

The day the world changed

After this unspeakable crime, will anything ever be the same?

SIX decades ago, a generation of startled Americans awoke to discover that their country was under attack. Pearl Harbour changed America, and therefore the world. Now the children and grandchildren of the Americans who went to war in 1941 have suffered their own day of infamy, one that is no less memorable. The appalling atrocities of September 11th—acts that must be seen as a declaration of war not just on America but on all civilised people—were crueller in conception and even more shocking than what happened in Hawaii. Thousands of innocents lie dead in the wreckage of the World Trade Centre; hundreds more seem likely to have perished at the Pentagon and in a crashed airliner in Pennsylvania. This week has changed America, and with it the world, once again.

In the immediate aftermath, the United States showed signs of what makes it great. In so many ways, and for understandable reasons, it had been unprepared to face such evil. Modern Americans have never learned to live with terrorism or with enemy action of any kind within their borders. They have not needed to. Neither the attack of 1993 on the World Trade Centre nor the bombing in Oklahoma in 1995 had changed that. Even the attack on Pearl Harbour was remote from the country's heartland. At home, Americans felt safe, in a way they never will again: it made this week's enormity all the more terrible. Despite everything, the country rallied. Across the United States, people have queued to give blood, to offer help. Airports and stockmarkets have been closed, but there is an urgent desire to return to normality, to carry on and not be cowed. In the country at large there is nothing of hysteria or panic. The mood is grief, purpose, unity, and anger under control. That is admirable.

In his first messages to the country George Bush spoke well, balancing reassurance and resolve. It did seem a mistake, perhaps a sign of the country's innocence in these affairs, that Mr Bush should be hurried to safety in Nebraska in the first instance, rather than to the White House or to the ruins in Manhattan or Washington. At such times the president's security ought not to be the overriding priority: exercising leadership, and being seen to do so, must come first. But if it is fair to call that a momentary mis-step, it was soon put right. The commander-in-chief was quickly seen to take command, and then acquitted himself with credit.

From horror to action

The testing, however, has barely begun. The immediate task of clearing the debris, recovering the dead and counting the full human cost will be daunting in the extreme. (In some ways, the first telephoto images, awesome though they were as spectacle, disguise the human toll of pain and distress.) And as that awful work proceeds, in circumstances hardly conducive to rational analysis, an adequate response to the atrocities must be framed. That is the greatest challenge of all. It must not be a task that the United States undertakes alone.

Even the simplest and most obvious prescriptions, to do

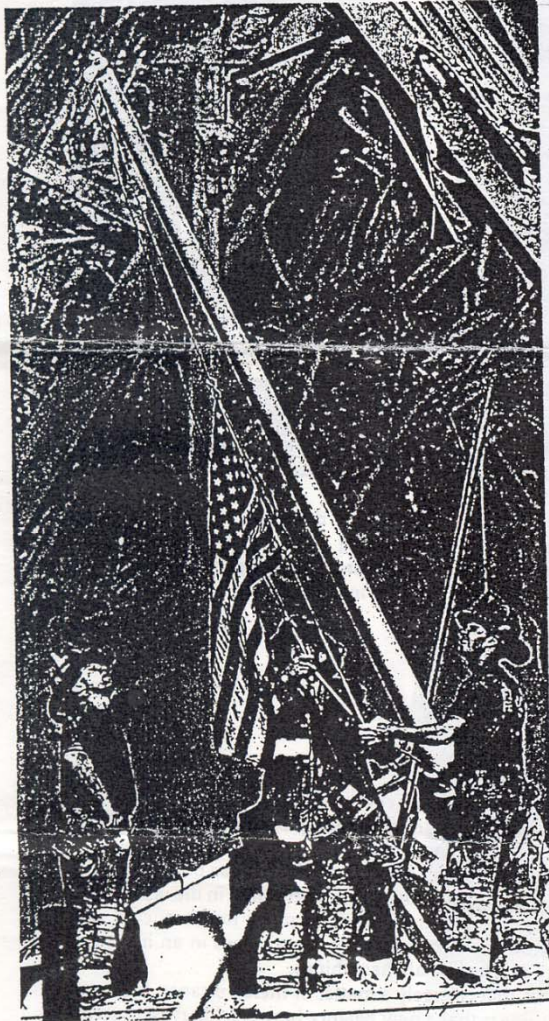


with improving security at domestic airports, pose a dilemma. For years, visiting Europeans have been either alarmed or delighted, according to temperament, to discover that boarding an airliner in America is as easy as boarding a train back home: bags checked at the kerb, tickets issued at the flash of a driving licence, minimal or no inspection of cabin baggage. This, it now sadly emerges, was a fool's paradise. Security at America's airports will have to be brought up to the same stifling standards as those endured in the rest of the developed world. That will entail much longer queues, much more bureaucracy and even more delays in an industry already detested for all these things.

