

010917 Dusk

One of the things that I have been asked quite a lot over the past few days is how people here in Denmark are reacting to the tragedy in the US. This is a question that I can not directly answer. I know that the Danish television and print media is saturated with stories and pictures from the tragedy, but my Danish is not yet good enough to understand what is being said directly or indirectly. The general population is difficult for me to read and so I have asked my Danish friends how Danes are reacting and what they are thinking. Friends such as Tove are expressing shock and dismay over what has happened. Tove lived in the US for several years and her eldest daughter is a US citizen. On Tuesday, her family was calling from all over Europe to talk about what happened. Nina tells me that the general population is much the same in their shock and sadness. For example, my Danish teacher lit candles in class on Wednesday and had a hard time concentrating on the lesson. Instead she wanted to talk with the Americans in her class and to express her sympathy.

Likewise for the international community at my university. So many are too difficult for me to read. But, everyone is very aware of what has happened and those who know me or know that I am from the US have expressed their anguish over what has happened. I went to the US embassy on Friday to give them my address so that they know where I am. The walkway in front of the building was covered with flowers, pictures and candles that people from the crowd outside have left. I imagine that there are similar scenes playing out at US embassies all over the world. (I never did get to register, they told me that they were too busy and to come back in a week).

I think that when something like this occurs, fundamentally we all revert back to what we are. Despite living in an international community, we revert back to being Americans and feel connected to the horror and the grief. I think that is why I felt so compelled on Tuesday evening to go to DTU's s-hus (student bar) to seek out the other Americans. But before I even made it to the bar, I ran into a quiet friend from Pakistan in the hallway. He was visibly shaken and I eventually had a hard time getting my hand back as he held it as he expressed his grief over what had happened. It is still the others from the US who I seek to talk about the tragedy because I know that they understand. Likewise how most of the people in the US have little connection to the bombings in Moscow two years ago, but for Muscovites it is a terrible tragedy.

All of the EU, including Denmark observed 3 minutes of silence on Friday. The tragedy in the US is unlike afore mentioned Moscow bombing in that it has affected so many people abroad. So many foreigners were lost in the WTC and so many people have been to the US or have connections there. Beyond the sheer horror of it all, I think that my friend Paddy from Ireland expressed an additional reason why this is so terrible to people from other countries. In an email that he sent to me to a few weeks ago after visiting the US, Paddy wrote:

"I had a great time out in the States by the way. I really enjoyed the atmosphere out there, some places more than others admittedly, but all in all I found it very relaxing and

comfortable. I think maybe a little of it could be attributed to the fact that, it's terrible that this is true but, most of my experience and knowledge of America comes from films and music and so I felt a little like I was walking in a fairyland some of the time, a big grown-ups fairyland."

A fairly land now shaken with tragedy. That is never supposed to happen.

Plus with NATO enacting Article 5, this tragedy will no longer just affect the US alone. As the US plans its response to what Bush is calling a war, all of the countries in NATO have opened themselves to playing a role. Likewise with Russian and now Pakistan which appears to be playing a difficult and pivotal role. (I wonder if the multiple layers of sanctions against the Pakistani military dictatorship will now be lifted). One thing for sure is that acts of terrorism will no longer just be seen as threats to individual countries. Hopefully this coalition will help end the use of terror in the future.

As I see it, the fundamental question now is what will change? We have all said that nothing will be the same after Tuesday. Of course security will be tighter at the airports and borders, we as a people will be willing to stomach worse losses in this war than before and laws will be changed. I shudder at the idea that is being considered to legalize political assassination. There was a reason why that presidential order was first made. What type of people country will we be if we advocate the killing of the heads of states that we disagree with? Since when is killing a part of legitimate statesmanship? I also shudder at the idea of civil liberties of specific ethnic groups being violated as the Attorney General plans new legislation as government begins its war on terrorism within our borders. We saw what that led to in the 1940's.

But those are laws and actions. How will we as a people change? Will we contract and favor isolationism instead of participating in this world of ours which is shrinking every day? I think back to arriving at the mother house of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta a few years ago. It was close to Christmas and there was a lot to do and the other volunteers were feeling tired and overwhelmed. One had said that what they really needed now was a group of energetic Americans to arrive. Arrive we did. I think that overall, people from the US are seen by most people of the world as friendly, energetic, sometimes bungling people. Especially in developing nations we are sources of fascination for our wealth and freedoms that we take for granted. Clearly, however there are exceptions to these general impressions.

I ask myself how I have changed. Granted I am removed from what is being thought and said in the US and I feel the separation. I am far removed from the emotions and which have been described to me in emails. But, therefore, maybe I can be a bit more objective in my own examination of events than others who I have seen interviewed on the news. As I contemplate if how I relate to people will change, I tend to think not. I believe that we will all be more aware of the widening scope of terrorist threats, but I will still continue to live abroad and to travel. Those of you who have traveled with me in the past know that I am already very safety conscience. I also believe that if the bombings in Moscow were to occur again that people in the US would be much more sympathetic and

perhaps that is not a bad thing although the reason is. Perhaps then as we look at the world as a smaller place; as a place where terrible acts of terror have touched us all; instead of isolationism will we feel a sense of unity with people from other countries as we fight against such heinous violence? Just a thought.

I can only hope that the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan will lead to the arrest of Bin Ladin without military action. I guess that we will find out in less than 48 hours. Iran and Pakistan have sealed their borders with Afghanistan, a country now doomed to a humanitarian disaster as the last of the humanitarian groups pulled out Sunday. Thousands are predicted to die regardless of whether the US attacks or not. Not that the disaster in Afghanistan is the direct fault of the current US policy. But people here in Europe seem a lot less eager for blood than the population of the US. People want justice, but they want it to be the result of a methodical plan implemented after clear evidence has been presented against the people who are responsible. I am glad that military action has been delayed so far so that conclusive evidence can be found and clear plans can be laid. One only needs to look at the over 110,000 troops that the Soviet Union lost in its campaign in Afghanistan to see that action in this region should not be taken lightly. The question is whether Bush can calm the maelstrom that he is rising if Bin Ladin is brought to justice peacefully, or will the need for blood persevere? Can we as a people pick up the pieces and get on with life without the closure of killings or war? I guess that time will tell.

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