

# 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.

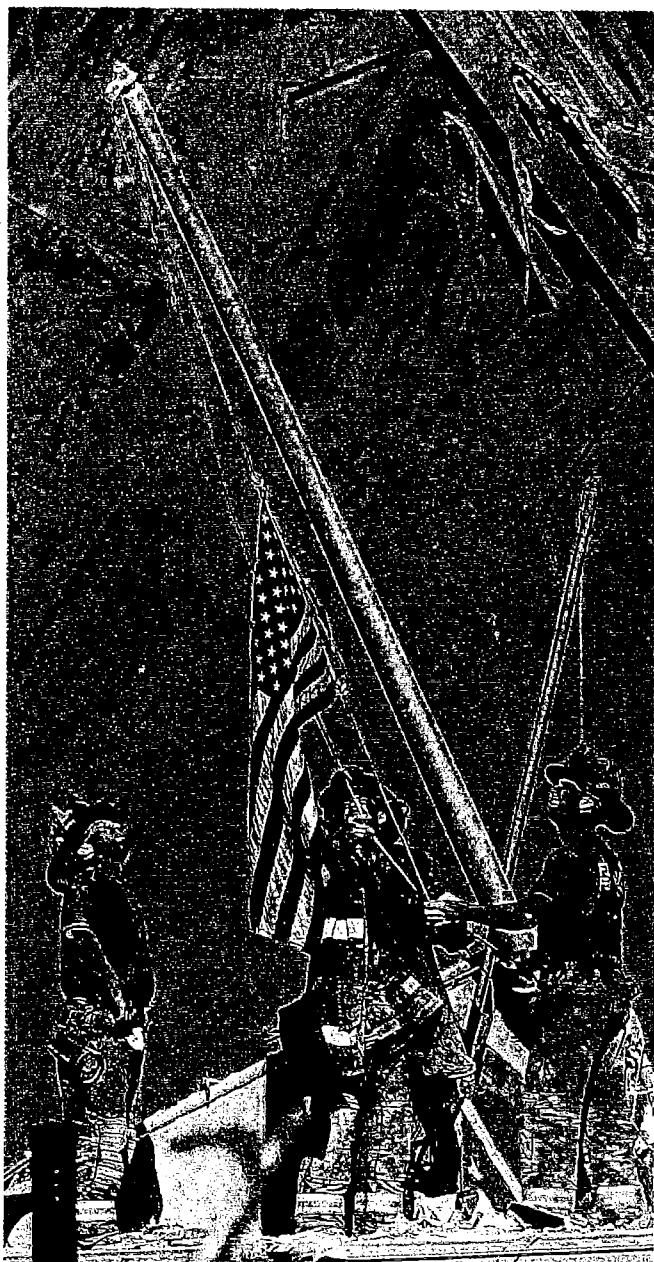
### Stand together

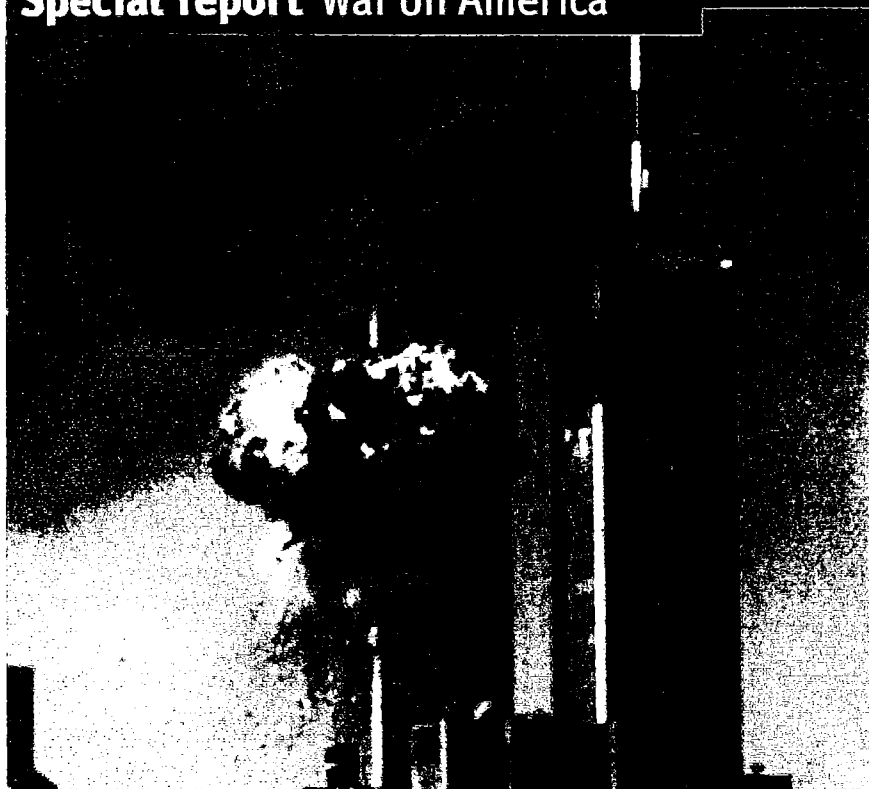
Counter-terrorism, depending as it does on the pooling of information, also requires international co-operation, something which Mr Bush has, at a minimum, failed to emphasise in his approach to foreign policy. The United States has had good reason in the past to be sceptical about the value of some 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 new enemy

