

THE FUTURE OF THE USA: THOUGHTS ON THE AMERICAN BOMBINGS ON THE 11TH SEPTEMBER 2001

Dr Sean Gabb



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Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 36
ISBN 1 85637 771 7
ISSN 0267-6761

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Introductory

On the 11th September 2001, I started out on holiday with Mrs Gabb to Greece. I was disembarking in a small airport when the bombings happened in America. We then drove off immediately to a small cottage in the hills above Chania, and did not go into town until we had eaten and drunk everything in the rather generous welcome pack left for us. When I did eventually hear about the bombings, I went back to the cottage and, looking out over the bay far beneath, wrote the following article in a lined exercise book I had bought for the purpose.

On getting back to England, I decided not to publish the article. The media was still flooded with report and speculation, and my own thoughts on the matter seemed too stale and lacking positive information to justify the effort of transcribing. Now, almost a year later, I have moved house, and I have found the exercise book in a box that I hoped contained something else. It is not quite so unpublishable as I thought last year, and so I am sending out. I publish it exactly as I wrote it, complete with repetitions and digressions.

Sean Gabb, Deal, England, 5th September 2002



Villa Aptera, Greece, 15th September 2001

I am presently on holiday half way up a Greek mountain with Mrs Gabb. As we have neither a radio nor a television set, and have made sure to keep the mobile telephones mostly turned off, it was several days before we heard about the terrorist raids in America. What little I do know about them now I had from an American I met outside a Roman church in Chania, from

a hurried telephone conversation with Dr Tame, and from a Greek newspaper that I read haltingly and with much skipping of demotic words. I am therefore almost uniquely qualified to comment on the matter.

I am not basically ignorant of the facts. I know what was bombed. I also think it reasonable to assume an Islamic connection. What I am missing is the endless television coverage—the politicians variously sobbing over the widows and orphans, and threatening some vague but terrible revenge; the journalists interviewing each other when no one else is saying anything they think worth covering; and co-ordinating the whole show in all its limited diversity, the Washington lie machine, now working a pitch that makes the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait nothing by comparison. Sorting through that lot for the occasional nugget of truth and relevancy must surely prevent anyone in the short term from clearly seeing the underlying reality of what has happened. And so, while I have no grasp of detail, and while what I do say will lack all immediacy when I do eventually send it out on the Internet, I think I have something that is worth saying.

First, to the legitimacy of the attacks. The Greeks I have spoken to seem mostly rather pleased by the attacks. The common response goes something like: “It was a terrible thing, and I feel for all those ordinary Americans - but they did have it coming”. I can understand this response. The Greeks have never much liked Westerners. They despised us long after their own days of greatness had passed. More recently, they have resented our superior wealth and civilisation. They only sided with us in the Cold War because of the bribes given to their politicians, and because they hated Soviet atheism more than our Enlightenment virtues. But

while I understand the Greek response, I do not agree with it. Undeniably, the American establishment and its British glove puppets have spent the past generation recklessly provoking what has just happened. But I am not at all pleased that it has happened. I have friends in both New York and Washington, and I do not know as I sit here writing if they were not among the victims. I am also strongly aware that what has been done in America could just as easily be done in England. I do not like it that our rulers have killed or helped to kill many times more Moslems than Americans died this week. But neither am I prepared to welcome a retaliation that threatens the whole of western civilisation. If our rulers now propose to carpet bomb whatever Islamic country may be harbouring the directors of the attacks, I cannot find it in me to raise a word of protest.

This being said, our longer term response cannot be purely violent. Just as the shootings in Sarajevo started the 20th century, so these aeroplane bombings have started the 21st. And the basic fact of this new century is the death of the American Empire.

Since 1945, the Americans have believed empire to be a fairly cheap business. It is not. The Romans discovered this more than 2000 years ago. They acquired their eastern provinces almost without trying—in one case, they were left a province in the will of the last local ruler. But when the Greeks of Asia Minor rose in support of Mithridates, they murdered 40,000 Roman citizens in one go; and it was only after years of hard fighting that the revolt was crushed. We learnt the cost of our own empire in the blood and humiliations of the South African War. The Americans are now learning the cost of their own empire. It is not a theoretical risk of nuclear annihilation, or a few colourful defeats in south east Asia that can be forgotten or ignored at home. It is the real and ever-present threat of mass terrorism within the United States. And unlike the Romans, but rather like us, the Americans do not have the firmness of mind to live with the costs of empire.

