

9/11: THE DAY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Introduction

Focus

Five years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the world has changed dramatically. This *News in Review* story looks at the significance of 9/11 from its tragic beginning five years ago to what it might mean for the world in the 21st century.

Did you know . . .

Al Qaeda marked the fifth anniversary of 9/11 with a spate of videos showing the bombers preparing for their deadly mission. Al Qaeda leaders also warned of future attacks against Israel and the Gulf States.

Each day the boy would look out his classroom window in Brooklyn Heights with the comfort of knowing that his father was working on the other side of the East River in the World Trade Center's South Tower. But on this day all feelings of consolation were gone. For nine-year-old Nile Berry comfort was suddenly replaced by horror. As he looked across the river, he could see that both World Trade Center towers were on fire. Just after 10:00 a.m., the tower where Nile's father worked succumbed to the heat and flames that engulfed it and collapsed to the ground. Later that day, when David Berry failed to return home from work, the darkest of Nile's thoughts that day came to pass. His father, along with close to 3 000 others, was a victim of terrorism. Five years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the shock of the massive, precise, and horrifying assault on the U.S. is giving way to deeper analysis of what that fateful day means not only to people like Nile Berry and his family but also to people around the globe. Scholars are attempting to put the event in perspective to see what impact that day, and the subsequent "war on terror," has had on recent events and how it may shape the future.

The War on Terror: Afghanistan

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, few nations really questioned the U.S.'s decision to go after Osama bin Laden via an attack on Afghanistan. In fact, Canada, like many other nations, pledged immediate assistance to the United States and joined it in Operation Enduring Freedom. Within months, the Taliban was ousted from power and the hunt was on for bin Laden in the

mountains along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

But some experts believe that, five years after the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. has botched the job, leaving NATO allies like Canada to do the dirty work of destroying the last vestiges of the Taliban regime and stabilizing a nation that is still poverty-stricken and in dire need of infrastructure development and financial aid. While the United States continues to scale back its troop commitment, many people wonder if any nation, including Canada, has the will to persevere in Afghanistan.

The War on Terror: The U.S. Home Front

The attacks of 9/11 left the United States in a state of shock. The U.S. government did everything it could to mobilize its economic, political, and military resources to fight its new and elusive enemy. While U.S. troops were sweeping into Afghanistan, the Congress of the United States was passing the Patriot Act—a piece of legislation that dramatically expanded the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate alleged terrorists. The Patriot Act allowed agencies like the FBI to access phone, bank, and medical records of suspects without a judge's approval. Suddenly, the United States, the self-proclaimed bastion of civil rights, was willingly infringing on people's civil liberties, and the people were letting them do it. The Patriot Act was seen by many as a central component in the U.S.'s war on terror.

The citizenry and politicians of the United States rallied around President Bush in the first months after 9/11. However, many believed that, while

Further Research

The text of the Patriot Act can be read at:
www.patriotact.com.

acquiescence in the face of the Patriot Act might be acceptable, never challenging the President on vital issues was not acceptable. From the outset, many of the families of the victims of 9/11 wanted the government to hold a full-scale inquiry into the attacks on the U.S. The Bush administration initially dismissed the idea. However, after ongoing pressure was exerted by the families and the media, Bush set up what has come to be known as the 9/11 Commission. The commission was formed in late 2002 and published its report in the summer of 2004.

The 9/11 Commission concluded that vital information—information that could have helped to prevent the attacks on September 11, 2001—was deemed insignificant due to poor communication between U.S. government agencies like the FBI and the CIA. One of the Bush administration's security advisors on 9/11, Richard Clarke, testified before the commission. He claimed that he repeatedly warned of an Al Qaeda threat to the U.S. In one dramatic moment, he turned to some 9/11 family members gathered at the hearings and said, "Your government failed you, those entrusted with protecting you failed you, and I failed you. We tried hard, but that doesn't matter because we failed. And for that failure, I would ask—once all the facts are out—for your understanding and forgiveness" (www.cbc.ca/news/background/sep11/clarke.html).

The War on Terror: Iraq

After removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, the United States shifted its attention to Iraq. In early 2003, a war of words erupted between the United States and Iraq. The U.S. made repeated claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction

(WMD), with Iraq repeatedly denying the claims. By March, the U.S. demonstrated a willingness to invade Iraq to find the WMDs unless Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, abandoned his presidency and left his country. Saddam said "no" and, on March 13, against an enormous wave of opposition from peace activists around the world, the United States, Great Britain, and the so-called "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq. In May, Bush announced that the Iraqi conflict was over in his "Mission Accomplished" speech aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*. Iraq was under the control of the U.S. and its coalition partners. No WMDs were ever found.

Despite the "mission accomplished" proclamation, the violence only escalated and the hope that Iraq would simply embrace democracy (and its U.S. liberators) has failed to materialize. To date, almost 3 000 U.S. soldiers have died in the conflict in Iraq.

What does it all mean?

The "war on terror" has put the United States on shaky ground. The global community is weary of the U.S. tendency to beat the potentially hostile views of its opponents into the ground with the might of its military. Many commentators are very concerned with the trend that essentially pits the rich U.S. and its friends against poorer Muslim nations. To date, the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq is far from over. With nations like Iran and North Korea boldly asserting themselves, many commentators predict that the U.S.'s war on terror is bound to expand to those countries. All these events and speculations occurred in the wake of an attack by a few extremists on a September day five years ago.

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One can only wonder if any of these things matter to Nile Berry, now a 14-year-old high-school student in the United States. He is the true face of the

consequences of terror, for he is the one who had to endure the terror of September 11, 2001. No one needs to tell him that 9/11 is the day that changed the world.

Questions

1. Imagine the experience of Nile Berry on September 11, 2001. Pretend you are a friend of his and write words to comfort him after the death of his father.
2. Why do some critics think that the United States may have botched the job in Afghanistan?
3. Why did the United States invade Iraq? Was the campaign successful?
4. In what way has 9/11 changed your world?
5. What might the world be like if 9/11 had never happened?