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The United States, the West and the Rest of the World

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The United States, the West and the Rest of the World

Abstract

Excerpt

The world will never be the same again after the terrible attack on the economic U.S., the military U.S., the foreign policy U.S., and on human beings like all of us. We embrace the victims of the violence, of all violence, in deep grief, and express our hope that perpetrators will be brought to justice. Violence at this level can only be explained by a very high level of dehumanisation of the victims in the minds of the aggressors, often due to a very deep level of unresolved, basic conflict. The word "terrorism" may describe the tactics, but like "state terrorism" only portrays the perpetrator as evil, satanic, and does not go to the roots of the conflict.

Keywords: *class struggle, Islam, Johan Galtung, September 11 terrorist attacks, United States*

Author Bio(s)

Johan Galtung is a Professor of Peace Studies and Director of TRANSCEND: A Peace and Development Network. Professor Galtung is one of the founding figures of the field and has taught at many universities worldwide. He has also written numerous books, all of which have contributed to the development of peace and conflict research.

POLICY FORUM:
In Response to September 11

THE UNITED STATES, THE WEST AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

Johan Galtung

Diagnosis

The world will never be the same again after the terrible attack on the economic U.S., the military U.S., the foreign policy U.S., and on human beings like all of us. We embrace the victims of the violence, of all violence, in deep grief, and express our hope that perpetrators will be brought to justice. Violence at this level can only be explained by a very high level of dehumanisation of the victims in the minds of the aggressors, often due to a very deep level of unresolved, basic conflict. The word "terrorism" may describe the tactics, but like "state terrorism" only portrays the perpetrator as evil, satanic, and does not go to the roots of the conflict.

The text of the targets reads like a retaliation for U.S. use of economic power against poor countries and poor people, U.S. use of military power against defenseless people, and U.S. political power against the powerless. This calls to mind the many countries around the world where the U.S. has bombed or otherwise exercised its awesome power, directly or indirectly; adding 100,000 dying daily at the bottom of an economic system by many identified with U.S. economic, military and political power. Given the millions, not thousands, of victims it has to be expected that this will generate a desire for retaliation somewhere, some time.

The basic dividing line in this conflict is class, of countries and of people. It is not civilisation, although the U.S. sense of mission, manifest destiny, and Islamic sense of righteousness are parts of it. Right now the confrontation seems to be between the U.S./West and Arabs/Muslims. But this may also be a fallacy of misplaced concreteness: the latter may possess more intention and more capability than other victims of the enormous U.S./West violence since the Second World War. We should neither underestimate the extent of solidarity in the "rest of the world", nor the solidarity of the world upper class, the West, and build solidarity with victims everywhere.

In placing the horrendous attack on the U.S. in the context of a cycle of retaliation there is no element of justification, no excuse, no guilt-attribution. There is only deep regret that this chain of violence and retaliation is a human fact. But it may also serve to make us break that vicious spiral.

Prognosis

With talk of Crusades from the U.S., and of the fourth stage of jihad, Holy War, from Islamic quarters, the world may be heading for the largest violent encounter ever. The first jihad, against the Crusades 1095-1291 lasted 196 years; the Muslims won. The second, against Israel, is undecided. The third, against communism in

Afghanistan, ended with Soviet withdrawal and collapse as a factor ending the Cold War (and no thanks). Muslims are willing to die for their faith.

Therapy

To prevent a slide into a large war with enormous, widespread suffering, the U.S., indeed everybody, should not rush to action. Dialogue and global education to understand how others think, and to respect other cultures, not debate to defeat others with stronger arguments, can lead the way toward healing and closure.

Governments in the West, and also in the South, cannot be relied upon to do this; they are too tied to the U.S. and also too afraid of incurring U.S. wrath. Only people can, only the global civil society. What is needed as soon as humanly possible is a massive peace movement, this time North-South. It worked last time, East-West. The future of the world is more than ever in the hands of the only source of legitimacy: people everywhere.