WASHINGTON, DC

The assault on the United States will forever change the way America looks at itself and at the world.

SEPTEMBER 11th 2001 will be a date that America never forgets. Early on Tuesday morning terrorists simultaneously commandeered four passenger aircraft flying from Newark, Boston and Washington, DC. On the evidence of cellphone calls from inside the hijacked airliners, groups of between three and six terrorists herded passengers and crew into the back of each craft, threatening them with knives and cardboard-cutters.

Two of the planes flew straight into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, felling both structures an hour later while thousands of people were presumably still trapped inside. A third ploughed into the Pentagon. The fourth crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, apparently after the passengers decided to overpower the hijackers when they heard, again over cellphones, of what had happened in New York. The aircraft had been aimed, it seems, at the heart of Washington.

For Americans, these terrible events are epoch-making, changing the landscape of geopolitics as indelibly as they have defaced the skyline of Manhattan. Current debates about budget deficits and the Internet boom now seem frivolous. The

country's sense of invulnerability, built on its superpower status, has been violated. America has learned that it is not merely vulnerable to terrorism, but more vulnerable than others. It is the most open and technologically dependent country in the world, and its power attracts the hatred of the enemies of freedom everywhere. The attacks have shattered the illusions of post-cold war peace and replaced them with an uncertain world of "asymmetric threats".

The parallels with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, which brought America into the second world war, have been widely drawn and are in large part justified. There was the same shock of surprise. Colin Powell, the secretary of state, said there had been no credible warning. The enemy struck at the symbols of American might—its economic, military and (in intention at least) political power. The principal difference was that the targets were on the mainland, not thousands of miles offshore.

Even though the dead will not be counted for days, the casualties were almost certainly greater than the 2,403 who died at Pearl Harbour. This was the deadliest day's military action against Ameri-

cans since the civil war. It represents a profound change both in the scale and the complexity of operations mounted by any terrorist group.

At Pearl Harbour, America could immediately identify its aggressor. The experience of the Oklahoma City bombing—blamed at first on Middle Eastern action, but later discovered to be perpetrated by an American—enjoins caution this time. But a growing amount of evidence points towards Islamic extremists, including, some say, the date itself. September 11th 1922 was the day when a British mandate came into force in Palestine, over the heads of unyielding Arab opposition.

In particular, America's leaders seem increasingly convinced that Osama bin Laden was responsible. He is one of the very few terrorists with the organisational power to carry out such an operation. Mr bin Laden's people recently talked of planning "very, very big attacks" on America. As Peter Bergen, the author of a forthcoming book on Mr bin Laden points out, all his operations have been preceded by boasts of this sort. They were not, alas, credible enough for the CIA.

Assuming that the enemy is Mr bin Laden, then the biggest difference from Pearl Harbour may eventually be that America has no clear idea about what it means to go to war with him. In the immediate aftermath, America briefly behaved as if war had been joined in the old way. Financial markets were closed. Traffic into the capital was turned away. The ordinary business of life—airline flights, sporting events, shopping malls, Disneyworld—→

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The administration

## Delayed reaction

WASHINGTON, DC

Who was running the country?

**T**HE terrorists may not have succeeded in paralysing the American government, as they clearly intended. But they certainly sent it into a defensive crouch. Until dusk on Tuesday the need to protect the lives of leading politicians, particularly the president, seemed to override all other considerations, such as rallying public opinion.

George Bush was told that a second aircraft had hit the World Trade Centre while he was visiting a school in Sarasota, Florida. He wanted to return to Washington. But the gigantic security apparatus that surrounds the president had different ideas. Convinced that the president was a target, they kept him airborne on Airforce One for much of the day. At one point, officials contemplated keeping him overnight in an underground bunker at the Strategic Command near Omaha, at the controls of the country's nuclear arsenal.

