



AUTHOR: Dr Keith Suter
Global Thought Leader
Real Insights & Authority



SEPTEMBER 11: “THE DAY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD”



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEPTEMBER 11

The September 11 2001 terrorist attacks were the first big foreign attack on the mainland United States since the war with Britain in 1812. For the first time, an enemy had overcome the US's formidable geographic advantage to bring destruction to the mainland. There was, of course, the sudden December 7 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in the South Pacific, which forced the US into World War II. There were also some small attacks by the Japanese on the mainland but only a few people were affected by them. The September 11 attacks were conducted without any precise warning, in sparkling clear sunshine, with extensive media coverage. It was, in a sense, another Pearl Harbour. For many Americans, then, this was a day that changed the world. It has certainly meant major changes in US foreign and domestic policy (and for some of its allies).

Public policy responses to September 11 have taken two main forms. One is to use military force (the approach followed by the Bush Administration), either in retaliation or in a pre-emptive strike. Whether the precise Bush strategy will work is a matter of opinion. This book puts September 11 in the wider context of the new era of warfare. Terrorism is a form of guerrilla warfare (or complex irregular warfare), which is now making a comeback as a military tactic. The terrorist attacks were not the first such acts of terrorism and (as we have since seen) they have not been the last.

Another public policy response has been advocated by social justice non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have called for more attention to the underlying causes of violence. Again there may be some validity in this. But it is worth noting that all the hi-jackers came from wealthy families. Osama bin Laden (a millionaire himself) did not recruit poor, downtrodden peasants because they would not be able to take control of a modern aircraft. His personnel are very different from the young, angry stone-throwing Palestinians often depicted in television coverage of Israel. Therefore, eradicating poverty is noble cause in itself. There is no civil war in country that has full employment. But ending poverty will not alone end the threat of terrorism.

To use President's Bush ambiguous phrase “War on Terror”, then, this could be interpreted as meaning either destroying the organizations using terrorism or to change the conditions that give rise to terrorism in the first place (to “drain the marsh”). Or perhaps it means both. There are no easy answers on how to deal with terrorism.



OSAMA BIN LADEN



The Charismatic Leader

Osama bin Laden was born in 1957 into a wealthy family in Saudi Arabia. He has 51 brothers and sisters (his father has several wives). His father, Mohammed bin Oud bin Laden, went to Saudi Arabia from southern Yemen in 1932. He made a fortune from the construction business (and the bin Laden name is highly respected in the Gulf area). The young bin Laden acquired good business skills. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, he went there to assist the rebels fighting the Soviet invaders. He opened a guesthouse at Peshawar in Pakistan for the weary warriors "The Base" (in Arabic "al-Qaeda"). As a military commander he was respected for his bravery, his survival skills and his organizational flair. He became a leader of the "Afghan Arabs".

In Afghanistan he was willing to accept (via the Pakistani intelligence service) US military assistance. He and the US were fighting a common enemy: the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was driven out of Afghanistan in 1988. After years of civil war, the Taliban (a militia of Pushtun Islamic fundamentalist students) took over in 1998.

But he was less happy when he returned home to find the US presence in his territory as part of the defence against Saddam Hussein, who had invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Never a great admirer of the Saudi Royal Family, he became more of a critic both for its corruption and its pro-American sympathies. He was expelled from his country in 1991.

He then spent the next five years in Sudan, where he used his money to fund a number of infrastructure projects for the Islamic Government. By the mid-1990s he was calling for a global war against the US. He has not been seen in person since the US-led forces attacked his mountain hideout in Afghanistan in 2001. Audio cassette tapes are sent to Arabic broadcasting stations in which he calls on his supporters to maintain their struggle.

Bin Laden sees himself as the ambitious leader of a global Islamic campaign to reinstate the traditional system of government (the caliph), who would run a government of the worldwide Muslim community ("umma") on strict Islamic lines. He also wants to free the three main places of worship from foreign (non-Islamic) control (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem). He also wants to destroy the Jewish nation overall and to provoke a worldwide confrontation between the west and the Islamic community.

Bin Laden is a charismatic leader. He is seen by some Muslims as someone who gave up the trappings of luxury and wealth to live in a cave (which hints at Muhammad receiving the messages in caves). He does not have day to day control over the military operations (indeed

there is even doubt whether he still alive). But he has become an inspiration to millions of Muslims around the world who see in him, at last, a Muslim who is taking on the communists and western countries.