Still, that is largely a matter of mere nuisance. Much more worrying is that a new balance between liberty and security may have to be struck more broadly, and not just in the United

States. This issue, at any rate, will have to be faced. The attacks called for meticulous planning and co-operation among an extended network of conspirators, yet apparently took the authorities entirely by surprise. This was an extraordinary failure of intelligence-gathering. Critics have long argued that America and its allies have come to rely too much on high-technology snooping for counter-terrorism purposes and not enough on old-fashioned human spying. To meet the threat of an enemy without compunction, who sets the value of human life at naught, governments will need to beef up both. But there is a heavy cost. Spying infringes everyone's freedom, everyone's privacy, not just that of the enemy. Just where this balance will be struck, or should be struck in a liberal democracy, remains unclear. In the face of the implacable evil witnessed this week, the answer may have changed.

Next comes the question of America's overall defence posture, and that of its allies. Mr Bush has given pre-eminence in foreign policy to missile defence. As this paper has said before, it is hard to see why America should be prevented from build-



ing a shield to defend itself and its friends against incoming missiles from rogue states if it wants to do so; no country should be deprived of the right to defend itself. Yet any idea that such a shield, if it can be constructed at all, would be enough by itself to guarantee American security, was far-fetched all along. Now it lies with the rubble. Among the enemies of America and the West are men who do not fire missiles, but who hijack aircraft full of fuel and fly them into crowded buildings. The missile-shield programme, whatever its merits, must not militate against efforts to improve security against other kinds of threat.

Stand together

Counter-terrorism, depending as it does on the pooling of information, also requires international co-operation, something which Mr Bush has, at a minimum, failed to emphasise in his approach to foreign policy. The United States has had good reason in the past to be sceptical about the value of some of its alliances and commitments. And it is right for Mr Bush to put American interests first—all governments should put their own national interests first. But mutually compatible national interests are often best served through co-operation. Without doubt, when it comes to international terrorism, a new spirit of common resolve is indispensable. America's allies in NATO have proclaimed their willingness to stand up and be counted by invoking for the first time in the history of the organisation its Article 5 on mutual defence, which binds the signatories to regard an attack on one member as an attack on all. That is what it was: an attack on all. The symbolism of the gesture is everything one could wish. Now America must demand, and receive, the tangible support it implies.

Lastly comes the question which is uppermost in most minds, the most treacherous question of all—that of retaliation. The problem is not merely that the American authorities still seem unsure who is to blame. Suspicion points to Osama bin Laden, but there are other possibilities, including, just conceivably, home-grown lunatics. Soon it will no doubt be possible to say with confidence who the perpetrators were. But if it does turn out to be bin Laden, that by itself will not give the answer to the question: "How much force in reply?"

America and the West—again, in their own interests—must recognise and reflect upon the hostility they face in parts of the world. Scenes of Palestinians and other Muslims celebrating this week's horrors may seem an unendurable provocation, but America must take care in the coming days that it does not create more would-be martyrs than, through military action, it can destroy. The strategy—easier said than done, to put it mildly—must be to make friends with opponents who are capable of reason, while moving firmly against those who are both incapable of it and willing to resort to, or assist in, acts such as those seen this week. The response of America and its allies should not be timid, but it should be measured.

Is there a danger that America will choose, in the end, to retreat behind a different kind of shield—not one that guards against missiles, but one that aims to shut out the world? The United States, no less than other great powers, has had an isolationist streak (George Washington said it was his true policy "to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world"). Our belief, and our fervent hope, is that the answer is No. Thanks to America, and only thanks to America, the world has enjoyed these past decades an age of hitherto unimagined freedom and opportunity. Those who would deflect it from its path must not, and surely will not, succeed. ■

The Day the World Changed

Vocabulary Expressions I

Task 1. Match the words and phrases to their definitions given below.

1. an appalling atrocity – the quality of being resolute, determination. Nazi war criminals committed appalling atrocities during World War II.

