



## *Hurricane Season*

Lewis R. Scudder, Jr.  
Apaasia Village, Cyprus  
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This year saw an exceptionally fierce season of deadly hurricanes (Gustav, Hannah and Ike) in the Caribbean and on the Gulf coast of the United States. And here's an irony: The Florida folks who forecast and monitor the Atlantic's tropical storms figure that the season should taper off on or around September 11<sup>th</sup>. And they were about right this year, weren't they? Is it a fluke? These days, when polar and glacial ice is melting like the Good Humor Man's soft ice cream in summer, and ocean currents are changing because the once-muscular polar ice no longer cools warm currents and bashes them back down to the ocean floor to run the other way, who's to say what seasonal patterns can be predicted? Precedent is no longer a guide.

September 11<sup>th</sup> this year was also the sabbatical of a massive American outrage. The only one comparable — the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 — was at least purged during a massive world war that Americans, by and large, felt was worth waging. Unfortunately that war was ended in the Pacific by a second outrage — the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (August 6 and 9, 1945) — and that has not yet worked its way out of the human psyche. I'm not sure where to slot the firebombing of Dresden and other outrages, not least of which was the Holocaust that consumed Jews, Romas, Slavs, homosexuals, the mentally infirm, religious dissidents, Communists and whomever else the Nazis deemed to be subhuman. Three generations on, there's been no effective catharsis for these obscenities either.

However we weigh up that mid-20<sup>th</sup> century season of killer storms, in the wake of 9/11 the launching wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (with reverberations in Pakistan and elsewhere) has, if anything, only added strength to this latest human-wrought hurricane. This is a real category-5 storm. Far from offsetting the trauma of 9/11, even seven years on, the counter-measures taken only add anguish to outrage, and the storm continues to suck up intensity from the tepid waters of human irrationality.

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On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, glued to the news as most of us were after the barbaric, long drawn out, and much replayed demolition of the Twin Towers, the crumpled Pentagon, and the lonely flight that ploughed into the Pennsylvania countryside, there seemed to be a moment when, out of agony, something healing might yet have been salvaged. But a pistol packin' American president hell-bent on playing with his big new toys that went 'boom!' pranced onto the stage and those hopes were dashed.

In the immediate aftermath, members of the Bin-Lâdin family and the Saudi royal household were quickly spirited out of the US back to Saudi Arabia on luxury jets when only military aircraft were supposed to be in the air. Theoretically, nobody yet even knew that the terrorist crews of the doomed planes were primarily Saudi nationals. Curious it is how quickly the war horns began to blare even before the investigative process had been concluded. I won't ever forget, on the day after the

holocaust, Gore Vidal's chilling forecast that the Bush administration would target Iraq even though Iraq was not complicit in the 9/11 outrage, far less in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Vengeance, Vidal said, was on Bush the Younger's mind; but for those who manipulated that mind, Vidal observed, the real driving force was oil. And oil has been cauldron-hot vector in this current hurricane season.

It was a time when Americans and the world at large first became aware that there was something called *al-Qâ'idah*. Later ... *much* later! ... we were to learn that the American intelligence community knew it intimately for nigh unto fifteen years earlier, having brought it to birth in the first place, and moreover knew even then that it had spawned a viper. (Read Oliver North's 1987 testimony before the Senate committee investigating the Iran-Contra Affair.) Now it is a household word along with the Mephistophelian visage of 'Usâmah bin-Lâdin. But then suddenly TV anchors were talking knowledgeably about *al-Qâ'idah* and the Taliban concerning whom they had been ignorant only the week before. And we all scrambled to find Afghanistan on the map because that's where our first bombs were heading.

By the time we learned those things, though, we were already well and truly into the hurricane season, weren't we? September 11<sup>th</sup> became not the end but the beginning of the fiercest season of human-generated killer storms in living memory, and we're still in the midst of it. It touched off spot tornadoes in London, Madrid, Bali, Lahore, Baghdad, all of Lebanon and God knows where. The cushioning 'ice shelves' (our cooler minds, that is) seem to have melted; the human currents have become quirky and unpredictable. And we've yet to find or invent a mechanism for catharsis that will damp down the humid Coriolis effect of human cupidity and allow for a new dynamic that we might call 'peace' or at least breathing space that will allow the storm winds and the drenching rains of human emotion to dissipate.

