

MEMO TO: VENGEFUL MINDS

RE: POST-ATTACK
POLITICS

In the week following Sep 11, with the World Trade Centre in ashes and the lovers, families and friends of more than 6,300 in anguish, it was hard to concentrate on anything else.

Something else, however, did trouble me shortly after the carnage unfolded on my TV screen.

It was the face of a former colleague whom I haven't spoken to in years. When I read about the possibility of racial profiling at airports, I saw her. I imagined a burly customs official grabbing her and taking her to a secluded room somewhere at Pearson International for one reason: She is of Arabic descent. She is also a political lesbian. I worried about her. I still do. We all should.

The United States, and Canada by default, are in peril of substituting civil liberties with draconian restraints on our freedom, all in the name of protecting us in this new war.



**KATE
BARKER**

But what war is that? This is not the childhood terror my parents experienced in London during the Blitz. How, exactly, do you get at this enemy? By bombing an already destroyed country? By killing its children and civilians in the hopes of knocking off a few bad guys? By infiltrating a terrorist den so tight its own leaders only send messages through family members?

As if he is the only problem.

George W Bush, whom I have always thought of as a cowboy, lived up to this estimation with his ridiculous "wanted dead or alive," Old West rallying cry in the days immediately after the attacks. I'm sure his handlers winced at that one. (Note to Karen Hughes, counsellor to the president: Don't let your fearless leader out in public without a teleprompter in clear view.)

Dubya seems to have been reined in a little since then, telling Americans in his address to Congress that "the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends." But his speech was too little, too late for three more dead in the United States, the victims of suspected hate crimes. It came too late for the victims of more than 40 hate crimes perpetrated after the Sep 11 attacks. Is it any wonder that this mindless racism has migrated north, with Muslim kids taunted in schoolyards, with the burned out husk of a Hindu temple in Hamilton?

The day of the tragedy my lover and I watched in horror as the towers collapsed. Like everyone else, we were stupefied. It didn't compute. We couldn't have just seen that. At one point I said, "Let's hope cool heads prevail." It seems they have not. Instead we are inundated by the images of the US gearing up for war and with it, all the extremists who have crawled from their holes clutching Bibles and Old Glory to their patriotic breasts. TV evangelist Jerry Falwell is one of them, claiming that gay men and lesbians, among others, are to blame for the attacks because we have angered God. Great. That's just what yahoos need to figure it's open season on Arabs, blacks, Muslims and fags.

The social climate is changing and it is going to be a chilly season for activists of all stripes. But I'll never have any trouble at an airport with my blue eyes, blonde hair and Anglo-Saxon surname. Nobody will scream obscenities at me in the street based on my skin colour. And I won't have to choose to wear or not to wear my usual outdoor attire, a decision those who customarily don a Hijab now must make every day.

So for those of us who won't be scrutinized in public as though we are potential terrorists, it's time to have a little courage and stand up for those who are. Cooler heads may not prevail in the seats of power, but we can do our part to prevent the backlash down here on earth.

Memo To features a different community member every issue.