

Dear Mr. President, Please Listen to Your Inner Voice...

I'm sure you are taking all precautions and measures and doing everything to protect the American lives and interest ever since you became the President. The entire world admires you for the role you played in the days and months following the worst attack of terrorism on the soil of America. Overnight you became a firefighter, a policeman, a rescue worker, a doctor, a therapist, a caregiver and a comforter. Those who lost loved ones on September 11 and those of us who didn't, saw in you a loving father, a comforting son, a caring kin and a dear friend. You became someone everybody in this country needed at that moment and still does. Your words of comfort and solace reached every home and touched every heart in the land and even crossed the international borders. They consoled one and all as if you were right there beside every one of us at the same time. On that fateful day when everyone was in shock and pain, you provided direction. In the following weeks and months you chased the perpetrators and the masterminds of this heinous crime with all the might that the world has come to reckon with. Your leadership was seen in a new perspective - in the light of renewed awe and admiration - as you united the entire globe in your relentless fight against the new kind of terrorism of the new millennium.

In the following months the reinforced broad war against terrorism, however, took many ugly turns. Every Muslim name was given the face of a terrorist and every Arabic-speaking male of Middle-Eastern/North African descent became prime suspect of harboring ill and plotting to hurt America and the Americans. As you as well as most of the Americans know, this is a far cry. But unfortunately this stereotyping has already taken its toll. Since then the media has had a field day - every day. Even the most revered names in the world of journalism have fallen prey to this fatal attraction. Apparently, the rage has blurred every vision and clouded every judgment from day one. But can anyone ever imagine and fathom the misery of the Muslims in this country, when they were witnessing the defiling of their own religion and faith by a few others who proclaimed the same faith? Did anybody ever wonder what an internal turmoil and excruciating battle the Muslims in this country were fighting, when they were faced with this stigma? You know as much as I do that every Muslim in not Mohammad Atta or Osama Bin Laden, just like every Christian in America is not David Koresh or Timothy McVeigh. At times when I'm undulating between hope and despair, I'm reminded of your passionate speech of February 10, 2001 on the floor of UN General Assembly, when you said: *"History will record our response and judge or justify every nation in this hall. The civilized world is now responding. We act to defend ourselves and deliver our children from a future of fear. We choose the dignity of life over a culture of death. We choose lawful change and civil disagreement over coercion, subversion and chaos. These commitments - hope and order, law and life - unite people across cultures and continents. Upon these commitments depend all peace and progress. For these commitments we are determined to fight."*

With the January 27 deadline of UN inspectors' first report to the UN about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction nearing, globalized fear of the looming war has become a reality. The debates and counter debates about the pros and cons of the US going most

probably alone to war with Iraq (and not only against Saddam Hussein as many of us are made to believe and understand) are raging and intensifying.

For some reasons, this collision course draws a parallel from the Vietnam War, which the history tells us, you were against in your Yale time. In his memoir, *AN AMERICAN REQUIEM: GOD, MY FATHER, AND THE WAR THAT CAME BETWEEN US*, James Carroll reveals some of the painful details of the struggle that was going on in his family and perhaps in every American family of that time. He is the son of a Vietnam era Air Force General who was also the founding director of Defense Intelligence Agency. He talks about the grief in the family when his father was picking the target for American bombers Vietnam War, while *he* was standing outside the Pentagon denouncing the bombing of North Vietnam and his brother (an F.B.I. agent) was catching the draft resisters. In the higher circles, there was a real debate going on about what to do in Vietnam or whether the war could be won. Robert McNamara's memoir and other sources at the Defense Intelligence Agency revealed that the bombing of North Vietnam was not working. On the contrary, it was stiffening the resolve of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, which led eventually to McNamara's own loss of faith in the possibility of the bombing working. It can be reasonably argued that the men inside the Pentagon right now and at the White House have the same kind of ambivalence, the same kind of doubts that James Carroll's father experienced more than four or five decades ago. In a recent interview with Bill Moyers on PBS he said:

*"In the '50s into the early '60s one of the great debates was whether preventative war was a strategy America should undertake. There were people in the Pentagon who argued the morality of and the political necessity of preventative war. That is to say, we should attack the Soviet Union now before they have the capacity to launch a retaliatory strike that would undo as a nation, and it was a serious debate.*

*"One of the great political and moral victories of that era, I would say, is when the American government decided — I think on moral grounds — preventative war is unacceptable. The United States of America does not do that.*