The obsession with security was pervasive. Dennis Hastert, second in the line of presidential succession, was whisked away on helicopters to an undisclosed "secure location". So were other congressional leaders. The vice-president, Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, remained in an underground bunker in an otherwise evacuated White House.

With key officials either in the air or underground, the job of reassuring the country fell, for the most part, to local politicians and retired dignitaries. Rudy Giuliani was a pillar of strength. Old hands such as Lawrence Eagleburger put the horror in context. In mid-afternoon, Mr Bush's counsellor, Karen Hughes, appeared at FBI headquarters to insist that



The first news

"your federal government continues to function effectively."

The vacuum was filled at about 7pm when Marine One, the presidential helicopter, ferried Mr Bush to the South Lawn of the White House. Mr Bush had finally decided that this hopscotching could not continue. In an important symbolic moment, he snapped a salute to his Marine guards and strode across the lawn to the Oval Office.

In the evening, a succession of cabinet ministers addressed the country; Donald Rumsfeld spoke from the shattered Pentagon. About 150 members of both houses of Congress massed on the steps of the Capitol to listen to Mr Hastert and Tom Daschle pledging that America would stand united against terrorism. They then burst into a spontaneous rendition of "God Bless America".

Just after 8.30pm, Mr Bush spoke to the country from the Oval Office. He was forceful and to the point; but the important thing was the sight of the president back in place, in charge at last.

very infrastructure of an open economy in order to wage war.

The answer will not be clear for years, and will depend crucially on the outcome of America's likely reprisals, unlaunched as *The Economist* went to press. But a few conjectures can be attempted.

Mr Bush called these "not acts of terrorism but acts of war". In other words, he will treat the assault not as a matter for an international criminal tribunal (as happened after the destruction of Pan Am 103 in 1988) or a cause for pinpoint cruise missiles (as after the bombing of America's embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998) but as a *casus belli*. Who then would be the targets of that war? Mr Bush answered:

"We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them." This must mean America is considering attacks on the military bases and government buildings of the countries that give Mr bin Laden and his like safe harbour: Afghanistan, of course, but possibly also Iraq (implicated in an earlier attempt on the World Trade Centre) and Iran, with the fainter likelihood of Pakistan, Sudan and Syria.

Such a policy would obviously challenge America's allies, some of whom, notably France, have condemned mild attacks on Middle East terrorists. But the scale of the killings may change allied minds. The day after them, NATO invoked Article 5 of its treaty for the first time: this says that an attack on one member is an attack on all. Mr bin Laden has previously shown an interest in acquiring chemical and nuclear weapons. The mass murders in New York and Washington show the seriousness of that possibility. NATO may well take the view that the next time he strikes, there will be a mushroom cloud.

Counter-terrorism will also take centre-stage in America's reordering of its defence priorities. In March, a commission on national security chaired by former Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman argued presciently that a "catastrophic attack against American citizens on American soil is likely over the next quarter-century. The risk is not only death and destruction but also a demoralisation that could undermine US global leadership. In the face of this threat, our nation has no coherent or integrated government structures."

The report argued that the Pentagon should be reorganised to reflect these threats; that the special operations division dealing with "low intensity" conflicts should be given more clout (critics claim it has been downgraded by the priority given to missile defence); and that a counter-terrorism tsar should be created, with cabinet rank, to co-ordinate the many different agencies that get in each other's way when responding to terrorism. On May 8th, the vice-president said he would take over this task.

Lastly, the attacks may seem to vindicate critics of Mr Bush's proposed missile defence, who say the biggest threat to America comes not from missile programmes of rogue states, but from terrorists' "suitcase bombs". Logically, that point may be justified. But in their new vulnerability Americans may want defence of all sorts—and be willing to pay for it. You don't tear up your fire insurance because your house has been flooded.

Such arguments will form the debates of a new era of shadow war. No one can know in advance where they will lead. But wherever it is, the starting point is the awful wreckage in lower Manhattan under which so many Americans lie buried. ■

was shut. For a few hours, the government itself seemed headless, as the secret services spirited away the president and leaders of Congress to secure, secret spots.

Yet the assault of September 11th presents America not with a military challenge of the old definable sort but with a dilemma of a new type. The attacks were essentially on America's way of life. The temptation is to defy those attacks by going about the nation's business as usual. But that, of course, is not possible or desirable. At a minimum, stricter airport security will be imposed. The bigger question is how America, without compromising its own open society, can defend itself against a suicidal enemy who uses the