

Post 9/11: Effects within the US

SABRIA CHOWDHURY

ON this 10th Anniversary of the tragedy that we now know as 9/11, a great deal is being reflected upon, written and said. Most of the reflections on this horrific incident are related to the geo-political, defensive, economic and anti-Islamic aspects of the events. What is extremely relevant to note here are also the effects 9/11 has had over the years on the culture and psyche of the people living, working and studying on US soil.

Immediately after the attacks on September 11, 2001, the attitudes and level of suspicion on the part of US authorities of Arab and Muslim communities took a negative turn. Muslims in the US, present in about equal numbers from South Asia, South East Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, were targeted without exceptions. Some examples include detention of several hundreds of thousands of men for months with no justification -- some were deported for even minor reasons -- Muslim charities became an object of target by the FBI, it became increasingly difficult for Muslim students to obtain student visas, mosques were under continuous surveillance and many Muslims felt uncomfortable and intimidated speaking out about US foreign policy and the Iraq war.

The assumption on the part of the US government seemed to be that these people were somehow linked to terrorist activities and that there were, without a doubt, domestic conspiracies. The 9/11 attacks also targeted other immigrants such as migrants from Latin America and Mexico. We know now from the Report of the 9/11 Commission that in fact there were no domestic conspiracies.

One of the most significant responses to 9/11 was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security whose responsibilities it was to protect the territory of the United States from terrorist attacks,

man-made accidents and natural disasters. This organisation is now known to have engaged in abuse of power not only in its treatment of the Muslim population of the US but also in its controversial control and patrol of the US-Mexican border. Even the US's allies, notably France, were not spared due to President Chirac's refusal to follow in the footsteps of the US to send troops to invade Iraq.

The post 9/11 era brought about fearful images of

What can be considered most shocking is that a land, priding itself on being a melting pot of cultures, ethnic backgrounds and religions, had altered its policies towards the factors which rendered the nation so rich and enlightened in the first place.



the stigma of McCarthyism of the 1940's and 1950's. The "liberty and justice for all," which is the foundation of the American Constitution, seemed to have been severely violated on the grounds of an unsubstantiated fear factor and the veritable creation of a Big Brother watching over the population at large.

Hence came the establishment of a whole host of practices worldwide which we now have become

accustomed to in the last 10 years. Some of these practices include the presence of the army within cities, mobile phone surveillance, air travel which encompass the stringent rules and restrictions of carrying liquids on board a flight, security checks involving the removal of clothing and shoes, full body scans, biometric passports, and the installation of CCTV's, just to name a few.

What can be considered most shocking is that a land, priding itself on being a melting pot of cultures, ethnic backgrounds and religions, had altered its policies towards the factors which rendered the nation so rich and enlightened in the first place. The ever famous quote on the very symbol of American freedom, the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," had taken a violent turn.

It goes without saying that the unforgivable actions committed on 9/11 are in no way made banal or simplified. However, what is notable are the methods in which the US government had decided to manifest itself after the fact, questioning the fundamentals of democracy and liberty which it so prides itself on. She became the nations she loathed during the Cold War.

Today, on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, the people within the US continue to re-build, not only the physical damages to locations such as Ground Zero, but also their morale. The trust factor is beginning to seep back into the fabric of society, replacing the fear factor. However, the scars remain within the millions

of American Muslims, to prove that what happened on that unfortunate day cannot take away what made this nation a great one to begin with, to learn to stand together against adversity for, as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt so wisely said: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

The writer is Senior Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

SHIFTING IMAGES

The incredible lightness of being



MILIA ALI

"So, what do you do?" asked I have a job? No, I don't. This often triggers follow-up queries like: "Oh! Then, what do you do the whole day?" Good question! Often, I am tempted to retort: "I dwell in nothingness!"

However, I have realised that for most people "doing" means

participating in an activity which translates into a paycheck, profit or some tangible benefit. Judging by this yardstick, I am at best a dead beat or a flunky and at worst a social parasite living off either inherited wealth, or a fat pension, or my husband's earnings! Fortunately, owing to intense lobbying by feminist groups, housewives who care for young kids are excused for not "doing anything" economically valuable! But, since I am past the reproductive age, the assumption is that I am a "non-doer" who makes no significant contribution to society!

I appreciate that it's the "doers" who bring about change and innovation. Where would we be without these high achievers who are determined and driven? I admire people who have already made five phone calls, sent seven text messages and organised three meetings on their way to work. Not to speak of all the productive things they do during the rest of the work-day. These go-getters can multitask, juggle between three disparate chores and are always there when something important needs to be accomplished.

