

The tough test for our sorts of societies is how to keep respect for individualism and difference alive.

The Americans, terrorised by September 11, developed a doctrine of pre-emptive strike and applied it to Iraq. John Howard of Australia has adopted the doctrine. You might call the French state's bombing of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985 an earlier example.

Bush's pre-emptive strike neither uncovered terror links nor stopped the bombing. He has since justified the Iraq adventure as liberating a people from a dictator's oppression. But he has not made this a doctrine: no strike force is being readied to liberate the oppressed of Zimbabwe. There is a doctrine at the United Nations (as this column has argued since before September 11): that each government has a responsibility to protect its people and, in the event of egregious failure, other governments are duty-bound to assume the responsibility.

But doctrines which veer too close to a foundation in ethics discomfort large states. They prefer realpolitik grounded in power.

This doesn't stop terror bombers, as Spain, Australia (in Bali) and now Britain have found. But it does put small states on the hotplate

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