



## THE WORST DAY

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September 11 has turned the world upside down, which was the name of a popular song the British Army played on its fifes and drums as it marched out of Yorktown, Virginia after losing the American Revolution to colonial rebels and terrorists in October 1781.

The devastating and unprecedented fanatical suicide attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and severely damaged the Pentagon in Washington D.C. at a catastrophic cost in lives on September 11 were not directed at those installations merely because they are symbols of American power but are truly the centers of this nation's military and economic New World Order.

The appalling attack on the USA claims the worst death toll on a single day in American history, nearly 6,000 persons, double that of the Civil War's Antietam battle which was the worst previous day of death, and unprecedented since the burning of Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812 when the British attempted a comeback.

Similar to the assassination of John F. Kennedy nearly four decades ago, the devastating murder/suicide strike on the WTC and the Pentagon burst our personal bubbles. Suddenly we as individuals are minuscule, our private concerns petty and irrelevant.

Although we are starting to think of other things it dominates our minds, underlying our thoughts, hopes and perceptions, and will for a long time. We have wrung out our brains and souls over this, nothing else seems worth thinking about until this horror that haunts us is resolved, and we suspect it may never be resolved despite attempts at retribution.

Bombing Afghanistan back to a stone age it seems to have never been allowed to emerge from is not the panacea that will help us recover from our national angst.

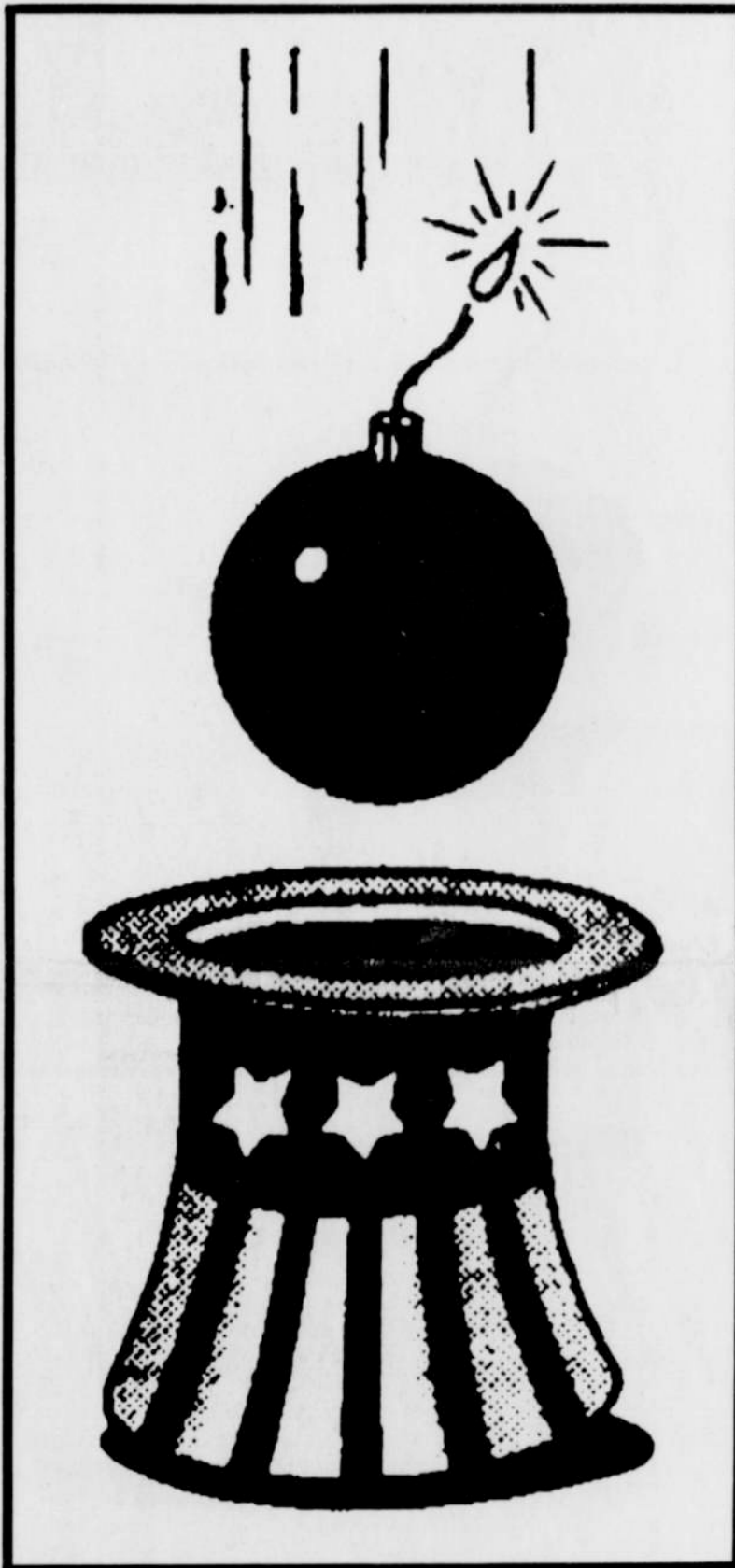
The funerals and memorial services will continue awhile yet; the collective sense of having been raped might persist the rest of our individual lives and will most likely be a legacy of our unborn heirs. The MacDisney images of this new century/millennium are revealed as the insipid fantasies they really were. It is a drastically different world we now perceive for the future, yet it is the same old world of danger and death it has always been, never mind for how long we have been able to pretend it isn't. Our center of gravity has radically shifted and we look out upon a newer milieu of uncertainty with feelings of anxiety, dread and grim determination to survive that would be familiar to our earliest ancestors.

