

Islam”—will surely lead to large numbers of civilian casualties and hardship. Such attacks will not only make it difficult for any government in the region to cooperate with the United States, they will also generate thousands of new recruits for terrorist groups and millions of sympathizers.

There is good reason to distrust the intentions of governments in the Middle East. Many are undemocratic and often unpopular. They may be reluctant to crack down on fundamentalist Islamic groups that focus their hatred on the United States or Israel out of fear that such groups might then turn against them. Although the only effective way to combat the terrorist groups of the region would be with the cooperation of governments in the Middle East, they would need something from the United States or the rest of the world to reward their assistance. Yet help from these governments, especially if it was seen as an alliance with the United States, could backfire politically, unleashing more popular support for militant fundamentalism.

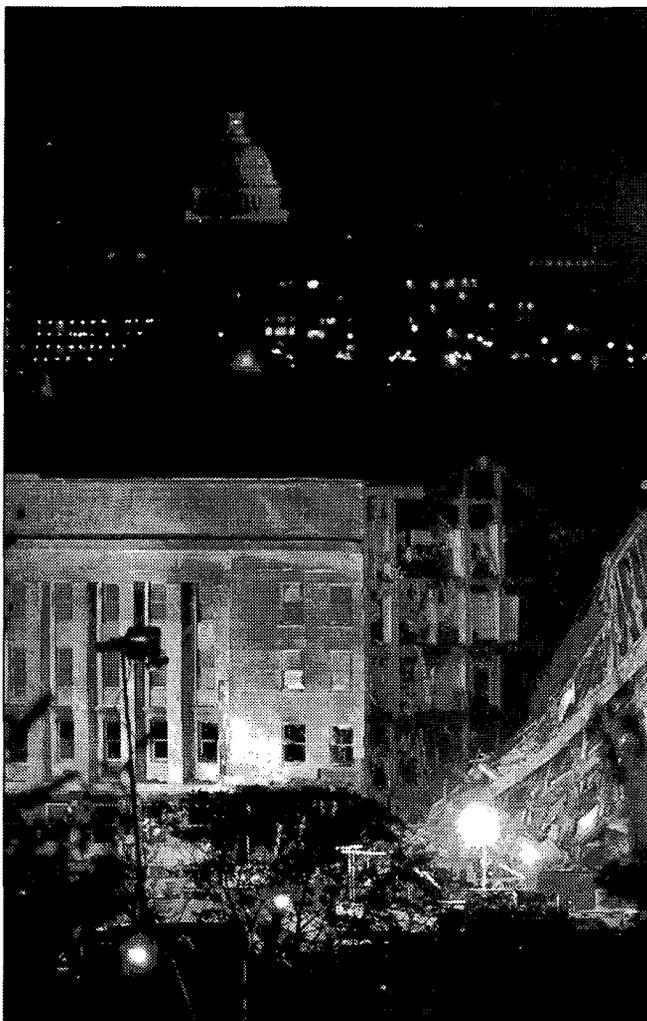
That might be lessened, however, if Middle Eastern governments truly democratized themselves, as part of an economic and political development package. Democracy is no sure-fire antidote to Islamic fundamentalism, but it is the best long-term bet. It will not be easy to ask for both democratic reform and action against terrorists, but anything less would risk a greater version of the same “blowback” from past U.S. interventions that plagues the country now. After all, bin Laden rose to prominence as part of the U.S.-funded, CIA-assisted Afghan fundamentalist war against the Soviets during the '80s.

Massive military attacks are also likely to alienate many of the diverse range of leaders outside the region, not just Europe but also Russia and China, who have lined up in support of the United States. The broader the network of cooperation, the easier it will be to put pressure on states like Pakistan or Afghanistan that may be harboring whoever is responsible.

At home, the war frenzy risks provoking threats to civil liberties and democracy for all Americans, but especially Arabs or other Muslims living in the United States. That may come partly in deference to any actions taken in the name of security. It may also come with Congress giving the President carte blanche or encouraging the CIA, which has

not provided needed intelligence about terrorist groups, to return to its bad old ways (starting with lifting restrictions on working with known human rights violators).