*"The reason I point to that is because the same debate now is going on in the Pentagon. Preventative war is the question when we're dealing with Iraq, Iran, North Korea, the so-called Axis of Evil. What President Bush is proposing when he considers an action against those nations? He's talking about preventative war, that is, we initiate the strike, and we initiate the conflict. A generation ago, America decided that this country doesn't do that."*

Time and again you have stated that these three countries are dictatorships. They are openly hostile to US interests. They are actively developing weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. They've all spilled American blood and they all harbor and support international terrorism. Now, do you think those are grounds for action against those three countries? Here is James Carroll again:

*“One could have said the same things about Joseph Stalin's regime and the regime that succeeded him, Nikita Khrushchev's, there's no question about the evil those regimes were capable of. We saw it. We know what kind of a threat they were. There was a time when this country could have in fact taken actions against the Soviet Union without suffering a strike against the mainland of the United States.*

*“We didn't do it. What we did was we found other ways of dealing with the Soviet Union. With the theory of containment, diplomacy and alas a ferocious arms race which I believe was misbegotten. But nevertheless, we found nonviolent political diplomatic responses, over a long haul but ultimately. One of the great tributes we have to pay that generation is the patience that enabled the demise of the Soviet Union without a war. The Soviet Union self-destructed in response to pressures from the West. Why can't we learn from that?”*

Mr. President, do you see an uncanny similarity between the events that are forty to fifty years apart in time? While your government is trying to coerce Iraq into total compliance through the UN, there is a renewed and far more real crisis facing the US and the world. In a surprise move, North Korea has restarted the nuclear reactor shut down four years ago, dismantled of IAEA-installed monitoring devices and expelled UN authorized IAEA personnel. Now, there is an escalating danger of putting the lives of 37,000 American soldiers on the line, patrolling the DMZ on the Southern half of the peninsula. And yet, in the face of this crisis, we're prepared to use only diplomatic and political pressure since our current interests dictate it. Why can't we use the same strategy with Iraq, whose reservoir of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons is reportedly unlimited, but according to the UN inspectors' latest reports, still unconfirmed and non-existent?

With every passing moment of time it seems that the US is not inching, not limping, but rather rushing toward a military show down with Iraq – towards a war, it appears from many angles, the White House has imposed on itself. And for reasons far less convincing than to be put in the 'reasonable doubts' category. Today many Americans to their utter dismay find that the president – 'the no-kid-left-behind George Bush', 'pro-life and high Christian-value George Bush', 'the family-oriented George Bush', is not the same as the one who was ushered into the White House exactly 2 years ago. Majority of Americans would like to say: Mr. President, please go to war, if you must. But they will urge you to wrestle with and fight against the demons of a different war. They will also tell you that Saddam Hussein or Iraq is a demon they worry about least at the present time.

If we think that we can respond to anarchic regimes by going to war with them, we've condemned ourselves and the future of the planet to an endless succession of terrible conflicts. We would have set in motion a momentum that is going to roll on. Let us imagine for a moment, if India and Pakistan go to war with each other (and given the degree of mistrust between the two countries, they eventually might) with disastrous consequences for those two nations and the globe, will we still be so confident that our policy of "dead or alive," "us or them" which licensed that war was the right thing?

After reading my note of 9/11, a woman from Indiana, wrote to you:

*President Bush:*

*I was contemplating how to send you inner peace and strength and love and hugs and ANYTHING that will help you in this horrific time. Remember that you were voted as President because we believe in you and believe you are a fair and just leader with faith in our Lord. Please try to remember in the heat of all the hatred that we do believe in God, and God is merciful and God is with us as we turn to Him during our times of need, of which this is definitely one.*

*I was trying to figure out how to say what this AMERICAN man has put so eloquently into writing, so I am forwarding it to you in the hopes it will help. My thoughts and prayers are with you and if there is something I can do to assist I am happy to be called upon. God bless,*

I'm certain that every American feels that way about you even after 14 months of that tragedy. At this crucial juncture of our history and history of the World, all we wish is that you listen to your inner voice and give diplomacy a chance. As the head of a superpower, please lead the humanity to live in dignity, not humiliation. To persevere, not perish. To reason, not react. To free, not fret. To order, not oppression. God Bless you and God Bless America.

*Abdul-Majeed Azad  
(Days preceding the US invasion of Iraq)*