

Out of a clear sky

Pillars of Republic stand amid carnage

By Charles Rousseaux

It was a perfect fall morning on Capitol Hill. The bright, yellow sun warmed the stark, white pillars of the Capitol and the green grass on the Mall. Only fleecy, white clouds marred a clear, azure sky as Washington began another busy day.

Congressional staffers were milling through the Capitol's endless corridors, lobbyists were studying position papers, congressmen began considering appropriations bills and a 9:30 am press conference was set to start just below the steps of the House of Representatives on the east side of the Capitol.

That's where I was, waiting for a press conference on sludge dumping into the Potomac. Dark reports of the plane crashes at the World Trade Center towers had already begun to make the rounds, but other than the initial report, no one was really certain what had happened.

Then a cameraman spoke up. He said that he had seen the horrifying footage of a plane crashing into the tower. Disbelief became horror and rage. The press conference began anyway — astonishingly, it even started on time. Yet heightened, agitated conversations continued to cloud the background.

Then, suddenly, a shadow darkened the sky — a large, silver jet flew overhead, its wings glittering over the Capitol dome. Jets aren't supposed to fly over the Capitol. No aircraft is. Yet for a few minutes, that simple, wildly significant fact didn't even register among the attendees.

Then it did. The background buzz became a full-throated roar. Sirens shrieked through the still air. Someone said that the Pentagon had been hit. No smoke could be seen, but suddenly, no one doubted that it was true. Jets screamed across the sky, and the press conference was left in shambles, even though no one had any idea where to go.

Some started to the far side of the Capitol, looking for smoky fingers reaching out from the tomb that the Pentagon had shockingly become. Others reached for cell phones, desperately reaching out to assure, or to find, friends or loved ones.

As the realization set in, the evacuation began. The police began ordering people off the Capitol grounds, and the palpable fear in the air became ordered walking — and panicked running. People flooded out of the exits — staffers carrying folders, lobbyists holding briefcases and tourists clutching packages.

Yet they didn't run far. Once they were off the Capitol grounds, many stopped, standing in the shade by the Library of Congress, trying to figure out what had happened. Those who weren't trying to somehow resurrect dead telephone lines gathered in small groups, hoping to figure out what had happened and who was responsible. Rumors spread the air — New York was a disaster, a helicopter had hit the Pentagon. Planes had been hijacked. Bombs had gone off across the country...

Suddenly, a second explosion ripped through the air, apparently a secondary blast from the Pentagon. The fear that confusion had somehow covered became palpable once more. Sirens again shrieked through the air. The explosion was not near, but it was loud. And it was here. The police began moving everyone away from the Library of Congress, and they moved. But no one ran — most didn't even hurry.

Pearl Harbor was on everyone's mind — as were creative suggestions for the punishment for those responsible. "Turn it into a parking lot" was the most popular suggestion.

Amazingly, seemingly minutes after one of the worst events in the Capitol's history, Washington business began to assert itself. Journalists continued to scribble. A few cameras snapped. Reps. James Moran and John Murtha gave informal press conferences — until they decided to go to lunch — on the Hill.

No one I talked to was even thinking about running. Tourists were planning on finishing their tours. Rookie journalists planned on filing their stories, and then reporting for work the next day. A few congressional staffers said that they would be back at work — even if they had to do it in a coffee shop.

It all made sense. The faceless cowards who attacked the nation's citizens did not shake its foundations.

It's worth remembering that the Statue of Freedom was placed atop the dome of the Capitol while the Republic was in the agonies of the Civil War. The Capitol's pillars stand firm because they are supported by the citizens of the Republic — in Washington, in New York and in every city and town across the United States.

Those citizens will recover from yesterday. They will rebuild and remember. And their Capitol will stand, a monument to the ideals they embody.

Charles Rousseaux is an editorial writer and a Commentary editor for The Washington Times.



Tony Blankley's column for The Washington Times will return next Wednesday.

Tony Blankley

Could we stop calling this a "tragedy"? The hijacking of planes from American and United Airlines by terrorists, who crashed them into the two World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, represent an act of war. It's that simple. Yesterday's carnage may not have been preceded by a hand-delivered notice and a finely worded declaration of war, but such formalities are not the nature of warfare in the 21st century. Come to think of it, no formalities were observed at Pearl Harbor either, which caught the U.S. government equally unprepared. Yesterday was a "day of infamy" no less than Dec. 7, 1941.

