



America's biggest, non-nuclear bombs are now being dropped on Afghanistan. These so-called 'daisy cutters' have as little to do with gardening as they do with an understanding of terrorism.

This is a wretched, indefensible war, against a wretched and undefended people. I am not talking about the Taliban and Northern Alliance fighters, who have been shooting it out with each other, using left over Soviet weapons, for the last 10 years since Russian troops left.

The 'undefended' are the 2 million internally displaced people, half of them children, caught up in the humanitarian tragedy that hangs over them.

By preventing news reporting within the country, the Taliban cushion us from the starkness of what is happening. From the wings, NGO's in the region describe the arithmetic of starvation in bleaker terms. Only 20% of the 'survival' food requirement is being delivered. Less than 2 weeks remain before the winter snows make roads impassable and food convoys irrelevant.

By the day, leaders of the bombing coalition urge us to remember September 11th, the voices of the dying, the last messages to their families and loved ones. But the squandering of 6,000 innocent civilian lives in the USA will not be offset by an Afghan cull of 600,000 or more equally innocent civilians. There was a universal public response - and quite rightly so - that 'something must be done about terrorism'. This cannot be redefined as public support to do the wrong thing, yet that is where the bombing is taking us.

When the winter snows melt and the Afghan dead are counted, the West will be blamed, irrespective of who governs the country. Our refusal to prioritise humanitarian aid over bombing raids also takes us much closer to the mindset of the terrorists than we should feel comfortable about. Those who flew planes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon may not have dismissed civilian deaths as collateral damage, but they would have argued the legitimacy of their actions in pursuit of higher cause. They too would have wanted to send out a warning to others who gave support to the 'satanic evil' they set themselves against. Their view of Islam (and of other faiths) may be distorted and hateful, but we should not pretend that it lacks support amongst the dispossessed and alienated of the Arab and Muslim world.

Bombing fans the flames of anti-American hatreds. It will create new war zones within Central Asia, re-enforce unresolved Arab grievances within the Middle East, and turn radical secular protest movements into intolerant fundamentalist ones. Within Britain and Western Europe it will also open fresh divisions within fractured and abandoned parts of Muslim communities, already on the receiving end of racial violence. If we become the war zone, we too will pay a heavy price.

Look at the lop-sidedness of what is happening. Muslim leaders are under increasing pressure to

denounce (Islamic) terrorism, whilst not a single protestant, catholic or Jewish church condemns the terror that bombing inflicts on innocent Afghans/Muslims. We demand that young Muslims who go to fight for the Taliban be tried as traitors, but say nothing about the open recruitment of mercenaries in Britain to support state terrorism in Latin America, Africa or Asia. Killing for conscience is treasonous, killing for cash is just trade. It is a skewed morality that we should be ashamed of.

The sophistry of ministerial statements about the terrorist threat is not much better. Already we are being told that anti-globalisation protesters are the West's spiritual extension of the bin Laden network. An array of corporate lobbyists and puppet politicians will attempt to describe the demands of global justice (equity, sustainability, rights and accountability) as little more than an anarchist threat to free trade.

How untimely it was, then, for 20 NGO's - including Christian Aid, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth and WDM - to launch their own critique of world trade rules on the day ministers were denouncing anti-globalisation protesters. NGO's are obviously another part of the al Qaeda network, and will have to be crushed or bombed, outlawed or maligned. If protesters turn up at Qatar to object to the corporate bandwagon that is as comfortable stealing jobs from the North as resources from the South, they too will be denounced as terrorists. It is a complete distortion of the situation we are in.

America has to be rescued less from its grief than its mindset. Bombing has become a substitute for thinking. Remove the right to bomb and the US Administration loses the ability to come up with any other plan. This is the trap that Britain also finds itself caught in. In the confusion that follows, we abandon the international rule of law, diplomacy and the United Nations, international offers to track down and break down the al Qaeda network, and a willingness to tackle the causes of terrorism, not just its manifestations.

A new economics, offering to do something about global poverty and inequality gets re-written as a WTO expansion of the rights of corporations over citizens. Cynicism rolls on in an uninterrupted, unstable, tyrannical mess. Wherever you look, the war machine is running out of good days to release bad news.

As the 'Stop the War' movement in Britain grows in strength, so it will have to embrace a wider agenda about the causes of terrorism, exclusion and instability. The real choices are not between religious fanaticism and free-market fundamentalism. They are to be found in an agenda based on global rights, justice and sustainability. It isn't the protestors who would have a problem with this. Those who would fill the sky with B52's and bomb a country into dust have a lot more of the re-thinking to do.