The dangers are perhaps made even greater because the target is a shadowy, fetishized enemy—“terrorism”—ripped out of any social or historical context that would help us understand and deal with the roots of terror. For example, *New Republic* editor Peter Beinart is already viciously attempting—in an updated version of McCarthyism—to link the domestic anti-globalization movement to anti-American terrorism and demands that the movement must choose between America and the terrorists. He writes: “Domestic political dissent is immoral without a prior statement of national solidarity, a choosing of sides.”



BOB HOULIHAN/US NAVY/GETTY IMAGES

**T**he key to resolving the ongoing problem of terrorism from the Middle East is a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that the terrorist attacks proved the folly of appeasement, there has been no appeasement of Palestinians. Indeed, there has been little from the Bush administration at all, except a disengaged but lockstep support for Israel.

The United States has also lost its limited credibility as a neutral broker. At this point, a multilateral intervention, involving the European Union

and possibly the Security Council, to promote a peace agreement would be more promising, even if diplomatically unwieldy. The grand bargain must include not only security for Israel and a Palestinian state, but a regional strategy of cooperation against terrorism, deliberate steps toward democracy, and a plan for economic development and poverty reduction.

Needless to say, it will not be quick or easy to reach such an agreement, but the level of worldwide unity and concern prompted by the terrorist attacks on the United States opens the door of opportunity. While the world will tolerate and even support limited military actions aimed at bringing the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks and their backers to justice, the political and diplomatic unity needed for a long-term solution will be shattered by widespread military action. The United States will exercise real strength if it takes the firm but principled high road to justice and peace. It will demonstrate the futility of its own military might if it resorts to war. ■

9/11/01

# GAME OVER

## THE ILLUSION OF WAR WITHOUT CASUALTIES

By Naomi Klein

Now is the time in the game of war when we dehumanize our enemies. They are utterly incomprehensible, their acts unimaginable, their motivations senseless. They are “madmen” and their states are “rogue.” Now is not the time for more understanding—just better intelligence.

These are the rules of the war game.

Feeling people will no doubt object to this characterization: War is not a game. It is real lives ripped in half; it is lost sons, daughters, mothers and fathers, each with a dignified story. This act of terror was reality of the harshest kind, an act that makes all other acts seem suddenly frivolous, game-like.

It's true: War is most emphatically not a game. And perhaps it will never again be treated as one. Perhaps September 11, 2001 will mark the end of the shameful era of the video game war.

Watching the coverage on Tuesday was a stark contrast to the last time I sat glued to a television set watching a real-time war on CNN. The Space Invader battlefield of the Gulf War had almost nothing in common with what we have seen this week. Back then, instead of real buildings exploding over and over again, we saw only sterile bomb's-eye views of concrete targets—there and then gone. Who was in these abstract polygons? We never found out.

Since the Gulf War, American foreign policy has been based on a single brutal fiction: that the U.S. military can intervene in conflicts around the world—in Iraq, Kosovo, Israel—without suffering any U.S. casualties. This is a country that has come to believe in the ultimate oxymoron: a safe war.

The safe war logic is, of course, based on the technological ability to wage a war exclusively from the air. But it also relies on the deep conviction that no one would dare mess with the United States—the one remaining superpower—on its own soil.

This conviction has, until Tuesday, allowed Americans to remain blithely unaffected by—even uninterested in—international conflicts in which they are key protagonists. Americans don't get daily coverage on CNN of the ongoing bombings in Iraq, nor are they treated to human-interest stories on the devastating effects of economic sanctions on that country's children. After the 1998 bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan (mistaken for a chemical weapons facility), there weren't too many follow-up reports about what the loss of vaccine manufacturing did to disease prevention in the region.