Still, as in the war with Japan 60 years ago, it is not as though we have not been put on notice over the past decade. For years, Islamic terrorists have considered themselves at war with the United States and its ally Israel, whose vulnerability to suicide bombings ought to be especially appreciated by Americans today. What we felt here yesterday, from astonishment to helplessness to absolute outrage, is what the Israelis have to live with every single day.

Our recent experience with Islamic terrorism ought to have placed the country on high alert. The World Trade Center bombing of 1993 was a warning. So, too, was the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998. So was the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in October of last year.

Forces of darkness are indeed conspiring against us, people who act in ways that we consider neither rational nor intelligible. They do

A day of infamy

Someone just delivered a declaration of war

have a sick logic of their own, however. Saudi fundamentalist terrorist leader Osama bin Laden has been fingered as a prime suspect in the coordinated embassy bombings in Africa, and he has reportedly bragged about the attack on the USS Cole. Reports of an imminent and massive attack on the United States have apparently been around for the past several weeks.

So, it surely is not unfair to ask why the U.S. security services were asleep again. As an outraged Rep. Curt Weldon fumed yesterday on CNN, "the first priority of the U.S. government is not education, it is not health care, it is the defense and protection of U.S. citizens." Rep. Dana Rohrabacher is very reasonably demanding accountability among high-level intelligence officials. An operation of this magnitude and level of precise coordination should have been picked up by the CIA or the FBI. Whether the reason is complacency, a lack of funding or a lack of human assets in countries that harbor and nourish terrorists, it is totally incomprehensible and unforgivable that the United States was caught off-guard again.

President Bush preserved calm

during one of the worst days a U.S. president could have imagined. Calm is good. But if anything, one would have liked the president to have spoken more in anger than in sadness, which seemed to be his prevailing mode. "Make no mistake," Mr. Bush stated, "the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." Acknowledging that "[t]he resolve of our great nation is being tested," Mr. Bush promised, "We will show the world that we will pass this test." He had better follow through on that. The actions of Mr. Bush — and of every country that wishes to be called a friend of the United States — will be carefully watched by the enemy. This is not a time to urge caution. We have to respond with massive retaliation or expect more American lives to be lost in the future.

Somewhat encouragingly, it seems that this is also the expectation felt abroad. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was among the first to deplore the action, looking severely shaken. Perhaps he could inform his people that their dancing in the streets of the West Bank and handing out candy in celebration does not exactly back up his regrets.

Meanwhile, Islamic Jihad in Gaza issued a statement blaming U.S. Middle East policy, but renouncing any responsibility. Even the odious Taliban in Afghanistan held a press conference to let it be known that they didn't do it. Nor did they think that Osama bin Laden did, by the way.

It is certainly true that an open society cannot protect itself against every lunatic who thinks he has a cause and a grievance. Necessary precautions must not be allowed to change the nature of this country from what makes it great and strong — its free people whose democratic and enterprising spirit has brought the United States to an apex of power. If Adolf Hitler could not bomb Britain into submission with the Blitz of London, which likewise targeted the civilian population, surely the actions of the terrorists yesterday ought only to strengthen American resolve against the evil forces they represent.

Americans, bless their hearts, have a way of rising to the occasion. Now the Bush administration has to do the same.

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Helle Bering

By Jed Babbin

Yesterday, terrorist scum killed more Americans than the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor. Sept. 11 will go down in history just like Dec. 7 did: a date when Americans were killed in cold blood in an attack that was both criminal and unjustifiable by any human measure. After we were knocked down at Pearl Harbor, we got back up, dusted ourselves off and got ready for a real fight. We have to do the same thing now. We are at war. Let there be no quibbling about it. Let there be no talk of "proportional responses" to yesterday's acts of terror that brought death and destruction to America.

These actions are taken by people who mean to destroy our way of life. You cannot negotiate or compromise with such psychopathic killers. For almost two centuries — with the exception of the Pearl Harbor attack — America's homeland, with very few exceptions, has been safe from foreign invasion or attack. We have enjoyed a sanctuary from the destruction of our homes, our places of work and worship. But that era ended when the first two aircraft were intentionally crashed into the World Trade Center. We have to confront — and defeat — the threat of the well-organized, well-financed terrorists who now bring their wars to kill our friends, neighbors and loved ones.

