

it.") Bush needs to impose a body count on *somebody* to show what he's made of, and it seems to matter little whether those against whom we will inevitably riposte are actually the people who carried out the attacks. That's the implication of the overnight *Washington Post* poll showing that 84 percent of Americans want military action against any nation that "harbors or shelters" the terrorists (terms susceptible of an unsettlingly fluid definition).

Bush's Oval Office speech claimed the attacks were visited on America "because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world." That, of course, was a lie. However appallingly misguided and criminal the attacks were, they were surely fueled by seething rage at a long list of deprivations over many decades—the support of despots, oligarchs and sanguineous dictators not only during the Cold War, but since; and the exploitation of the impoverished.

A formal Declaration of War undoubtedly would be popular in this country, but it is fraught with domestic dangers: It would give the executive branch enormous latitude in speeding up the drive toward a garrison state on which Bush—with no visible dissent as yet from any Democrat—seems bent. Any attempt to block Bush's \$18.5 billion raid on Social Security revenues to finance the Pentagon buildup?

Fugeddaboutit—those numbers will only go up. In the wake of the attacks, Kent Conrad, the Senate Budget Committee's Democratic chairman, has already declared defense spending "our core priority." And voices in Congress are calling for giving intelligence agencies more domestic authority. (Bill Clinton's 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act contains many suspensions of civil liberties protections in terrorist investigations, but more will now be proposed.) Moreover, the Democrats' chances of holding on to their one-vote Senate majority or retaking the House, slim before the attacks, will be next to nil. (And whenever the New York mayoral primary is rescheduled, Freddy Ferrer might as well stay home. In the new wave of law-and-order sentiment, he'll be toast.)

Here in Lower Manhattan, long lines of refrigerator trucks are pulling up outside the city's overburdened morgue to receive the thousands of corpses yet to be unearthed. The smoke and stench from the rubble of the Twin Towers is still seeping through the window of my apartment. CNN's Bill Schneider just announced a new poll showing three-quarters of Americans believe that "like Pearl Harbor and the JFK assassination, the events of the last 24 hours will change America forever."

Not for the better, I greatly fear. For, as the poet said, when the flag is unfurled, all reason is in the trumpet. ■

9/11/01

THE END OF ISOLATION

By Geov Parrish

In the wake of an event unprecedented in world—let alone U.S.—history, comparisons to Pearl Harbor have been flying. There are any number of ways this is a misleading image, but in one important respect it's utterly wrong.

By December 6, 1941, a war had been raging against fascism in Europe for two years, and the United States had stood aside. It had done so because of powerful domestic political forces urging isolationism—arguing that the war in Europe was none of America's business, that we were best off tending solely to our own affairs. That attitude ended instantly and permanently (sorry, Pat Buchanan) with Pearl Harbor.

Today, the U.S. government and military is the extreme opposite of isolationist. They have their fingers in just about every pie in the world. What hopefully stopped on September 11 was not our economic, military or political isolationism; it was the willful cultural isolationism of the American people.



Comparisons to Pearl Harbor are misleading.

While the U.S. government, corporations and the military pursue extremely active (and often destructive) policies, many of us back here in The Great Mall have chosen to remain willfully oblivious. We follow the pennant races, we clip coupons and go shopping, we obsess about our jobs, we tend to our families and communities.

But we ignore the rest of the world. Most of us speak no foreign languages, and many of us couldn't find Afghanistan on a map. We trust implicitly—whether consciously or by our own lack of concern—that our economic, military and political leaders are acting in our best interests and on behalf of democracy and freedom. We know that the world buys our brand names, and we are secure. Now the grimmer realities of the rest of the world have come home with a sickening jolt.

With luck, one positive thing that might emerge from this horror is the end of America's cultural isolationism. It's a goal we should all encourage, not only to improve our understanding of and accountability to the rest of the world, but to improve our policy-makers' accountability to us.

If our citizens paid closer attention to what the people acting in our names around the globe were actually doing, they might demand policies more in line with our professed ideals of democracy and freedom. Ultimately, that's the best protection against global terrorism. ■

9/11/01

SO THIS IS WAR?

By Christopher Hitchens

In the post-World Trade Center era, the question “how” is still taking precedence over the question “why.”

At the presidential level, the two questions appear to be either crudely synthesized or plain confused, since George W. Bush has taken to describing the mass murder in New York and Washington as “not just an act of terrorism but an act of war.” This strongly implies that he knows who is responsible; an assumption for which he doesn’t care to make known the evidence.