✓ Saudi Arabia – the Fragile Regime

Bin Laden’s campaign against the Saudi Royal Family has global implications. Saudi Arabia has the world’s largest singe reserves (about 25 per cent of the total reserves). The oil is easy to obtain from the ground. The world’s largest oil field, Ghawar, was found in 1948 and it remains the world’s largest oil field. There has been no recent oil find anywhere near as large as the old finds in Saudi Arabia. The lack of new large finds is adding to international fears that the world may be running out of easily available oil. The world may yet long have oil reserves – but they are not easily and cheaply available.

Saudi Arabia therefore plays a key role in influencing the international oil price. It can flood the market with a new supply and so prevent other countries from suddenly pushing up the price. But if the current ruling house fell and it was replaced by people who did not like western countries, then they could use the country’s oil influence in the other direction. They could put this mechanism into reverse and so jolt the international financial system by restricting the supply.

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world to be named after the ruling family - which still controls its own country. Arabia has been inhabited for thousands of years by nomadic Arab tribes. The area became the centre of Islam, with the rise of Muhammad in the sixth century. In 1902 tribal leader Ibn Saud decided to unite Arabia under his family’s control. This would take him 30 years to accomplish. He had to take on both the other tribes and the Turkish Ottoman rulers who controlled the Middle East. The Arab tribes had never liked the Turks and so they were willing to rise up against them. They co-operated with Britain’s Lawrence of Arabia’s World War I campaign against the Turkish rulers.

The Saudi regime was able to knit together traditional tribal clan structures and conservative Wahhabi Islamic clerics. The Wahhabi sect within Islam is seen as the “puritans” of Islam who wish to draw their faith back to a purer and stricter form of adherence.

Oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in 1936, with commercial production beginning in 1938. But for about the first four decades the oil industry was largely controlled by British and American interests. The ruling house did not make the most of its wealth.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was formed to enable the Arab producers to make the most of their oil wealth. In the 1973 Middle East war, OPEC used its

control over the supply of oil to try to deter western countries from supporting Israel. The price of oil was suddenly increased and the oil wealth started to pour into the OPEC countries.

The ruling regime consists of about 50,000 people. There is some doubt about the exact number because some of the men are not sure about how many children they have.

The regime governs about 22 million people. About 16 million people are Saudi, with the others being foreign workers. For example, Saudi women rarely drive cars and so there are many chauffeurs imported from overseas to drive cars.

There is little democracy. Because of all the oil wealth, citizens do not pay tax and so the ruling elite feel no obligation to be accountable to them.

There is also a basic contradiction. Saudi society is wealthy and so open to new technology and new ideas. But there is also extensive daily governmental/ religious control over the lives of citizens and so they cannot make much of all this foreign technology. Meanwhile, young Saudi people in their 20s and 30s have few opportunities for personal advancement. They are rich and bored. Some are attracted by the extremist violence of Osama bin Laden. He wants to depose the ruling elite (even though he is related to them).

He wants to purify the country, to get rid of foreign influences and their low consumer tastes. He offers the young men a purpose for living. Most of the September 11 terrorists were rich young men from Saudi Arabia. The problem for the rest of the world is that this tribal Arab struggle has international implications. Saudi Arabia is a key player in the global oil industry.

✓ **The US War Against Osama bin Laden**

September 11 has a long history. Osama bin Laden's first explicit attack on the US was in August 1998, when his forces struck at the US Embassy in Kenya, killing 219 people. There was an earlier attack in which he was implicated: the bombing of the Khobars Towers military complex in Saudi Arabia in 1996, in which 19 US service personnel were killed. In October 2000 there was a suicide attack on USS Cole in Yemen, killing 17 sailors.

Bill Clinton was the US President 1992-2000. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) became interested in Osama bin Laden as part of its investigation into the attempted bombing of the World Trade Centre on February 26 1993. A truck laden with home-made explosives of agricultural fertilizer was driven into the building's underground car park. The truck hit a speed ramp on the way in, which prematurely detonated the explosives, with the blast mainly going back out through the entrance, rather than up through the building's core. Six people were killed.