That's one choice. The only other choice is to accept life of constant terror as it is in Israel or Northern Ireland. We are a free people. We deserve better. There will be much debate over how and when we should respond, and against whom we should act. The president will hear a lot over the next few days, and he should ignore about 90 percent of

No sanctuary for terrorists

Forget all the talk about a 'proportionate response'

it. There will be appeasers who will say we should only respond "proportionally," whatever that means. There will be those who say that the likely perpetrators have not been convicted, so any military response should await a court's determination of guilt. President Bush should tell all of those people to sit down and shut up.

There will be a need for action at home and abroad. At home, we must fight against any restrictions on our

essary to destroy the threat. We cannot wait, rubbing our knuckles until some court declares someone guilty. The courts are not an instrument of national security. If we wait, our hesitation will only invite more attacks.

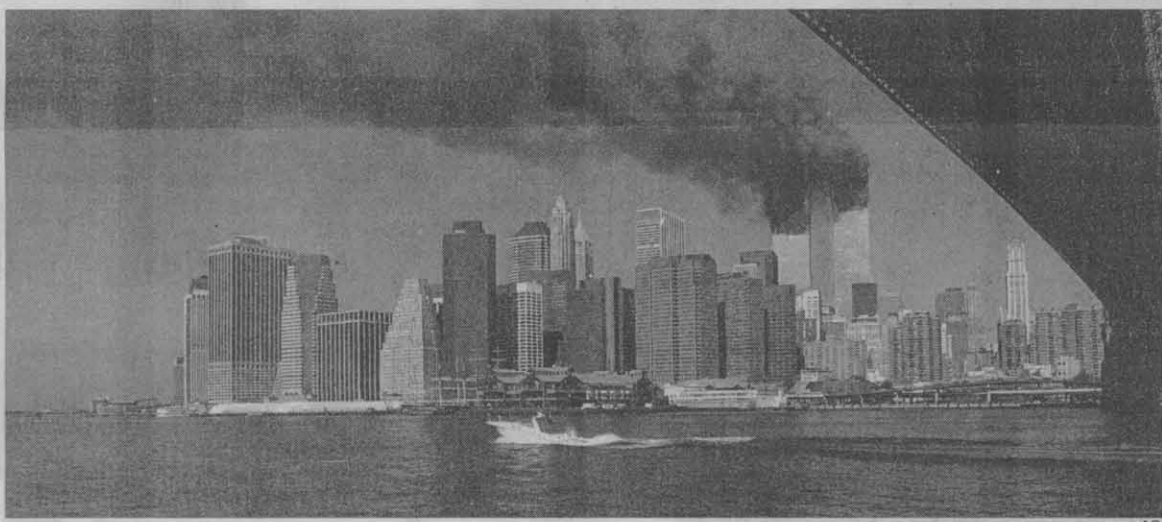
When America is attacked, as it was yesterday, it must strike back in a manner that is proportional to our strength, not proportional to the size of our enemy, large or small. Mr. Bush shouldn't listen to any talk of

soring an earlier World Trade Center bombing, has been given a safe haven in Afghanistan. Lil' Billy could wag the dog and bomb all the goat-milk farms in Afghanistan, but nothing bad would — or did — happen to bin Laden. The Taliban need to know we're serious. Today, the president should send a message to the Taliban government in Afghanistan: Give us bin Laden, or we'll carpet bomb the area we think he's hiding in. And if he's not there, we'll try another place.

What's more, our intelligence agencies will have some idea of who was responsible for yesterday's attacks. We should take them on, one by one. Give them a day to turn over those responsible. If not, the next day the B-52's pay them a visit. No ifs, ands or buts.

That's a start. We will have to take on other nations and other terrorist networks. We cannot let them have a moment's peace. We should often reiterate our condemnation of terrorist killers and those who help them. There must be no safe place for them to hide, and no hesitation to attack them or those who give them shelter. As President Reagan said we should tell them: "you can run but you can't hide."