And when NATO bombed civilian targets in Kosovo—including markets, hospitals, refugee convoys, passenger trains and a TV station—NBC didn't do “streeter” interviews with survivors about how shocked they were by the indiscriminate destruction.

The United States has become expert in the art of sanitizing and dehumanizing acts of war committed elsewhere. Domestically, war is no longer a national obsession, it's a

business that is now largely outsourced to experts. This is one of the country's many paradoxes: though the engine of globalization around the world, the nation has never been more inward looking, less worldly.

No wonder Tuesday's attack, in addition to being horrifying beyond description, has the added horror of seeming, to many Americans, to have arrived entirely out of the blue. Wars rarely come as a complete shock to the country under attack, but it's fair to say that this one did. On CNN, *USA Today* reporter Mike Walter was asked to sum up the reaction on the street. What he said was: “Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, I just can't believe it.”

The idea that one could ever be prepared for such inhuman terror is absurd. However, viewed through the U.S. television networks, Tuesday's attack seemed to come less from another country than another planet. The events were reported not so much by journalists as by the new breed of brand-name celebrity anchors who have made countless cameos in Time Warner movies about apocalyptic terrorist attacks on the United States—now, incongruously reporting on the real thing. And for a bizarre split second on Tuesday night, CNN's logo “America Under Attack” disappeared and in its place flashed a logo that said “Fighting Fat”—an eerie ghost graphic that the day before had passed as news.

The United States is a country that believed itself not just at peace but war-proof, a self-perception that would come as quite a surprise to most Iraqis, Palestinians and Colombians. Like an amnesiac, the United States has woken up in the middle of a war, only to find out the war has been going on for years.

Did the United States deserve to be attacked? Of course not. That suggestion is ugly and dangerous. But here's a different question that must be asked: Did U.S. foreign policy create the conditions in which such twisted logic could flourish, a war not so much on U.S. imperialism but on perceived U.S. imperviousness?

The era of the video game war in which the U.S. is always at the controls has produced a blinding rage in many parts of the world, a rage at the persistent asymmetry of suffering. This is the context in which twisted revenge-seekers make no other demand than that American citizens share their pain.

Since the attack, U.S. politicians and commentators have repeated the mantra that the country will go on with business as usual. The American way of life, they insist, will not be interrupted. It seems an odd claim to make when all evidence points to the contrary. War, to butcher a phrase from the old Gulf War days, is the mother of all interruptions. As well it should be. The illusion of war without casualties has been forever shattered.

A blinking message is up on our collective video game console: Game Over. ■

# Practically Speaking

By Kim Phillips-Fein

Several years ago, Richard Rorty gave a speech on the origins of the American labor movement. It was, he said, “a blood-drenched history of violent struggle.” Winning the

**The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America**

By Louis Menand  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
546 pages, \$27

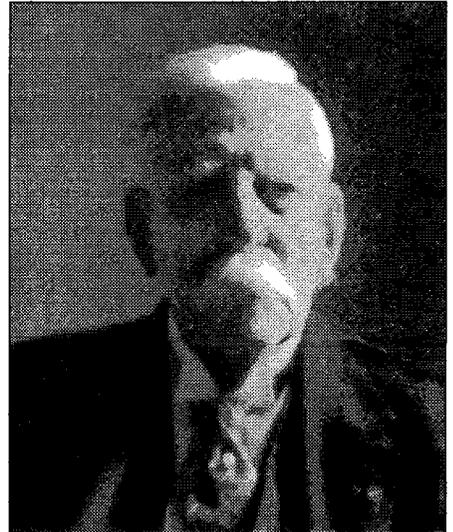
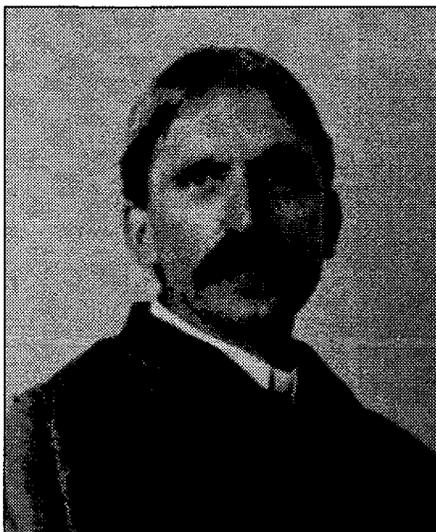
smallest reforms—the eight-hour day, the five-day week—required near-revolutionary commitment from workers who had to be willing to undertake “repeated and deliberate criminal acts.” The speech—called “Labor’s Flag Is Deepest Red”—was striking, but still more so was the fact that Rorty gave it: Here was a leading pragmatist who seemed to believe that simple political victories require an absolute faith, an unwillingness to treat one’s beliefs as though they permit compromise.

