

The Ten Year Anniversary of 9/11

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PROLOGUE:

The morning of September 11, 2001 feels as though it were only a year ago. That an entire decade has elapsed since then seems difficult to believe. It's true: Here we are, ten years later. So a candid evaluation of the intervening developments would seem to be in order.

It seems like only last year that I was standing on the corner of Broadway and Spring. That day, other things were on my mind: romantic troubles with my girlfriend and the search for a new talent agent occupied my thoughts. Now, I remember watching—numb and in shock—as tower 2 collapsed. The scene before me seemed surreal: Was this really happening? I recall wandering around Manhattan that day in disoriented disbelief: “What is god’s name is going on here?”

At the time, few of us were fully aware of the circumstances abroad that precipitated this massive tragedy. But, today, as we continue to memorialize the thousands of innocent AMERICAN civilians who lost their lives, we are morally compelled to recognize the *hundreds of thousands* of NON-American civilians who have (needlessly, pointlessly) lost their lives ever since...due to decisions of U.S. government officials.

Indeed, much has happened since that morning. Those of us paying attention DO now have a better understanding of the circumstances that prompted those 19 psychopathic men to do what they did that day. We know that an act of terrorism by a cadre of Salafi fanatics is not—ipso facto—an act of war. And we now have a better grasp of why hundreds of millions across the globe would be so angry with the citidels of American power: both corporate and military. Of course, such a candid recognition requires that we set aside our false pride, leave our egos at the door, and resist indulging in the braggadocio endemic to national chauvinism.

MANICHEAN MYOPIA:

During the first decade of the 21st century, “The Long War” on “Terror” offered an enticing worldview—replete with all the national chauvinism we could imbibe: a self-ingratiating motif of Good vs. Evil (a.k.a. US against THEM) that had been seducing crowds for millennia. The standard narrative (the Good Guys versus the Bad Guys in an epic struggle) is wonderfully straight-forward. It's tough to resist because it appeals to our penchant for tribalism.

As the adults of us know, this is a narrow prism through which to see the world—not to mention a misleading one. With its simple-minded categorizations (and self-tighteousness), it is a seductive—and addictive—perspective to take. It is especially enticing when we feel insecure...and angry. Even as fear (and an itch for vengeance) is the primary saboteur of sound reason, it can be exploited to stir patriotic fervor—replete with braggadocio. Such sentiments preclude any motivation to hold a mirror up to ourselves...and engage in critical reflection. For, in

this captivating Manichean mindset, it is US against THEM, and that's all there is to it. Pick a side, then proceed with the "war".

Just prior to the 10-year anniversary of 9/11/01, Glenn Greenwald stated, "If I could impose one media rule, it would be that following every column or TV segment featuring American political commentators dramatically unloading their *Where-I-Was-on-9/11-and-how-I-felt* tales, there would be similar recollections offered from parents in the Muslim world talking about how their children died from the pre-9/11 acts of the U.S. and its client states or from post-9/11 American bombs, drones, checkpoint shootings and night raids... [T]he reality is that the nation's political and media elite learned no lessons from [the 9/11] attack."

The military-industrial complex welcomed the mindset adopted by much of the American public—a mindset that was amenable to the fear and anger most of us felt. Plutocrats were able to exploit the tragedy for their own ends, under the auspices of "national security" and "national pride". Fueling super-patriotic mania was too hard to do in such a climate. Indeed, such a climate is the optimal incubator for false pride—and the perfect environment for oligarchy seize control. "You are in danger. Give us the power, and we will protect you. You have been wronged by the other. Give us the power, and we will re-assert national honor. Glory will be ours." The sales-pitch has been used many times in the past. The examples are too obvious to mention. The consequences too eerie to recap.

Greenwald added: "Worship of the American military and all that it does—and a corresponding taboo on speaking ill of it except for tactical critiques—is the closest thing America has to a national religion." He also noted that "terrorism" in the American lexicon "now means little more than: *violence or extremism by Muslims in opposition to American or Israeli actions and interests.*" Indeed. Our interests are by definition noble; anything that stands in the way of our interests is by definition evil. This rigged lexicon suits the desired purposes magnificently.