2. **debris** – a quality of being well known for evil, esp. morally wicked actions. After the bombing there was a lot of debris everywhere.
3. **resolve** – an act of great evil, esp. cruelty, shocking, terrible. Her encouragement and support strengthened our resolve.
4. **to be conducive to doing** – getting suddenly surprised at an unexpected slight shock. The friendly tone of the meeting seemed conducive to finding a solution to the problem.
5. **in the aftermath** – as a whole, all together. There is a danger of disease in the aftermath of the earthquake.
6. **to acquit oneself with credit** – to come or bring together for a shared purpose or effort. She was interviewed on the radio and acquitted herself with credit.
7. **in the extreme** – almost not; only just; hardly. He has been generous in the extreme.
8. **to daunt** – (esp. in writing or in newspapers) to die, esp. in a terrible or sudden way. He didn't seem daunted by the difficulties facing him.
9. **infamy** – smth that needs attention, consideration, service, being more important than anything else. The terror unleashed on September 11th held Osama bin Laden in infamy all over the world.
10. **to exercise leadership** – to bring under control by violence or threat. On October 7th President Bush exercised his international leadership to launch retaliatory strikes on Afghanistan.
11. **to rally** – the remains of a large building that has been broken to pieces or destroyed; ruins. Her supporters rallied for her defence when she was attacked by her critics.
12. **enormity** – of the highest degree. I don't think that even now he realizes the enormity of the crime.
13. **barely** – to carry out an activity with the stated degree of success. We have barely enough money to last the weekend.
14. **startled** – likely to produce a desirable result. The British were startled by the news that the Prince and Princess of Wales were getting divorced.
15. **overriding priority** – the result or period following a bad event such as an accident, storm, war. You must learn to get your overriding priorities right.
16. **to cower** – to use one's position of power to manage the situation. The people were cowed by the execution of their leaders.
17. **to perish** – to cause to lose courage or determination; dishearten. Thousands of Americans perished in the September 11th terrorist attack.
18. **at large** – an act of great wickedness. The world at large is hoping for great changes.

The Day the World Changed II

Vocabulary Expressions

1. **to invoke an article** – to make an event or action necessary. The government invoked reasons of national security to justify arresting its opponents.

2. **to undertake** – to satisfy a need or demand. Dr Johnson undertook the task of writing a comprehensive English vocabulary.
3. **to gather intelligence** – to act as a reason against smth. The gathered intelligence reports of a rebel group that's planning an attack.
4. **rubble** – a person who is guilty of doing smth wrong or criminal. After the bombing her house was just a heap of rubble.
5. **a commitment** – a person, thing or situation that causes annoyance or inconvenience. As members of the alliance we must honour our defence commitments.
6. **to steer clear of smth** – to cause a situation in which one has to make a difficult choice between two courses of action, both equally undesirable. I should steer clear of the fish stew; it's not very nice.
7. **nuisance** – an awkward feeling of guilt that stops one doing smth. It was a nuisance having to go home to get my ticket.
8. **to pose a dilemma** – to gain or obtain information about an enemy country. Her father's death posed a dilemma as to whether to stay at school or find a job.
9. **to snoop for** – cause one to hold a good quality, ability, or main activity above all others. I caught him snooping for something in my office.
10. **meticulous** – able to exist, live or be used together or with another thing. The child produced a meticulous drawing.
11. **to pool** – to keep away from; to avoid. If we pool our ideas we may be able to produce a really good plan.
12. **to emphasize** – to take up or accept as a duty or piece of work esp. one that's difficult or needs effort. He thumped the table with his hand to emphasize what he was saying.
13. **the kerb** – extremely careful with great attention to detail. The police arrested a driver who parked his car on the kerb.
14. **to infringe on/upon** – not to care about or not fear. He considers that this firm has infringed upon his computer hi-tech copyright.
15. **compunction** – too improbable to be believed or accepted. She didn't have the slightest compunction about telling me a lie.
16. **to militate against** – to call or bring into use (esp. a right or law) or operation. The high risks involved in such a business militate against finding backers.
17. **a perpetrator** - a line of raised stones along the edge of the pavement. The perpetrator of the statue in the reception area was the managing director.
18. **compatible** – a mass of broken stones or bricks, esp. from a building that has been destroyed. Is your computer compatible with my equipment?
19. **to entail** – to search; to look into, or concern oneself with other people's property or affairs without permission; to pry. Writing a history book entails a lot of work.
20. **to set smth at naught** – (about information) to combine; share, or bring together for the advantage of everyone in a group. Alice's setting her colleagues' opinion at naught upsets Paul.
21. **farfetched** – to demand. He told us a farfetched story about the president asking for his advice.

22. **to give pre-eminence to smth** – to give a special force or attention to smth to show that it's particularly important. Germany has always been given pre-eminence in the field of medical research.

23. **to meet smth** – a responsibility or promise to follow certain beliefs or a certain course of action. Their new model of car is so popular that they have had to open a new factory to meet the demand.