People are the only solution to terror

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By Mark Ritchie

I. Introduction

The following essay is by Mark Ritchie, President of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The author asserts that citizens and policymakers must sort through the 'rubble of rhetoric' and self-serving arguments emerging from the tragedies of September 11th. Ritchie suggests that political leaders and press pundits are using the attacks to push other political agendas, such as free trade and deregulation. But, unchecked globalization has led to economic disparity while creating the conditions for war and insecurity. The author concludes that peace and security can only be achieved through the actions and voice of civil society.

II. Essay by Mark Ritchie

People are the only solution to terror
By Mark Ritchie September 12, 2001

Wars between governments -- covert and overt -- are everywhere and increasingly indiscriminate. Civilian aircraft are used to bomb the Pentagon while Russian warplanes level entire Chechnian towns and gasoline bombs get thrown at Catholic schoolgirls in Ulster. We may see more civilian casualties in the coming days as the United States and European military machines are being cranked up to punish Kabul and perhaps others.

Perhaps worse than this coming downward spiral of violence is the rush to use the tragedies of September 11th to push every political hot button and agenda. Some Congressmen said this shows that we need an even bigger and more expensive Star Wars project. The stock market drop and predicted recession are being used to argue for further tax cuts. The Pentagon and the CIA, of course, want more money so they can stop these things from happening in the future. There is nothing wrong with self-serving arguments. Hopefully the public can sift through the rubble of rhetoric and make some informed decision on the best ways to beef up security - not necessarily the most expensive ways.

However, there are two specific agendas that I think are a serious threat and worth responding to.

The first is the attempt by some to use this as a weapon against the peaceful and determined folks, like me, who have been pointing out the dangers and problems with globalization. In the Christian Science Monitor on the day after the attacks, they began speculating on who was responsible. Quoting a retired CIA counter-terrorism officer, they point the finger at "the mass demonstrations at the recent World Bank meeting in Washington." They go on to say that although "most of the demonstrators were peaceful ...there are groups committed to violence - both anti-capitalist and anti-military." Republican Congressman from Alaska, Don Young, picked up this theme in an interview by the Anchorage Daily where he stated that he believed that the attacks may be linked to the protests against the World Trade Organization. In the interview he said "If you watched what happened (at past protests) in Genoa, in Italy, and even in Seattle, there's some expertise in that field," Young said. "I'm not sure they're that dedicated but eco-terrorists -- there's a strong possibility that could be one of the groups."

We may see the World Bank or the World Trade Organization canceling meetings and blaming the threat of protestors, thereby lumping the legitimate expression of civic duty together with suicide bombings. We cannot let the Christian Science Monitor or any responsible newspaper get away with this attempt to smear democratic expression with the venom of terror.

Perhaps most disturbing is the attempt by some to argue that this act of terrorism is further proof that what the world needs now is more globalization. Big paper pundits are scurrying around to find an angle in this story to reinforce their biases and previous proclamations. Some will argue that this shows that we need more free trade, fewer rules and regulations, more outside investment, fewer laws to protect citizens from the ravages of unchecked global cowboy capitalism. They are missing the point in all of this. Global de-regulation, no matter how you dress it up, is designed to create winners and losers. It is precisely this situation -- the mega-rich and the totally desperate -- that creates the conditions for war. US President Wilson understood this but he could not prevent the First World War. John Maynard Keynes and many others knew this but they could not prevent the Second World War. We know this now - and we know that peace and justice are inseparable.

Governments have failed to bring peace and security. It is now up to the citizens, individually and in the organized groups that make up our civil society, to find the ways to justice -- through communications, understanding, reconciliation, forgiveness -- and therefore clearing the path to peace. In fact, it is only civil society that can find the path to peace. Mile high fences to keep out the voice of democracy will slow the process of peaceful resolution, but that is the only response that governments know. They have failed to bring peace and security precisely because they are blind and deaf. And they are blind and deaf precisely because they can no longer hear other voices.

It is up to us, all of us, to do what no government on the planet can do right now -- guarantee the end of terrorism as we know it today and the beginning of peace through justice.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:
nautilus@nautilus.org