For the moment, I have no doubt, the Americans are breathing fire and vengeance; and they will cheer on anything their government does. But that is only for the moment. It can no longer be assumed that those people who hate America and are not afraid to die are also too stupid to throw away their lives to any great effect. Aeroplanes could be made more secure against a repeat of what has just been done by letting crew and passengers carry weapons—though I doubt if that will be considered, bearing in mind our rulers' dislike of an armed citizenry. But there are other cheap and easy means of killing civilians on a large scale. Deadly chemicals or germs can be dropped into reservoirs. Otherwise, there are people able to pray themselves into a frenzy, then willing to infect themselves with something deadly to spread as they walk through crowded railway trains. Whoever it was thought of taking over aeroplanes and crashing them into big buildings is a genius. But no genius is need to vary or improve on that flash of insight. If the Americans carry on as they have, they will be hit again and again. Before long, public opinion will sicken of imperial adventures. Even before then, the monied interests will demand an end to policies that plainly endanger them.

This, after all, is how the Americans usually behave in the face of violent resistance. 20 years ago, they went into Lebanon, telling themselves what a fine job they could do of restoring peace there. A single truck load of high explosive had them straight back out. Much the same happened in Somalia ten years ago.

I do not blame the Americans for such behaviour. Theirs is an individualistic, commercial civilisation. It is not capable of accepting death on a large scale unless there is no easy alternative. That is both the excellence and the weakness of their civilisation. They are not like the Romans. They are not even like the British and French.

And so, whatever the Americans may do in the short term, their empire has collapsed. It should never have been established. It was

maintained with endless cruelty and lies. But its passing will leave the same chaotic void as follows the end of every other great empire. Throughout the world, nations and classes raised to power by American support will now be left to find their natural level. The new equilibrium will take years to emerge, will involve unimaginable suffering, and may not be favourable to western civilisation.

The most obvious victim of these changes will be the State of Israel. Since it was founded, it has relied on American support. It has been able to count on American money and weapons and diplomatic support and military intelligence. Though there has always been much quiet grumbling in America at the scale of support, a reasonably united Jewish lobby, plus the fact that the costs of support have never been unbearable, has always kept the Congressional votes favourable. This will now change, even if not at first. No bribes or threats of character assassination will keep the votes favourable when the cost is more domestic terrorism. For all they disagree on other matters, Jews and anti-Semites agree that the Jewish lobby rules America. I do not think it does. Whatever influence it has enjoyed in Washington has been on the understanding of a limited liability to America. Every perceived increase in that liability will bring a proportionate decline of influence.

For the moment, of course, Israel is a great power in its own right. Its wealth and general civilisation make it unbeatable in any standard war. But the demographic trends in the Middle East are against it; and I am not sure how long a mostly western and liberal Israeli élite will remain willing all by itself to maintain Jewish supremacy even in Israel, let alone in Israel and the occupied territories. The men with beards who talk endlessly about God's promise to the Chosen Race would rejoice at ethnic cleansing and wars to establish regional hegemony. But they are not on the whole the people who rule that country. Those are visibly beset by very western moral qualms, and may not have the nerve to begin—let alone continue—the course

of terror by which alone their country can be saved. Any Israeli with dual citizenship is well-advised, therefore, to start looking seriously into what right of abode his children can expect to have elsewhere.

But I digress. That America will not remain an imperial power strikes me as not worth doubting. How the retreat will be managed is in doubt. The best option seems to be that the Americans should spend the next year in putting on a tremendous show of power—to seek out and punish those responsible for the bombings—and then should quietly scale down their activities in every place that does not involve some obviously vital national interest. And that means abandoning Israel and all the corrupt and inherently weak ruling classes they have been supporting throughout the Islamic world. The object should be to deter future terrorism by a combination of ruthless force and the avoidance of further provocation.

The more likely option, I fear, will involve their blundering about until there have been more and even larger terrorist attacks inside America. Hubris and Nemesis are never long separated. Right at the end of his book *Give War a Chance*, P.J. O'Rourke writes exultingly of his final experience while covering the 1991 Gulf War. He had hitched a lift out of Kuwait on a New Zealand warplane. Flying at 300 miles per hour, he and the crew dropped to a hundred feet over the Saudi desert and frightened a camp of Bedouins. A boy of about ten looked up into the sky. For the split second of visibility, his face could be seen awe-struck at the immense technical supremacy of western power. That technical supremacy, says Mr O'Rourke, is a sight the boy would never forget. Perhaps it has not been forgotten. The boy would now be a young man in his twenties. Am I the only person wondering if he ever took flying lessons?