In this new phase of the Endless War, we had waged an open-ended "war" against a *tactic*. The vaguely-defined enemy of "America" was—like the "Evil Empire" before it—defined as a *menacing force hell-bent on taking over the world*. This new nemesis was scheming to install a global caliphate...and only American militarism could stop the impending cataclysm. Military intervention overseas was what would save us from this "clear and present danger" lurking over the horizon. It was a narrative regurgitated from the Cold War—adapted to new circumstances.

Such jingoism works splendidly for drumming up mass mania (in the form of super-patriotism) while stoking mass hysteria (fear of *the other*, and a distinct impression that there is a menacing threat lurking just over the horizon). This narrative works by exploiting ignorance, insecurity, and the reactionary mindset that appeals to those who've indulged in the narcissism that is American Exceptionalism. Meanwhile, the jingoism conveniently obfuscates the reasons 9/11 happened in the first place: resentment at the very right-wing approach that people were rallying around BECAUSE OF 9/11. It's like the chain smoker who resorts to cigarettes in order to calm his nerves after finding out he has lung cancer...or the gun fetishists who insist MORE GUNS is the solution to gun violence.

The U.S. government ended up stoking augmented divisiveness in the very forces it claimed to be fighting against—thereby creating all the more need to wage war against those "evil" forces. It's almost as if the hawkish (i.e. belligerent, right-wing) foreign policy of the U.S. had been following an instruction manual entitled, "How To Further Radicalize A Radical Movement".

So long as there is a vested interest in on-going militarism, this will continue to be the instruction manual of choice. Indeed, the military-industrial complex profits handsomely from its use.

\$3 trillion and hundreds of thousands of innocent deaths later, we can only wonder what those public funds may have been able to do if invested in basic public infrastructure and vital social services. In particular, it could have been used for R&D in new/clean energy, public healthcare, public schools, public transportation, and desperately-need ROTA for the financial services (i.e. investment banking) industry. Instead, those public funds were siphoned to military contractors (i.e. war profiteers).

What do we have to show for it? A foiled underwear bomber, a foiled shoe bomber, and burning fertilizer in Times Square, a corrupt tyrant heading Afghanistan, continued recalcitrance of the Pakistani ISI...along with the death of a reclusive Salafist loser holed up in an Abbottabad bedroom watching videos. (Forgive me if I'm not impressed.)

Investment in public works projects here at home would have been (and still could be) a stimulus for the national economy...*from the demand side*. Instead, those crucial trillions were funneled into the coffers of corporations via schemes that amounted to corporate socialism. Using tax-payer money to fund pointless tax-cuts for the super-rich, rampant cronyism / corporatism, egregious corporate welfare, as well as needless corporate tax-breaks and corporate exemptions was—perhaps—not the best use of the federal budget. The planes that hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon did less damage to our nation than the cascade of bad policies that ensued.

Hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis have died as a result of the unwarranted U.S. military incursion into their country. That means that the Iraqi citizenry (men, women and children guilty of nothing but being born in that area of the world) suffered a “9/11” roughly once every couple months—starting in March '03, through the Obama inauguration six years later. (Adjusted for proportion of population, the social impact is more like a “9/11” every two weeks.) Moreover, the arrogance of a hyper-militarized nation that deems itself “boss of the world” has actually exacerbated the antagonism and resentment that has spurred militant actions against the U.S.

Meanwhile, the Arab Spring proved that progress happens from the inside out, from the ground up. The grass-roots rebellions demonstrated that when progress does happen in foreign lands, it happens NOT because of the U.S. (and often, IN SPITE OF the U.S.) The spread of democracy must come organically, from The People—the indigenous rank and file—as it did here in America during the 1770's and 80's. America can't effect democratic society for anyone else (heck, it can barely do it for itself!) America only exacerbates dysfunction (abroad and at home) when it attempts to order the world according to its own designs. America can only serve as a model, setting precedent, not by imposing force but by embodying that which it preaches. America must lead, but it must lead from the power of example, not by the example of its power.

It's time to change course.

WHY DO THEY HATE US?

“They still hate us.” Who exactly is the “they” in that statement...and WHY do “they” hate us?

One theory: They hate Israel and the US as much as for who they are as for what they do. It's part of their extremist religious interpretation of the world, and part of their extremism is the pursuit of power.

So, there is the sub-group of global jihadists relentlessly pursuing their End of Times battles against the West. But how many of those deluded fanatics are we really talking about...and how much influence do they have?

