

WHERE IS OSAMA BIN LADIN?

BY Julianne Malveaux

Nearly four years ago, the United States of America was viciously attacked by Al Qaeda terrorists, who flew planes into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center and possibly had another plane headed for the White House. Our nation's response? Our cowboy of a President said that he would hunt down the perpetrators of this outrage. Something happened on the way to his search, though. Instead of finding Osama bin Ladin, who tantalized us with a series of televised messages, he chose to go chasing after "weapons of mass distraction" that clearly did not exist in Iraq. Thanks to the Downey Street memo (and all kinds of other documentation) it is clear that the Bush administration was eager to go running off to Iraq instead of seeking the man who says he perpetrated the carnage on our country.

Mr. Bush does not miss an opportunity to talk about terrorism. When he spoke to the nation on June 28, he did not hesitate to equate Iraq to September 11 – indeed he did it about a dozen times. Of course, we are frightened of terror and of a repeat of what happened on September 11. But there is, at best, a jagged line, not a direct connection between September 11 and Iraq. But Mr. Bush has made it difficult, if not impossible, to criticize our effort in Iraq. After all, more than 1700 American soldiers, men and women of all races and backgrounds, have lost their lives there. One feels as if she is balancing on a tightrope, criticizing this unjust and wasteful war while supporting our troops. We have had one Vietnam, and we should never have another, and so somehow, we must juggle the criticism of this President and his war with an appreciation for the sacrifice of our troops.

Matters are not helped by the fact that terrorists have, now, attacked London and that the loss of life is building there. Our hearts cannot help but go out to the people of London, people who have seen so much bombing, so much terrorism, going back to World War II. At the same time, one wonders whether these subway bombings could have been prevented had Mr. Bush and Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair focused on Osama instead of Saddam.

This is an uncomfortable question, but it is still a fair one. And it is one that must be asked. Any reluctance to ask the questions reminds us how effective domestic terrorists have been in stifling conversation about a range of issues. When conservatives experience the smallest disagreement, they are out, in full force, ready to fight and to pressure the rest of us into silence or into incorporating their truths. I recently appeared on a conservative radio program and within a couple of hours of the appearance, in which I opined that the United States has been just as guilty of terrorism as other countries have been, I had more than 100 emails. I might be able to respect these people if they simply disagreed with me, even if they got heated. But the correspondence was scatological, sexual, and threatening. One man said he would start following my speaking so that he could throw "dog poop" on me. Another, based on my political beliefs, made horrible accusations about my sexuality and wished all kinds of violence on me. The goal – to shut me up because I disagree about this war. The ugliness of the response was almost enough to make me consider keeping my thoughts to myself. And then I realized that by doing that I'd give the devil what it wants.

After London, George W. Bush sounded just like he did after September 11. He spoke of hunting down those responsible and punishing them. But the fact is that he didn't find Osama bin Ladin after September 11, and his hands are so tied that he is not likely to find him any time soon. Instead, he is off in Iraq, creating billion dollar profits for his corporate friends, and sacrificing US life in the process.

What is a terrorist, one might ask? A dictionary describes it as "somebody who uses violence or the threat of violence, especially bombing, kidnapping, and assassination, to intimidate, often for political purposes. We in the United States have certainly been victims of violence, as have people in London, Madrid and Bali. But if we searched our history carefully, we would have to admit that we have also been guilty of terrorist acts, of intimidation (what was lynching, after all), and often for political purposes. Where is Osama bin Ladin? Why this war in Iraq? Why did we pass up our search for an avowed terrorist for blatantly political purposes?

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