Jed Babbin is former deputy undersecretary of defense in the first Bush administration.



personal liberties in the name of national security. As Franklin said, those who would surrender liberty for security deserve neither. But someone should be answering some pointy-type questions about how it became so easy to hijack four big airliners. Abroad, we must fight as well, and in the literal sense. Nations that sponsor or harbor terrorists are our enemies. We have to treat them accordingly. We must act against them, using whatever force is nec-

proportional responses. We have to be ruthless. We need to do whatever it takes to make the terrorists know that no matter where they go, no matter who helps them and no matter what they think they can do to us, we will hunt them down and kill them without mercy.

It is enough that there are reliable reports that Osama bin Laden said three weeks ago that his followers would make an "unprecedented" attack. Bin Laden, guilty of spon-

By Philip Gold

"They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions. . . . How the mighty have fallen." (II Samuel 1:19-27)

But we were not swifter than eagles. We only thought we were. And we were not stronger than lions. Instead, we chose to assume that our strength was unquestionable, our homeland inviolable, our peace an eternal God-given right. And now we too are fallen, fallen amid the trash and trivia of a culture and a governance that figured reality — the reality of evil — could be kept away indefinitely, provided we only issued enough studies and opinions saying that it could be or that it wasn't really that bad. Provided that we only entertained and diverted ourselves to stupefaction, provided we only . . .

Some of us knew differently. Some of us predicted that something of this magnitude would happen. We take no pleasure in being right. Nor do we find any comfort in "better now than five years from now," when the weapons available to our enemies (get used to the word, America) might be far more horrific. Perhaps in five years, they will be. But that's up to us.

There will be, no doubt, the usual surfeit of rhetoric and proposals and recriminations, of analyses and punditries, of calls for "justice" and pleas for "dialogue" and "beware of racism" and all the rest of the appa-

The war with Jihadistan

Does this country have the will to defend itself?

ratus of evasion. But no words matter, save insofar as they acknowledge one simple fact. We are now a nation at war, a homeland under siege.

At war with whom? With a nation you won't find on any map. Jihadistan: violent fundamentalist Islamic terrorism. Or perhaps you do find it on a map. It's the force that created the "arc of terror" that runs eastward from North Africa through the Middle East, up into central Asia, through the Indian subcontinent, thence to the Philippines and Indonesia. And westward now, to us.

What must be done? First, the United States must join with the other immediately affected nations — Israel and Russia especially. Then, the United States must make it clear to the nations which arm and harbor and abet our enemies that there will be consequences unless they desist. Then, the United States must establish a domestic security apparatus beyond the present patchwork. Then Jihadistan must be destroyed.

But most of all, the United States must understand what this new war is about. It is not about the endless slaughters of Israelis or Palestinians

or Chechens or — today we must say it — the greater slaughters of Americans. Only history, history writ large, can define it.

For more than two hundred years, from Lexington and Concord to the fall of the Soviet empire, the world endured the Age of the Wars of Ideology. The great issues were collective. What are the proper forms of government and economic organization? What systems best nurture and liberate the individual, whose freedom and welfare are the ultimate purposes of all this? Ten years ago, we were told that "history" had ended, that liberal democracy and capitalism were now triumphant, and what remained was extending the benefits to those who had not yet partaken.

It has not turned out to be so. Today, a new force that despises all the accomplishments of those centuries has arisen; a force that despises all notions save its own, and is prepared to kill and destroy for the sake of killing and destroying. In this sense, Jihadistan has far less to do with Islam than with nihilism. And there are other forces out there that, for reasons of their own, feel the same. They call themselves oppo-

ponents of "globalization," but they have less to do with ecology, human rights or economic justice than with nihilism. They're far, far weaker than Jihadistan. But first blood has already been shed. And other forms of darkness are gathering.

The Age of the Wars of Ideology is over. I suggest that the Age of the Wars of the Ways has begun. The victories of the Wars of Ideology are now endangered by those who find the fruits of those triumphs intolerable. By those who find the truths of those victories intolerable. By those who would rather reign in hells of their own creation than participate in the 21st century as it is, and may become.

David mourned for Saul and Jonathan when they fell on Mount Gilboa. Then he went about the business of doing what a king has to do at such moments. He united the nation. He looked to its defenses. And the nation responded and triumphed and endured.

Will we?

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