The whole “They're hell-bent on installing a global caliphate, and so they will hate us no matter what” seems only to apply to a small subgroup of the total “they”. The “they won't be satisfied until they take over the world” explanation doesn't hold water outside of that fringe group.

To answer the important query “Why did 9/11 happen?” with that simple-minded assertion is a gross oversimplification, as it misses the reasons the resentment in question arose in the first place. Resentment doesn't emerge spontaneously. An explanation for it must be formulated, for it is the underlying cause of the hostility we saw come to our shores ten years ago.

Upon critical reflection, we find that much of the answer to “Why do ‘they’ hate us?” consists of the following 4 things:

- 1 The USG's support for the IG's appalling policies in Palestine
- 2 The USG's global garrison state (specifically the military presence in Muslim lands)
- 3 The USG's support for iniquitous dictators in Muslim lands (in the past, recently, and even now)
- 4 U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and other Muslim lands—which has involved the killing of many innocent Muslim civilians (hundreds of thousands in Iraq alone)

Bottom line: resentment, resentment, resentment, and more resentment. If these four grievances were addressed (i.e. eliminated from the picture), all that would remain are the “hate us no matter what because they're seeking world domination” sub-group. To be clear, it was the CONFLUENCE OF factors that explain what happened: the four things enumerated above IN CONJUNCTION WITH the existence of Salafi fanaticism (in particular, the deranged jihadist dogmas its indoctrinated subscribers vociferously espouse). That confluence of states of affairs precipitated the horrific events of September 11, 2001. The point is that we Americans can DIRECTLY do something about the four things enumerated above.

It should be noted that Hezbollah & Hamas are fighting a local war for local issues; this does not involve some world-scale agenda to install a global caliphate. For these groups, addressing the Israeli problem would nullify their radicalization (and thus their hostility toward, and resentment of, “the West”). So these two groups are not part of the key sub-group in question.

Side note: This is not to say that the U.S. “deserved” the attacks of 9/11. Let's say a tragically-misguided, petulant child regularly abuses and incessantly taunts a belligerent dog—and the members of what that dog perceives to be its pack—until one day the dog or one of

its pack bites the child's arm off. In explaining WHY the child was attacked we are not in any way insinuating the child "deserved" to lose his arm. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon responsible adults to provide an explanation for why the child's behavior was ill-advised...and thus lead to the tragedy. In doing so, *we are not absolving the dog from guilt*. Bottom line: It was the child's lack of responsible conduct—in conjunction with the dysfunctional state of the dog—that lead to the harm he incurred. To point this out does not entail an endorsement for the tragic repercussions of the child's actions...nor does it entail giving support to belligerent dogs.

Of course, this analogy only goes so far. The "dog" here was a Salafist cult—a cabal of fanatical militants. The key difference with 9/11 is that those responsible for the ill-advised conduct ended up (unwittingly) causing innocent bystanders loosely associated with them—not themselves—to be harmed. In this case, the child's sibling, say, incurred the retaliatory strike of the aggravated canine...while the culpable child—mostly unscathed—decided the best way forward was to antagonize more dogs suspected of being belligerent. What, then, should the *siblings* do about this development?

Suggestion: "Please, brother, stop mistreating other sentient beings. For the belligerent ones may very likely retaliate...and end up hurting the rest of us." The recognition that one doesn't address belligerence with counter-belligerence should be the basis of U.S. foreign policy. But this takes courage, rectitude, and fortitude. (*Fighting* is often the coward's approach.) Mutual antagonism is the only result of such militant approaches to perceived "threats".

The concern, then, is with the sub-group in question (the fundamentalists who will "hate us no matter what" because—presumably—they're hell-bent on installing a global caliphate). (That is to say, this sub-group hates Israel and the US *as much as for who they are as for what they do*.) This hidebound view is part of the sub-group's extremist religious interpretation of the world, and part of that extremism is the pursuit of power. To reiterate, this characterization applies *exclusively to the sub-group in question*—and therefore doesn't account for the remainder of the Muslim world (which doesn't share that extremist ideology), even though many Muslim factions engage in LOCALIZED disputes. **After addressing the four grievances enumerated above, this sub-group would be the ONLY group remaining that is endangering the U.S.**

The above are 4 valid points of contention. Each undeniably fuels widespread resentment and hostility toward the U.S., *enabling this sub-group to metastasize*. If we deprive this sub-group of such "fuel", would it eventually dissipate? Almost certainly.

