



WMRC Article

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United States: Second Anniversary of 11 September Attacks Reveals Dichotomy of US Sentiments

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 killed more than 3,000 people, cost billions of dollars in damage, and destroyed two symbols of American power. Moreover, they forever changed US society, and the second anniversary of the attacks reveals the country's dichotomy as it strives to cope with the results.

WMRC Perspective	
Significance	The second anniversary of the attacks of 11 September 2001 finds America mournful over the losses suffered at the hands of terrorists, and facing the palpable, omnipresent sense of uncertainty that now exists in their wake. This anniversary also finds America at war in distant lands, and at war with itself over how best to ensure its security.
Implications	The US is increasingly divided over the policies of the Bush Administration, as US-led military operations in Iraq continue to take the lives of American soldiers. Despite two overwhelming military victories, the uncertainty bred by the fear of another terrorist attack has only slightly abated, leaving the country unsure of how to cope with the new state of fear.
Outlook	The US will remain in a state of uncertainty about its security for the foreseeable future. The debate over the most appropriate way to protect the country will intensify - fuelled by the upcoming Presidential election - and will create deeper divisions within the country, as well as with other nations.

America the Mournful

The US was profoundly wounded by the attacks of 11 September, as many people witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Center live on television. The loss of so many police officers and fire-fighters - not to mention 'average people', who reminded them of themselves - made the loss that much more tragic. The attacks forced the US to grow up quickly; the realisation that the world was a very dangerous place had finally been brought to their home soil. In recognition of the wounds, the first anniversary saw the US solemnly memorialise the tragedy of the previous year, with high-profile events in the three locations where the hijacked airlines were crashed. This year, the country is attempting to move on and heal its wounds by not making as much of the fateful day.

America the Fearful

Despite the initial military successes in Afghanistan, where the US and its allies excised the Taliban from control and destroyed the training camps run by al-Qaida, the fact that Osama Bin Laden remains at large means that the US is still living in fear that an 11 September can happen again. The war in Iraq, which began as another unprecedented military success, has now turned into a morass, as guerrilla fighting rages in the streets and soldiers continue to die with frequency. As more soldiers are killed, the fear of terrorism in the US grows, and this fear causes fissures to appear between the factions of the once intensely patriotic united front. Despite all of the preparations the US has

America the Vengeful

Within hours of the collapse of the World Trade Center, US President George W Bush was plotting America's revenge. Before the dust had settled over Ground Zero in lower Manhattan, the US was calling for blood and for the delivery of Osama Bin Laden - 'dead or alive'. Human nature dictated that the sadness felt over the tragedy quickly turned into anger, creating a hungry beast that needed to be fed. Afghanistan was the first to be served up, and within less than 30 days of the worst terrorist attack the world had ever seen, smart bombs were mercilessly raining down on the Taliban and al-Qaida throughout Afghanistan. The regime was quickly removed from power as US and allied forces, including Afghani tribes, pounded them into submission.

America as Solo

After the fall of Afghanistan, Bush set his sights on what he proclaimed as the 'axis of evil' - Iraq, North Korea and Iran. Even though renewed United Nations weapons inspections turned up nothing in Iraq, the US government, with very limited international support, went to war to forcibly remove the regime of Saddam Hussein once and for all. After a quick military campaign, Baghdad fell to US forces, but recently the number of US combat deaths in Iraq surpassed the number of deaths during the official campaign. A street-to-street guerrilla war continues, likely carried out by loyalists of Hussein and members of al-Qaida who have come into the country in droves, after sensing an opportunity to kill Americans. Now that US forces have become officially

made, and the great lengths to which the government has gone to improve security, the US is at a higher risk of a major terrorist attack than it was before 11 September 2001.

American on the Defensive

The Patriot Act - legislation granting broad new powers to the US government to facilitate a crackdown on suspected terrorists in the country - was passed in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks. However, the new law has become a lightning rod of controversy, as civil liberties advocates and political opponents of the Bush administration have held it up as an example of the Bush right-wing agenda to limit people's rights and grant law enforcement agencies broad powers to monitor and investigate Americans. Bush's Attorney General, John Ashcroft, has gone on a nationwide campaign to defend the law, as Bush calls on the US Congress to give law enforcement even more authority to pursue suspected terrorists in the US. The creation of the US Department of Homeland Security was the largest reorganisation of the US federal government in 50 years; in theory, it provided a much needed degree of integration among agencies, but in practice it has resulted in a mammoth and unwieldy bureaucracy.

bogged down in Iraq, the international support that the US previously shunned will be hard to come by, without the necessary *mea culpa* to fellow members of the UN Security Council.

America on the Offensive

The US has successfully disrupted the al-Qaida terrorist network. The operation in Afghanistan dismantled the training camps, and there have been efforts to crack down on Islamic charities that are front organisations raising money for terrorist groups. The fight against terrorism has been aided significantly by international co-operative efforts to identify and seize financial assets, the imprisonment of key operatives, and the intelligence subsequently gleaned from interrogations. US operatives even went so far as to unapologetically assassinate a carload of suspected terrorists in Yemen with a missile from an unmanned US drone, marking a new tactic and new dimension to the war on terror. Bush has recast Iraq as being the new frontline of the war on terror and - despite the mounting US bodycount - he baits his enemies, urging them to 'bring it on.' As the US makes some gains in the war against terrorism, polls show that it is losing the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the Muslim world.

America Divided

President Bush's approval rating was at an all-time high as US and British troops rolled through Iraq on their way to topple Saddam Hussein's regime. Although a majority of Americans and members of the US Congress supported the war against Iraq, there was some trepidation, as most people would have preferred the US to be backed by the UN and a broader coalition of forces. Now, as forces have become mired in a guerrilla war, fewer and fewer Americans approve of Bush and his policies on the war in Iraq and the fight against terrorism. As the 2004 Presidential election draws ever nearer, the Democratic candidates vying for the party nomination to challenge Bush have all seized upon the problems in Iraq to criticise Bush's leadership. However, a good number of Americans still consider it to be unpatriotic and inappropriate to be so vociferously critical of the Commander-in-Chief while still at war, if only to show support for US troops abroad. The US is also still, for the most part, going it alone, despite its efforts to diversify the force of troops in Iraq by bringing in more nations.

Outlook and Implications

In order for the US to make progress in the war on terror abroad, it must succeed in Iraq. The Muslim extremists who want the US to fail in Iraq are hoping to use the existence of so many troops in their backyard to inflict damage to US resolve. Although Bush has committed to stay in the fight for as long as it takes, the policy is becoming increasingly politically untenable at home; Bush's level of support slips with each death of a US soldier in Iraq. He must therefore obtain UN backing, and troops on the ground in Iraq from other countries. The work in Afghanistan is also far from over, as the Taliban has made a resurgence and al-Qaida has regrouped. In protecting the US from terrorist attack on its own soil, despite unease about a loss of personal freedom and privacy, most people are willing to make the sacrifice for increased security. The problem is that despite the changes on the letterhead of dozens of federal agencies, it is difficult to say that the US is markedly safer, or that the country is better prepared to prevent terrorism or respond to the impact of such an attack. The overall implication is one of great uncertainty regarding security and the political future in the US, not to mention any impact on the already tenuous economic recovery.

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