremble in their quarters. So, it's hard for me to say this, but the American way of life is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

Copyright © 2002 *Guardian Newspapers Limited*
Reprinted for Fair Use Only.