A Long Road to Peace: The Waking of A Dream?

By Sung-Kee Kim

[1] At first almost sounding like an overwhelmingly bad joke, something so fantastic that its occurrence could only be found in Tom Clancy's books, could not be taken for real. Tuesday afternoon, rumors about a plane crashing into one of the two main buildings of the WTC spread through the library. Torn out of melancholy and lack of motivation for my studies, I seized the opportunity to gather more information. After two phone calls – one not seeming enough - and a news flash from the genitor's radio, it slowly seemed official: something terrible had happened. The instantaneously surfacing mental and physical reaction was an undeniable feeling of vulnerability and fragility. It was to persist. Back home, watching the news for the next four hours seemed to be most appropriate. Shock, fear, and a morbid fascination about the professionalism of the deed were mixing. The most striking feeling, however, was the experience of deepest insecurity about what I have always felt as my strong belief in the ultimate goodness of man. This conviction and image seemed to be have been irreversibly replaced by what we had all just seen. It all of a sudden seemed so obvious that to associate vulnerability and gravest violations of human welfare and social peace with places outside or far away from our allegedly "safe havens" had been a terrible illusion. It also made clear the amiuity of the instantly voiced comment on the "clash of civilizations". [2] The following days, however, showed the whole western world apparently focussed on the question *who* had organized and executed such a dreadful deed in such professional cold-blooded manner, and *how* they had done it. The questions put to us were whether and how the western intelligence could have failed so immensely, whether airport and aircraft security had been too lax, how these "sleepers" could have even been living in Western countries without being recognized, and how they could be traced and, ultimately, how such terrorist attacks could effectively be prevented in the future. [3] Nobody likes Usama Bin Ladin these days. From enemy of the state he has become enemy of the (civilized?) world. All of the evidence that could be collected so far, and all the suspects that have so far been caught, seem to support the assumption that Bin Ladin was the genius mastermind behind the attacks - or so we are told. From the very first news, the message was that Usama Bin Ladin not only seemed to be the prime suspect but that he *was* the perpetrator. The collection of evidence and the proving of his guilt must apparently have been executed stunningly fast. [4] While we all are still trying to somehow grasp the dimensions of the deed, the *Why* and the political and economic implications have to be examined. Simple black/white or perpetrator/victim schemes don't apply. "You're either with us or against us", President Bush exclaimed. Yes and no. As a general rule the perpetrator is guilty, and the victim is not. This rule applies, at least, in criminal law. In regard to foreign policy and international relations, though, it lacks consistency in explaining the doings and wrong-doings, and the complexity and the many existing layers of international affairs. The attacks of September 11th are monstrous evidence that the world is out of control, and maybe they were accompanied by the spirits of the many dead of America's wars and "proxy wars". With regard to the alleged perpetrator being in many ways associated with Afghanistan, it might seem that America - in a terrible way - "reaps" what it has sown, after, a decade and more ago, US intelligence helped to create Usama Bin Ladin and the fundamentalist Taliban regime that shelters him. "Infinite Justice" or "Enduring Peace", as the operation now has been named, therefore cannot be America's holy war against this world's evil. It must become a process in which also America admits its own wrong-doings, the injustice and the mistakes of its own policies, even in the very moment where the most terrible price is being paid for them, as Derrida put it in his speech in Frankfurt last week upon receiving the *Theodor W. Adorno Preis*. It will be hard to deal with the fact that today's "Sarajevo" is not located in some distant and remote country – which, for Europeans, it never was, anyway. Destruction and death are not exclusive realities and torments of Balkan or Third World countries. But they are realities, not mere images on the screen of our movie theatres or books. [5] The foremost task will not be the practical handling of the conflict, although the immediate solidarity and unrelenting efforts displayed by helpers in New York, the country and abroad is stunning and impressive. The increase of security at airports and aircrafts, the formation of an "international alliance against terrorism", aid, and the planned restrictions of civil liberties that support democracy are (inter-/supra-)national measures that might stabilize the political and economic situation in the short-run, while these actions – at the same time - clearly pose a strong threat to the rule of law. However, peace defined as the absence of or the unarmed resolution of human conflict is not a state that will be reached sometime in the near future. It is a constant struggle. *Lasting* peace cannot be achieved through some quick fixes on this or that political issue or in this or that geographical spot. Terrorism is not the cause of the disease, it is a symptom, a mindset which we will have to explore much more very quickly. Furthermore, it has become very obvious that terrorism has no home country, but rather operates like a conglomerate with separate and partly independent subsidiaries. Therefore, the problem we're facing goes far beyond the conventional political parameters such as "nation", "enemy", "war" or "self-defence". [6] The urging call for considerateness along with the strategy to find long-term solutions, then, will remain unheard if false foes and foe-images are created in order to justify a series of acts that are not grounded in a deeper understanding of the conflict. *Realpolitik* and pragmatism have been and still are the ruling standards in policy-making, vision and cause (cautiousness??) are not. [7] Justice can only be understood but as a means to create and keep peace. It possesses a certain momentum that includes rather than separates, that unites rather than draws boundaries. Most religions teach embracement, at least in theory, because we all have the same cause. Yet, we see separation and

the danger of conflict on amost every level of the various systems that co-exist and interact in this world: "First World - Third World", "democracy – dictatorship", "Christianity (not to speak of the discrepancies between the Catholic and Protestant churches and their many confessions) – Islam", just to name a few. Are, thus, the military and political actions an expression of a cementation of the separatist status quo or the beginning of an awakening? "The day the world changed", *The Economist* claimed. True or false?