

Let Us Put the 10th Anniversary of 9/11 In Context.
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Ten years ago, Al Qaeda attacked New York and Washington (and more if they could have pulled it off). How could we not see this coming? And are we lulling ourselves into sleep again?

o Failed Awareness. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, no other credible enemy appeared on the horizon. To us, an enemy was a superpower with nuclear weapons. Not even China appeared to be a viable menace to us—at least, not for a long time.

Some of us, however, were watching another enemy. Historian Samuel P. Huntington warned of an imminent \223clash of civilizations.\224 Militant Shiite Islam had taken over the once modernizing Iran, and sent assassins around the world to assassinate defectors from the Ayatollah's government in Washington and Paris. A Japanese translator of a book, The Satanic Verses, that the Ayatollah did not like, was murdered in Tokyo. Iranian operatives (Hezbollah) bombed a Jewish community center in Argentina, murdering hundreds of people.

Then another Islamist turned up---Osama bin Laden---a Sunni Saudi millionaire, emboldened by how his \223holy warriors\224 had been used to help fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Thinking \223the enemy of our enemy was our friend, we foolishly supported them. When the demoralized Russians pulled out of Afghanistan, the holy warriors believed they could do it to the US too. This enemy was not our friend.

During the next decade, Osama bin Laden staged a number of bold attacks on the US: bombing the World Trade Center in 1993 (six killed and 1,000 wounded); simultaneous bombings in 1998 of two US embassies, Kenya and Tanzania (200 killed and more than 5,000 injured); and then attacking USS Cole in port in Yemen in 2000, using only a little motorboat bomb. Numerous attempted attacks around the world were foiled by good intelligence and sheer luck. But these foiled attacks didn't focus public attention on this real new enemy until 9/11/ 2001, when finally we were forced to take notice.

o Terrorism in History. How does one fight an amorphous enemy with no modern state power behind it? In the late 11th century, an Iranian Shiite (Hassan-I Sabbah) established an assassination cult with reach throughout the Middle East and Europe. His assassins were brainwashed to die, if necessary, in their missions to kill world leaders. They were only brought to an end by an enemy even more ruthless than they: the Mongols, who left a trail of blood and total destruction across Asia and into the Middle East.

A century ago, Anarchists assassinated seven world leaders (including President McKinley), which ended with one of these assassinations setting off World War I.

o Al Qaeda's Continuing War. Al Qaeda continued its mayhem after 9/11 with two major attacks in Europe: the London subway system and the Spanish railways, and more terrible attacks in Java and India. Fortunately, they were thwarted from numerous other attacks in the US and abroad by good intelligence (and luck). Finally, Osama bin Laden was killed in a daring raid in Pakistan (to the credit of President Obama); he was planning another attack for the 10th anniversary of 9/11. This time, fortunately, we are not asleep.

But are we tired of being vigilant? A recent mass murder attack in Norway was carried out by a right-wing fascist. Well-meaning people are relieved that the murderer wasn't a Muslim. But when we follow the numbers, militant Islamists are far more numerous than right-wing fascists. In addition they are funded by money (and arms) from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and overseas Muslims in Europe and the United States, which right-wing nuts are not.

These terror cult will eventually fizzle out, as we can see from historic precedents, provided we don't give up first. Considering the nature of militant Islam's war on the west, there has been surprisingly little \223Islamophobia.\224 Muslims in the West aren't persecuted; but they have been murdered in large numbers in Muslim countries by their own terrorists.

We must keep our heads when the inevitable next attack will slip through. Don't underestimate---or overestimate this enemy, but they really have no future.

680 words

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