The nation is, as one person said, awash in patriotism, defiance, compassion and fear. It is especially a time, as Rudyard Kipling said in a famous poem, to keep our heads when all others seem to be losing theirs.

The only thing that gives any and all of us a chance in this sorry world is the right and freedom to express our opinions and beliefs, to weigh in on national crisis. As gruesome and immensely tragic as Tuesday, September 11 was and the agony of its imprint on the American psyche, there is a grievous danger in overflaming the disaster to justify curtailing the Bill of Rights. In the name of national security the basic principles of our nation might well be suspended.

Television, which is unable to resist hype and hyperbole even amidst national tragedy, would have us think its panorama of patriotic ceremonies, the usual talking heads speculating military strategies and responses, and the countless camera views of flag carrying Americans verifies that the entire nation demands vengeance and war. Yet a passionate and significant debate is being carried out all across the USA concerning the future we collectively face, and it is reflected in internet E-mail and in the columns and letters pages of newspapers. Many writers wish revenge and say we must have the stomach to kill innocent persons --- so called "collateral casualties" --- to get at terrorists. Many others place security over liberty. Others give the President *carte blanche* in what he touts as the "first war of the 21st century." But nearly half caution patience and reason rather than vengeance and military action. The forum inadvertently addresses the dilemma of a modern superpower: what does a colossus do when attacked by ferocious mice?

The attempt by our former worldophobic leaders to unite the world as allies against terrorism might seem cynically self-serving in the small picture but a very good idea in the larger sense. We are a global civilization after all. The larger projection is that the United Nations represents this global civilization,



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as raucous and contentious as it is, but does not yet have the power to protect Americans or anyone else. Yet this is a chance to apply international law and courts to terrorism and the crimes against humanity its adherents perpetrate. The UN should act as arbiter of the terrorist act committed in this country, as Franklin Roosevelt intended it to be to reverse the failure of the League of Nations to prevent global war. The President should present the evidence he claims to have against Osama bin Laden and the al-Quiada terrorist network and that UN hearings as well as trial in the World Court be the dominant aim rather than a perpetual "War on Terrorism."

Fighting terrorism is a lot like stamping out fires with your feet. They spring back up again and again, their flames scattered by the stamping but most especially from fires underground that burn over great distances and erupt in several directions.