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I find it amazing how quickly political and senior retired military figures, preachers and newly minted pundits have come forward to proclaim that the *Qur'ân* is a demonic contrivance that enjoins the practice of terrorism and anti-Semitism, warning us that the whole Muslim community is working for the collapse of western civilization, replacing it with a reinvented and repressive Muslim Caliphate. This has actually taken root and is now a strong vector strengthening the hurricane. Muslims aren't innocent victims in all this, mind you. No less than others they're vulnerable and suggestible human beings, bewildered by the swirling, deafening howl of this storm, and vulnerable to exploitation and faith's distortion. But to tar-and-feather the whole Muslim community with falsehoods and exaggerations is itself demonic.

Islamic civilization's message has traditionally eschewed violence against innocent bystanders and worked to restore civil order whenever it has broken down. If violence there must be, it must be against those armed for battle and capable of defending themselves. All those not engaged — especially the aged, women and children — no matter their religious or cultural identity are *harâm* (God protected). That's the dictum ... *that's the rule!* Anyone who violates that code revolts against God and becomes a heretic, an apostate.

As are we all, the Muslim community is trying to sort out where it's placed in the global scheme of things. Boundaries have been fudged. Unlike in the past, today's

Muslim geography can't specify where the 'Household of Islam' begins and where it ends. Muslims are being forcing a rethink their traditional cosmology. Muslims, Christians and Jews — along with everyone else — have been jumbled together in a great, undifferentiated, global mass of cacophonous humanity. While this might be seen positively as the precursor of a new, more ecumenical world culture, perversely during this hurricane season it probably functions more like a pressure system that feeds in the destructive energy of fear and paranoia between people who should otherwise have been neighbors to one another.

And Muslims perhaps more than most are having a tough time sorting this all out. There is no doubt that the rolling boil of global issues impacts upon the broader Muslim community and its traditional social order — women's rights and status, matters of sexual orientation, the universality of charity, issues of war and peace, global consumerism and the new economic imperialism, how banks work and interest is earned, human rights broadly conceived, the environment's degradation, democracy and pluralism, and a host of other issues. Quite apart from Muslims often sensing they're under attack within and by western civilization, is it any wonder that they feel beleaguered in today's world? All their old certainties are fluctuating and many are patently archaic and actually failing.

Out of this and other very serious socio-economic and cultural factors springs the historically offensive distortion of fanaticism, an expression of Islam that Muslims themselves find both shocking and profoundly offensive. Furthermore, it plays in harmonic syncopation with other fanaticisms that belong to Jews, Christians and other ideological communities. Depending on how we're placed, the winds and deluge fall upon us more or less violently. But the winds and the fallout are there, like it or not.

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Hey folks! since we *ourselves* feed the storm vectors, they are really ours to control. Isn't it about time we did something about them ... *about ourselves*? The 9/11 hurricane, year after year, swells, subsides, makes disastrous 'landfalls' here and there, and then swings back out into tepid waters to begin the cycle all over again. Neither of America's presidential hopefuls seems to have the moral integrity far less the political acumen to resolve this thing. Throw into the mix the economic chaos bred by faceless corporate greed (a 'four-letter word', if ever there was one) in the investment and banking sectors that produce nothing of value but only scavenge and gobble up the profits of working stiffs, and we find that the matter returns to what the American Declaration of Independence identifies as 'we the people', doesn't it?

Do we have the courage and resolve to declare that we're just not going to take this any more? The storm has got to stop. We need a new and true catharsis ... a process of human reconciliation that gives way to peace. And to achieve that it's got to be a ground swell of Jews, Christians, Muslims and all morally competent human beings that reverses the spin and unwind the violence of this hurricane season.

In hope ...

I greet you from the Lands of the Morning.