

# Sandy Strang



**GRIM AFTERMATH:** But eliminating the groups responsible for the horrific attacks on the United States will be almost impossible

NINE days on. The macabre images of Apocalypse Tuesday remain etched on our consciousness. Indelibly. Grotesquely. Cinematic Hollywood disaster movie cliché alchemised into surreal truth.

Coruscating images which evoke those twin conflicting Aristotelian emotions born of tragedy. The terror and the pity. Those bodies, some with hands entwined, cascading streetwards from the inferno. Those friendly Boeing aircraft, symbols of freedom and national unity, transmuted into flying bombs.

Those frantic, chilling mobile calls to loved ones as oblivion loomed. Those twin behemoths, the emblems of America's self-confidence and global capitalism, disintegrating into gargantuan piles of smouldering, twisted steel.

## Nightmare

As Ian McEwan pointed out, we were watching death on an unbelievable scale, but we saw few die. The nightmare was in the gulf of imagining. The horror was in the distance.

As dawn rose the following morning, we saw the revised Manhattan skyline, with its newly yawning gaps where those self-proclaimed "monuments of man's belief in humanity" once proudly stood.

The terror, the horror, the pity, the compassion remain.

But amidst this agonising gamut of conflicting feelings, wounded America is now passionately experiencing a fresh emotion. Frustration. Frustration that there can be no military defence against such attack.

The disillusioning vexation that one is vulnerable, that no amount of Star Wars intercontinental ballistic hard-

jiyah warrior boy wielding a small knife in business class.

Frustration, too, that there can be no instant outlet for a nation's enraged belligerence, that the national thirst for revenge, for ferocious summary retaliation, has not – cannot – be slaked.

You can't readily institute your own Yankee variant of a jihah. For the enemy perpetrator is not a state and has not declared himself.

He is shadowy, unknown, beyond conventional intelligence and strategy.

It's an asymmetric contest in which little groups, secret, obscure have the advantage over the superpower. Any global response to terrorism is a new

written rules. It's altogether different from Pearl Harbor.

"All we had done," bewailed Admiral Yamamoto then, "is awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with terrible resolve."

But, in this case, resolve against whom? Who or what's the target?

## Demonised

Limited military action may well be being mounted this very minute against Afghanistan and the alleged prime suspect, the demonised Saudi holy war crusader Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaida group in their Kandahar tents.

But what then? Historically of late, America's deployment of Middle East

spicuously successful. Recall the Sudan, Baghdad, Afghanistan before.

Force, along with sanctions and isolations, could well be playing into enemy hands.

Gesture militarism might serve only to exacerbate the problem, to incite fanatical terrorist networks. Provoking World War III is no fanciful notion.

The more valid riposte is much less dramatic, much more mundane and pedestrian. A world-wide tightening of aircraft security. More sophisticated check-ins, armed marshals on board, sealed cockpits.

Maturity, as Simon Jenkins observed so pertinently, lies in sometimes learning to live with the

# Living with the madmen in our midst