The original American pragmatists, who wrote in the era of Homestead and Pullman, would have been surprised to hear it delivered by one of their number. As Louis Menand’s excellent new history of pragmatism, *The Metaphysical Club*, shows, the “fear of violence” spurred the intellectual development of the first pragmatic thinkers. Pragmatism, he suggests, was born in a wave of late-19th century revulsion against political ideology. One of its major inspirations was hatred of the Civil War, when abolitionists “marched the nation toward self-destruction in the name of an abstraction,” and the style of thought gained popularity at the *fin-de-siècle* in large part because of widespread fear of a new civil war between labor and capital.

Menand hails pragmatism as America’s great philosophical contribution to the Western tradition, its optimistic plasticity and bright-eyed hostility to theory the natural intellectual offspring of a land of prosperity and reform. He admires the pragmatists’ willingness to snap the moorings binding them to the past, and the sense of human possibility that result-

ed from their jarringly cheerful break with tradition.

Well known for balancing a double career as an English professor at the City University of New York and a *New Yorker* writer, Menand is also, like the pragmatists, no friend of scholarly jargon, elaborate theory or hyper-specialization, and *The Metaphysical Club* is clear and elegant in style. But even as Menand celebrates pragmatism’s flexibility, he also suggests the extent to which pragmatism—both at the end of the 19th century and in its reinvigoration today—is the product of a conservative political mood.



John Dewey (left) and Oliver Wendell Holmes

Shadowing its embrace of openness and experimentation, its constant willingness to re-invent the world and the self, there is a darker aspect to pragmatism, a tinge of anti-radicalism that borders on ideology itself.

**T**he *Metaphysical Club* (the name was ironic, since all its members abhorred metaphysics) is more than a clever title. There was a real club for a few years in Cambridge in the 1870s, though, like Groucho Marx’s, it was one that none of its members wanted to claim. While it is briefly mentioned in the letters of Charles Peirce, and disparagingly noted in those of Henry James (who was not a member, but

whose brother William was), none of its participants say a word about it anywhere. Yet it was the meeting place for the best-known pragmatic thinkers—William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Peirce—as well as influential hangers-on like depressive alcoholic Chauncey Wright, whose nihilistic mutterings seem to have influenced all of the greats.

The absence of the Metaphysical Club from the memoirs of its members reflects the discomfort all of them felt for the label of pragmatism. James coined the term to describe Peirce’s philosophy, but he would have preferred to describe his own thought as “humanism.” John Dewey—who was a bit too young to be a member of the original Club—liked “instrumentalism” instead, while Holmes pronounced pragmatism

an “amusing humbug.” Even Peirce, for whose benefit it was invented, had little use for the word until it was established enough to have some PR value. Then, he changed it to an infelicitous neologism—“pragmaticism”—to distinguish his work from that of Dewey and James.

It seems fitting that the leading pragmatic thinkers should have been unwilling to identify themselves as such. Doubt, after all, was the hallmark of their philosophy. Theirs was a school of opposition to schools. As James wrote, they had in common “a method only”: to oppose “rationalism” and “intellectualism,” and to treat anything that reached for the grandiosity of philosophy with a bemusement occasionally