The discussion, then, must be limited to this sub-group, and its "externalities". First, it should be recognized that such fanatics do exist. But we must ask: Is their number large enough to warrant dictating U.S. foreign policy in the way that it has?

Most of the problems in the history of IR have spawned from the masses becoming infatuated with tribal honor (i.e. succumbing to false pride) and calls for tribal glory (i.e. super-patriotism). The trouble with right-wing FP is that it is not concerned about the effects of policies on *regular humans* (i.e. the subaltern population of the world). Rather it is obsessed with the assertion of America's power (and the affirmation of national glory) and the promotion of "national" (read: corporate) interests. This national chauvinism (a.k.a. "exceptionalism") is not only deeply dysfunctional (as it amounts to a kind of group narcissism), but profoundly inhumane. The examples in this phenomenon are quite obvious—the most extreme of which was Nazism. We don't have to speculate what happens when FP goes too far to the right, we've already seen it,

from Germany's Third Kingdom (on a global scale) to Israel's Judean Settler Movement (on a localized scale).

Foreign Fall-out From 9/11 policies:

An article in the Sept. 3 issue of the Lancet chronicles "adverse health consequences of US Government responses to the 2001 terrorist attacks." According to its authors, Dr. Barry S. Levy and Dr. Victor W. Sidel, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq "caused many deaths of non-combatant civilians, further damaged the health-supporting infrastructure and the environment (already adversely affected by previous wars), forced many people to migrate, led to violations of human rights, and diverted resources away from important health needs."

According to the report, "The initial \$204 billion spent on the Iraq War could have reduced hunger throughout the world by 50 percent and provided enough funds to cover the needs for HIV/AIDS medicine, clean water and sanitation, and immunization for all children in developing countries for almost 3 years. Within the USA, the federal budget for the 2011 fiscal year for the war in Afghanistan—\$107 billion—could have provided medical care for 14 million US military veterans for 1 year."

Linda Rae Murray of the Public Health Association: "Do we understand that we've been hijacked by a small group of people using government for their own benefit?" Indeed, even as the war profiteers benefited from the "war on terror", hundreds of thousands of civilians have died. To what end?

CONCLUSION:

We should remind ourselves that when a country becomes scared, it becomes easily manipulated—and can be persuaded to eagerly endorse a security state. Ultimately, the "security state" is tantamount to a system of highly-concentrated, top-down power—and thus antithetical to genuine democracy. It should be noted that 9/11 only changed "things" to the degree that we *enabled* it to change things. More to the point, 9/11 only changed us insofar as we *allowed* it to change us.

The attack was not an act of "war", as the military establishment was itching to caricature it. Rather, it was a coordinated criminal act by a syndicate of criminal elements. That is to say, it was (transnational) *organized crime*. The syndicate (labeled "Al Qaeda" by the U.S. in 1998) consisted of a network of militant fanatics with a hostile agenda. While nature of their agenda was *predicated on* Salafism, it was *instigated by* U.S. foreign policy. Each alone was a necessary but not sufficient condition for what transpired. The vile cocktail of conditions precipitated the violent acts against the U.S. and its affiliates.

As we ask the question, "Did the world change on that fateful day?" it is important to keep in mind: The key thing that was different about 9/11 was *the identity of the victims*. Suddenly, it was ONE OF US (i.e. people who *mattered*) who were killed, not subalterns in a distant land (i.e. those who's death and suffering could be readily dismissed as collateral damage in a righteous crusade).

On the 10-year anniversary of that fateful day, George Packer put it best in a *New Yorker* article: “After the attacks, Americans asked, ‘Why do they hate us?’ This turned out to be the wrong line of inquiry. The most pressing questions were about us, not them: our leaders, our institutions, our ability to act as a cohesive nation...” Simply asserting we stand for “right” and “justice” and “freedom” is woefully inadequate. We must start holding up a mirror, as Jesus of Nazareth implored us to do. For we may find plenty of motes in the eyes of *the other*, while never acknowledging the plank in our own eye. Let’s take care of that plank first.