Although we regard whoever attacked the home country as "cowardly terrorists," they undoubtedly consider themselves heroic Davids standing up against the gigantic juggernaut of Goliath to revenge contemporary and historical grievances. They struck not only at the centers of U.S. economic and military power, they were also striking at our ambitions to be the heart of Western dominated world civilization. The terrorists are called "evil" and they respond by calling the USA "The Great Satan."

So we have two warring sides who claim God and right on their side, one with an arsenal capable of atomizing the world to oblivion, the other armed with comparatively inferior weapons yet with imaginatively destructive intentions of their use that are defined euphemistically as "low density warfare." They have shown themselves able to attack anywhere in the world with passionate fury and calculating homicidal suicide.

Human civilization is on the brink of something dire and awesome. It stares into a vortex that might very well obliterate it. Already the possibility of World War 3 is invoked, the final conflict predicted for millennia and possibly encouraged by Millenarians.

Palestine/Israel is the focal point of the vortex. It is where two very different peoples clash over ancestral land each disputably claims indisputably, which exacerbates every other conflict in Islam, and might be the real prophesied Armageddon.

For the USA and Europe, Israel is the brave outpost of Judaism struggling to sustain its recaptured Biblical 'Promised Land' (Zion, also synonymous with Heaven and Jerusalem). To the Arab peoples it is an upstart intrusion that usurped ancient Arab lands and cultures that once tolerated Judaism but loathes modern zealous Zionism that has disinherited them.

This small splinter of Mediterranean desert between West and East has been the focal point of history since the savage anti-Semitic pogroms of Europe precipitated the Zionist movement to recreate a Jewish homeland in Palestine their ancestors had to flee in the infamous Diaspora of Roman times. Except another people of another ancient religious culture were living in Palestine and for them it was their ancestral homeland also (and among them were Jews). These people were not isolated from the rest of humanity as had been the indigenous American peoples who were ultimately deprived of their lands and nearly exterminated by a three century war of genocide. Defending the Palestinians culturally and territorially is the rest of Islam.

This is the root of the problem that prevents a truly world civilization which has been a longheld dream, at least for dreamers, philosophers and humanitarians weary of the interminable wars between tribes, cultures, religions and nations. Here is the seemingly unresolvable problem that threatens humanity with possible annihilation. Here the best and worst traits of humanity are evident on both sides, and clash head on.

Would a United Nations redistributing of Palestine/Israel work to settle the problem, acceptable to both East and West? Will Jews and Palestinians give up religious nationalism for the sake of sharing a dual homeland? Would a few generations eventually heal the rift that has existed for more than a thousand years between three of the world's significant religions? Or is it hopelessly mired in the irredeemable past and thus patently self-destructs the human future?

The earlier analogy of firefighting might be applicable: If you can't put out or control a fire, attempt at least to contain it each time it erupts from a low flame. But this fire has been burning for millennia in one form or another and each time it flares its consequences are worse than ever. It would be a grotesque irony that humanity perishes because it is unable to resolve the conflicts from its earliest history.

Perhaps after the war is finished --- whenever and if ever --- and the shock of its costs and repercussions numb the current rally around the flag frenzy, many more American citizens might wish they had been more sympathetic to voices of dissent they this moment spurn or even denounce. "How empty, how sickish, how senseless everything suddenly seems when a war is over," Edmund Wilson once wrote.

Pacifists, people who wish to live not only their own lives in peace but wish for it to become the normal condition of humanity, are sneered at in times of war fervor and are told to live in the real world. Yet the real world, the human world, is of our making and threatens more than ever to be our undoing. Pacifists usually look down the long road instead of being gripped with the frenzies of the moment (although these can drive one to despair), and they have grim visions of humanity's future if it continues to make war upon itself on a small, already overcrowded planet on which the infection of violence and intolerance can spread faster than other diseases, and is the catalyst for most of the rest. True, the human species will probably die out someday --- just as we individually look into the future and see our own corpses laying somewhere on the timeline --- or it might evolve beyond anything recognizable as human. Pacifists seem to hope we might at least elevate to a higher plain of thought and compassion before we blow ourselves out like an extinguished candle.

Think of George Orwell: *War is peace.*