I don't just mean men and women who work in an office. "Doing" also extends to women who come for dinner and take over your kitchen or drop in for a

No one can provide a perfect prescription for prioritising certainties over possibilities. For me, taking time to "be" has actually freed me to "do" all the things I want to accomplish.

casual visit and within minutes organise tea and offer you a cup in your very own house! Some even provide gratuitous counseling on children's upbringing and education, marital relationships and, if slightly encouraged, offer advice on fashion, house décor and social etiquette. These people also sit in five different Board Committees, organise galas and charity events. Please don't get me wrong -- their inputs to our social lives are very useful.

However, there are others who "do" many things but just don't seem to fit into the standard profile. For example, my honest response to: "What do you do?" is: "Well, I manage my house, do some pro bono work, I read, sometimes I sing and I write a little." Unfortunately, these tasks seem mundane in comparison to what the real movers and shakers do!

The issue of being labeled as non-productive has been nagging me for quite a while. However, after hard reflection, I have concluded that it's not important only to "do," one must pause and take time to "be." I understand the need to pursue one's worldly ambitions but, in the process, are we collectively forgetting how to "be"? It is difficult to explain, in precise terms, what "being" actually entails because it can assume different connotations for different people. For me, "being" is taking time to be introspective. In fact, just experiencing the silence of the world within me gives me the opportunity to have an internal dialogue -- and, perhaps, ask myself a few incisive questions about my relationships and my total connectivity with my surroundings!

Does this mean I have become indolent and no longer want to pursue my dreams and ambitions? Of course not! But, with age I am gradually coming to terms with the fact that there is a time to "be" and a time to "do" -- the challenge is to ensure that there is a symmetrical relationship between the two. The idea is not entirely novel. In a somewhat different context, Bertrand Russell (In Praise of Idleness) talked about how a balance between work and idle time could actually create equilibrium in our lives. He believed that if this balance is achieved "... there will be happiness and joy of life, instead of frayed nerves, weariness, and dyspepsia. The work exacted will be enough to make leisure delightful, but not enough to produce exhaustion." Interestingly, today corporations have realised how important work-life balance is to ensure a productive, creative and happy work force. Recent research also indicates that work, home, community and self need to be viewed as a comprehensive system where each component complements the other.

The truth is, every individual needs to find his/her comfort zone in this fast-paced world. Like the protagonist Chanu in Monica Ali's Brick Lane, I have realised: "The thing about getting older is that you don't need everything to be possible anymore, you just need some things to be certain." No one can provide a perfect prescription for prioritising certainties over possibilities. For me, taking time to "be" has actually freed me to "do" all the things I want to accomplish in my life at this point.

Try it out -- it might actually work for you too!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

ANISUR RAHMAN

EVER since the end of World War II (WWII), the United States of America had enjoyed the status

of a superpower of the world. No country overtly dared to challenge American hegemony. The other major victorious power of the WWII -- the erstwhile USSR -- did lodge a muted challenge and the so called "Cold War" ensued. But American militarily surrounded the whole of the Soviet bloc and contained the spread of socialism. American industrial base and its economy were by far the strongest in the world and the USSR was no match at all. This state of affairs continued until an apocalyptic event of historic proportions took place in 2001.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, an earth-shattering (excuse the pun) event took place in America. The twin towers of the World Trade Centre in Lower Manhattan, New York, the potent symbol of American capitalism, were ignominiously destroyed by the al-Qaeda by crashing American civilian aircrafts onto them. It shook the whole of America to the core; the invincibility of the world's only superpower had been shattered brutally. The country was at the receiving end of an attack on its own soil. Even President George W. Bush, the most powerful man in the world, had to be protected in American itself from the threat of a terrorist attack on that day. The ignominy of the superpower was beyond belief and America is still reeling from that event.

The hunt for the terrorists who perpetrated such a heinous crime was immediate. The al-Qaeda was on American radar for quite sometime and when it was found that this organisation was indeed behind this audacious attack, the fury was boundless. America vowed to destroy al-Qaeda completely. Bush asked the world to join him in his crusade and said: "Either you are with us or against us." America launched an attack on Afghanistan -- the bastion of the Taliban supporting al-Qaeda. Almost simultaneously, America targeted Iraq on the pretext that it supported and harboured Islamic terrorism.

