



[ AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH  
FROM A FORMER U.S. MARINE SERGEANT: ]

# CAN AMERICA HELP LEAD THE WORLD TO PEACE AND JUSTICE?

Dear Mr. President:

I am a former Marine Corps sergeant who served his country well and was honorably discharged in 1970. I have never written such a letter before and I hope that it will somehow reach you through the bureaucratic filters.

Like every other American, I was appalled by the death and destruction we witnessed September 11. We have suffered a horrible attack and far too many of us have suffered and died. Saddened and sickened by the carnage, I know you too are suffering with the victims and their families. I can feel your anger and frustration as well as your desire for active retaliation. I understand it well. It is a natural and justifiable reaction to such a heinous criminal act.

And yet I would counsel you to proceed carefully. A mistake on our part could easily widen the spiral of violence.

Mr. President, you now have an historic opportunity to prove that the United States is more than just an economic and military power to be feared. You can show the world that the United States is also a civilized country that can be trusted to follow the law, guided by wisdom and compassion.

I urge you to use all legal means at your disposal to determine who perpetrated this horrible crime and to bring them to trial before the appropriate court. Let them indeed find the justice the world awaits and needs.

But I beg you, let not one more innocent life — American, Israeli, Palestinian, Afghan or any

other — be lost. Too often our weapons have taken the lives of innocents. The military euphemism is “collateral damage,” but in reality it is manslaughter, if not outright murder. What right can we claim that allows us to take more innocent lives? Is that not also a form of terrorism? Will we rise above the level of those who attacked us?

You have chosen to describe this as an act of evil. I fear using such language will only inflame the situation and incite a lynch mob mentality. What we need is compassion and cool reason to reach our true goals: peace, prosperity and democracy for all peoples. Lead us, Mr. President, with dignity and wisdom. Show the world that you are a leader with the strength and courage to seek understanding and restorative justice, just as Nelson Mandela did in South Africa.

It is critical that we recognize not only the perpetrators’ willingness to use violence, but also the political and historical context in which this atrocity and their self-sacrifice has taken place.

As a former Marine, I know what it means to be willing to sacrifice one’s life for a cause one truly believes in. Is it not possible that these people were simply horribly misguided, hate-filled and desperate, rather than cowardly and evil? If they see themselves as Davids fighting a Goliath out to destroy their way of life, we certainly need not agree with them. But we must understand this point of view if we ever hope to achieve a lasting peace and avoid a world locked down and bereft of the rights and freedoms we cherish.

Months ago we saw unbearable images of a father and child helplessly pinned down in cross-fire. As a father yourself, can you imagine that parent’s anguish as he felt the life ebb from his son? If we undertake military action which callously traps other families in cross-fire, any where in the world, we deaden what is most human within us.

This moment of deep crisis is also a moment of immense opportunity. I urge you to move our world away from violence and suffering toward peace, freedom and abundance. Bring the culpable to justice. But also let the voices of desperation be heard. Let us not repeat the mistake we made recently at the UN Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, but rather bring all voices to the table, even if they are screaming and telling the stories we do not want to hear.

We are truly a superpower, used to talking and expecting others to listen. Show the world that we are also strong enough to learn to listen. I pray that you will continue to resist the calls to rashly lash out in violence. May God give you the wisdom to find the opportunity that lies in this tragedy, for creating a lasting peace. I sincerely hope that future historians will look back at your actions and applaud the greatness of spirit and cool sense of reason that guided you in moving our world closer to justice and democracy for all.

*Respectfully,* Greg Nees  
Former U.S. Marine Sergeant

**The story of this ad:** Mr. Nees wrote this letter to the President on September 13 and e-mailed it to friends — one of whom suggested publishing it in *The New York Times*. Inspired, a Japanese mother of four teamed up with the leading rescue worker from the Kobe earthquake disaster to rally ordinary Japanese people to raise the money for this ad. Their generosity is largely responsible for its publication. Calling themselves the Global Peace Campaign, they have asked Veterans for Peace to help carry their work forward.

**8:45 am EST.** People of all religions and spiritual paths, as well as non-believers, are invited to pause for a daily moment of united prayer, meditation or reflection on these words: “May peace prevail on Earth.” October 9 is the birthday of John Lennon. *Give Peace a Chance.*

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Veterans for Peace is a national organization that conducts projects to help victims of war and advocates American global policies based on justice and peace.

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