

*From: Gore Vidal. BLACK TUESDAY*

On September 11, when suicide pilots were crashing commercial airliners into crowded American buildings ... dark Tuesday was casting its long shadow across Manhattan and along the Potomac River.

... But what was — on bin Laden's mind? ... The Saudi Arabian Osama bin Laden enters history in 1979 as a guerrilla warrior ... to defend Afghanistan against the invading Soviets. Was he anti-Communist? Irrelevant question. He wants no infidels of any sort in the Islamic world. [...]

He warned the Saudi king that Saddam Hussein was going to invade Kuwait. Osama assumed that after his own victories as a guerrilla against the Russians, he and his organization would be used by the Saudis to stop the Iraqis. To Osama's horror, King Fahd sent for the Americans: thus were infidels established on the sacred soil of Mohammed ... Osama persuaded four thousand Saudis to go to Afghanistan for military training by his group [...]

In a twelve-page "declaration of war," he presented himself as the potential liberator of the Muslim world from the United States.

Osama's organization blew up two of our embassies in Africa, and put a hole in the side of an American warship off Yemen, ... and so on — to the events of Black Tuesday. G.W. Bush promised us: "... We're going to find these evildoers and we're going to hold them accountable," along with the other devils who have given Osama shelter.

As of the first month of 2002, the Pentagon pretends that the devastation of Afghanistan by our high-flying air force has been a great victory (... it was like destroying Palermo in order to eliminate the Mafia). In any case, we may never know what, if anything, was won or lost ... [...]

Understandably, bin Laden dislikes the United States as symbol and as fact. But when our clients, the Saudi royal family, allowed American troops to occupy the Prophet's holy land, Osama named the fundamental enemy "the Crusader Zionist Alliance." Thus, in a phrase, he defined himself ... He would rid all the Muslim states of their Western-supported regimes, starting with that of his native land. The word "Crusader" was the giveaway. In the eyes of many Muslims, the Christian West, currently in alliance with Zionism, has for a thousand years tried to dominate the lands of the Umma—the true believers. That is why Osama is seen by so many simple folk as the true heir to Saladin ...

Who was Saladin? Dates 1138–1193. In the century before his birth, Western Christians had established a kingdom at Jerusalem ... Saladin raised armies to drive out the Crusaders. He conquered Egypt, annexed Syria, and finally smashed the Kingdom of Jerusalem in a religious war that pitted Mohammedan against Christian. He united and "purified" the Muslim world and though Richard Lion-heart was the better general, in the end he gave up and went home.

[...]

Although the American people have no direct means of influencing their government, their “opinions” are occasionally sampled through polls ... Three days after Dark Tuesday, 74 percent [of Americans] said they thought, “It would be necessary for Americans to give up some of their personal freedoms.” 86 percent favored guards and metal detectors at public buildings and events.

[...]

It seems forgotten by our amnesiac media that we once energetically supported Saddam Hussein in Iraq’s war against Iran and so Saddam thought, not unnaturally, that we wouldn’t mind his taking over Kuwait’s filling stations. Overnight our employee became Satan—and so remains ... Our imperial disdain for the lesser breeds did not go unnoticed by the latest educated generation of Saudi Arabians, and by their evolving leader, Osama bin Laden, whose moment came in 2001...

... [A *New York Times* writer] Anthony Lewis thinks it wise, ... in cooperation with other nations, ... to contain Tuesday’s darkness by understanding its origin (my emphasis – *G.V.*) while ceasing our provocations of cultures opposed to us and our arrangements. Lewis ... favors peace now. So do I. But then we are old and have been to the wars and value our fast-diminishing freedoms ...

[...]

Missiles are blunt weapons. Those terrorists are smart enough to make others bear the price for what they have done, and to exploit the results. A maddened U.S. response that hurts still others is what they want: It will fuel the hatred that already fires the self-righteousness about their criminal acts against the innocent.

What the United States needs is cold reconsideration of how it has arrived at this pass. It needs, even more, to foresee disasters that might lie in the future.

War is the no-win all-lose option ... As glorious as total revenge will be for our war lovers, a truce between Saladin and the Crusaders is in the interest of the entire human race.

[...]

This is from a pre-Osama text: “Restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press; on the rights of assembly and associations; and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic, and telephonic communications and warrants for house searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property, are also permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed.” The tone is familiar. Clinton? Bush? Ashcroft? No. It is from Hitler’s 1933 speech calling for “an Enabling Act” for “the protection of the People and the State” after the catastrophic Reichstag fire that the Nazis had secretly lit.

[...]

Finally, the physical damage Osama and friends can do us—terrible as it has been thus far—is as nothing as to what he is doing to our liberties. Once alienated, an “unalienable right” is apt to be forever lost ...