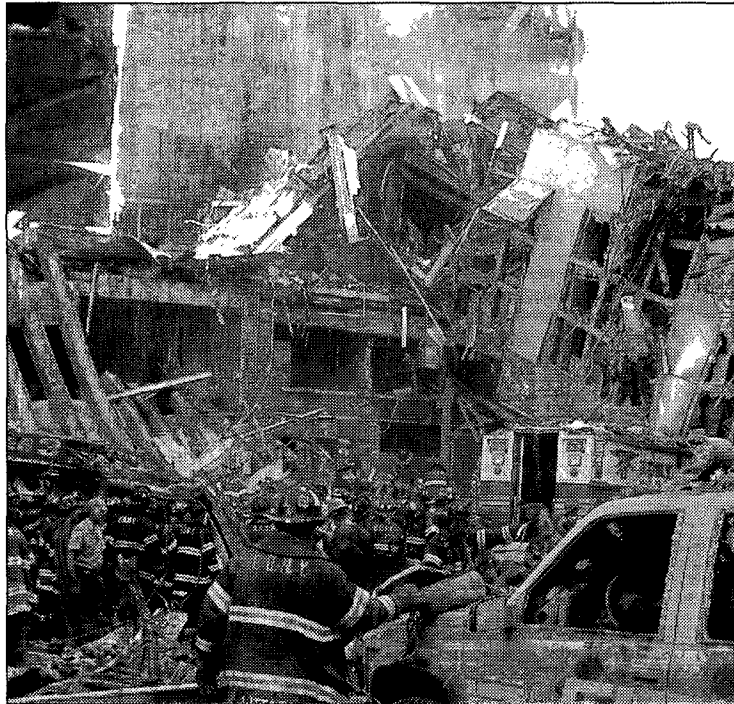
Instant opinion polls show the same cognitive dissonance at the mass level. Most people, when asked if they agree with the president about the “war”

proposition, reply in the affirmative. But in follow-up questions, they counsel extreme caution about retaliation “until all the facts are in.” This means, in ordinary words, that they have not the least idea whether they are at war or not.

Over the years since the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979, the public has become tolerably familiar with the idea that there are Middle Easterners of various shades and stripes who do not like them. The milestones of this—the Marine barracks in Beirut, the Gulf War, the destruction of Pan Am Flight 101—actually include a previous attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. And on that occasion, the men convicted of the assault turned out to have backgrounds in a Western-sponsored guerrilla war—actually a *jihād*—in Afghanistan.

Osama bin Laden had pretty good name-recognition among American news consumers even before Tuesday’s trauma. He has already survived a cruise-missile attack ordered by President Clinton in 1998 (in the same cycle of attacks that destroyed a Sudanese aspirin factory in the supposed guise of a nerve-gas facility). Bin Laden is perhaps unlikely to die in his bed, but his repeated identification as a “Saudi millionaire”—we thought the Saudi Arabians were on our side—makes consistency in demonization rather difficult; the image somehow doesn’t compute.

There have been cases of random violence here against Arab-owned shops, but, on the whole, it has been remarkable to see how such crude response has been kept to a minimum.



EMANUEL DUMONT/ITEMS

The television repeatedly shows film of Palestinian youths applauding the attacks in New York, but instantly “balances” it with a calm and reasoned appeal from the telegenic Dr. Hanan Ashrawi. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s Tuesday evening press conference in Manhattan—one of his very best and almost the first occasion on which any hard information was provided to the public—was notable in the same way. He tersely promised extra police protection to Arab and Muslim citizens, and dismissed any thought of vigilantism.

It probably seems indecent to most people to ask if the United States has

ever done anything to attract such awful hatred. Indeed, the very thought, for the present, is taboo. Some senators and congressmen have spoken of the loathing felt by certain unnamed and sinister elements for the freedom and prosperity of America, as if it were only natural that such a happy and successful country should inspire envy and jealousy. But that is the limit of permissible thought.

In general, the motive of the perpetrators is shrouded by rhetoric about their “cowardice” and their “shadowy” character, almost as if they had not volunteered to immolate themselves in the broadest of broad-blue daylight. On the New York campus where I am writing this, there are a few students and professors willing to venture points about U.S. foreign policy. But they do so very guardedly, and it would sound like profane apologetics if transmitted live. So the analytical moment, if there is to be one, has been indefinitely postponed.

In any case, the question of “how” is for the moment the more riveting one. Did the murderers have accomplices within the airport security systems? Have there been “sleepers” here for years? How did the coordination work? How near did we come to losing the White House? And—more nerve-rackingly—has all the venomous energy been spent in this one climactic assault?

During the Cold War, it was often said that the United States faced an unsleeping foe that was “godless.” I don’t think it’s sufficiently recognized how important this one word was, and how much it is missed. The holy warriors, as these seem