Bush stated in his State of the Union Address in January 2002 that Iraq, Iran and North Korea were an "axis of evil." America claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which must be destroyed, and that necessitated removal of Saddam Hussein. This hard-headed policy without any international consensus not only alienated America in the eyes of the world but also fractured Nato badly. France and Germany were strongly opposed to the Iraq adventure.

Disregarding the division in the Western power bloc and ignoring international efforts for rational approach in tackling terrorism, America almost unilaterally led the attack on Iraq and Afghanistan. Lack

of evidence that these two countries were behind the 9/11 attack did not deter America in her pursuit for revenge. It was a sheer gung-ho response. The country adopted the doctrine of "pre-emptive" strike on suspected countries. If necessary, America would carry out military action unilaterally without international consent or even UN approval. This was a brutal proclamation of military might and it did not endear America at all to the rest of the world.

War is never a low cost undertaking. It is estimated that the total cost of American "War on Terror" from 2001 to 2011, with inflation adjusted figure, amounts to over \$2,000 billion, almost twice the amount for the whole of the Vietnam War.

But could America financially afford to wage two wars simultaneously? Even before these two wars of choice, American economy was not in great shape. Productivity was dropping, and American share of

Although it is highly unlikely that capitalism will disappear overnight the US brand of capitalism, i.e. raw capitalism with no compassion for the poor is going to be damaged. If 1989 is regarded as the time when socialism collapsed, then one can say that 2001 may be seen as the beginning of the end of American hegemony.

the world economy was in decline. Russia was putting its house together after the collapse of its empire in 1989. Slowly and imperceptibly China, India and Brazil were emerging as the world's economic power-houses. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was amassing a huge credit balance. All of these things were happening while America was blinded with rage and revenge and pursuing aggressive military adventures against her presumed enemies.

Ten years on, following 2001, America finds itself in dire economic straits. Booming Chinese exports, were voraciously absorbed by the Americans. China offered credits, from her export earnings, to Americans to buy Chinese goods. To Americans it was like pay-day throughout the month. China, India and the OPEC countries also bought limitless amount of American sovereign bonds, which allowed America to pursue military adventures abroad without too much financial worry. But obviously things cannot go on like this forever and the consequence of such profligate behaviour will have to surface sometime.

The annual budget deficit in America in 2011 is now nearly \$1,600 billion (\$1.6 trillion), the sovereign debt has ballooned to \$14.3 trillion. In other words,

every American man, woman and child bears a national debt of \$55,000, which is one of the highest in the world, if not the highest. No wonder

American credit rating agency, Standard and Poor's (S&P), recently downgraded American credit rating from AAA to AA+. This is the first time in American history that the country has lost its triple A rating. Moreover, S&P has put America on the negative watch, which means that if the country fails to come to grips with its national debt, the AA+ rating may be further downgraded.

How did it all come about? How could the world's only superpower with the largest economy and huge industrial base run up such a massive, almost mind boggling national deficit? The answer to this can be found in profligate national expenditure and unilateral American military undertakings abroad, arising from excessive ego of national power.

During the Cold War, America pursued a policy of collective defence -- Nato, Seato, Cento and so on to counter the might of the erstwhile USSR. The advantage of collective defence was that all participating countries shared the cost and pain of defence and war. But after the demise of socialism and disbanding of the USSR and consequent disappearance of Russian threat, America saw no further need for collective defence.

When France and Germany opposed the attack on Iraq, America proclaimed that in the absence of collective agreement within Nato, the "mission will determine the participating countries."

At heart, it was the stance of the superpower to pursue a military undertaking on its own if necessary, particularly when the issue was nothing short of punishing the country or countries for the audacious attack on America and challenging its global might.

Historically, socialism hegemony did not collapse from foreign aggression. It happened from within when the state could no longer prop it up financially, when it failed to support client states internationally and maintain the military might of the superpower. It is the economic collapse which led to political collapse. Is a similar thing happening to America -- economic collapse leading to the demise of capitalism?

Although it is highly unlikely that capitalism will disappear overnight the American brand of capitalism, i.e. raw capitalism with no compassion for the poor, the unfortunate and down trodden members of the society, is going to be damaged. If 1989 is regarded as the historic time when socialism collapsed, then in the same vein one can say that 2001 may come to be seen as the beginning of the end of American hegemony.

The writer is MSRP FNuCI, Manchester, UK. E-mail: anisur.rahman1@btinternet.com