FBI agents started tracking down the plotters. Gradually the trail led back to Osama bin Laden. FBI agent John O'Neill was convinced that Osama bin Laden was a major threat to the US. But he could not get sufficient support for his assessment from FBI headquarters and the White House, who did not want to offend the Saudi Government. Even the attacks in the late 1990s failed to get official US support for his assessment. The US Government was more concerned with maintaining good relations with Arab Governments.

Meanwhile, the incoming Bush Administration had even less interest in Osama bin Laden. It was more concerned about Saddam Hussein (who had no direct link with bin Laden). In January 2001, Condoleezza Rice, the new National Security Advisor, downgraded the role of the White House Office of National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (headed by O'Neill's colleague Richard Clarke). Clarke got himself redeployed in the US Government.

In August 2001 O'Neill quit FBI in disgust. Aged 49, he had had 25 years in FBI. He became Chief of Security of the World Trade Centre. He was killed in the building a few days on September 11.

✓ CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The September 11 tragedy has become a conspiracy industry, rather like “who shot President Kennedy?” A Google Search for “911 conspiracy” results in 18 million hits in 0.13 seconds. There is a suspicion in some quarters that all is not what it seems. The event is one of the most discussed in recent history – but there are conflict results. Something odd has happened.

For example, writer and moviemaker Michael Moore has tapped into this anxiety with his “Fahrenheit 9/11” popular movie and book. For example, when the plane struck the first World Trade Tower President Bush was reading to Florida school children about a goat from “My Pet Goat”. The Secret Service (his bodyguard) advised him of the attack but did not try to evacuate him. He stayed here for seven more minutes still reading about a goat. His face did not display any great emotion – despite the news just relayed to him. Why wasn't he angry? Why didn't he move to a safer place? Why not (as commander in chief) try to take control of the military situation? Did his staff know about the impending attacks and so knew he was quite safe?

The speculations revolve around the role of the US Government and who really did it. Did the US Government know that the attack was coming – but let it happen anyway because it suited its own purpose? (This is similar to some of the conspiracy theories surrounding December 7 1941: President Roosevelt knew that the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbour but allowed the attack to go ahead because that would force a reluctant American nation to at long last go to war to help Britain). We now know that FBI and CIA had a great deal of information about the impending attack scattered throughout their respective organizations. For example, FBI agent John O'Neill had been warning about Osama bin Laden for years – but to no avail.

Meanwhile, who really did it? Opinion surveys in the Arab world showed that a majority of people asked did not believe that it was done by an Arab group – they did not believe that any Arab group was smart enough to do it. It must have been an operation of the much smarter Israeli intelligence service Mossad! Whoever did it, it was not (according to some) the result alone of being struck by passenger aircraft. The damage was too extensive for the aircraft to be that destructive. Some explosives must have been placed inside the building to do the bulk of the damage). How could burning aviation fuel melt the steel structure in the buildings when steel melts at a much higher temperature than aviation fuel burns? Why did the buildings collapse into their own “footprint” (rather than topple over to one side)? Their collapse was more akin to a controlled demolition with explosives.

The Pentagon building was also hit that day. But some people have argued that it was not hit by American Airlines Flight 77’s Boeing 757 because the damage was too concentrated. The Boeing would have caused far more damage. There were no wings or engines found in the debris. But if it was not that Boeing, they do not explain what happened to the real Flight 77.

Where was the US Air Force in all these attacks? How were hijacked aircraft allowed to remain in the air without US planes being scrambled to intercept them? Or perhaps the United 93 flight (the plane that passengers crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after restraining the hijackers) was destroyed by the Air Force? A story was made up to claim that the passengers saved Washington DC rather than admit to the US Air Force’s destruction of the civilian plane.

What about the links between the Bush and Saudi dynasties? Both of them derive their wealth from oil. George Bush Senior (US President 1988-92) was later a financial advisor to the bin Laden Senior family (via the Carlyle Group). Bush Senior has met bin Laden Senior (around the time that FBI agency O’Neill was pressing the Clinton Administration to go after Osama bin Laden).

Within 45 days of the attacks, the US Government responded with 350 pages of legislation: the PATRIOT Act. Hardly any politician read it before voting for it. It is one of the most far-reaching laws ever introduced in the US in peacetime. Conspiracy theorists wonder how such complicated legislation could have been written so quickly – and whether the evil forces that really run the US have done it (both September 11 and the PATRIOT Act) to deprive Americans of their basic human rights.

The theories are endless. What is more interesting is not so much their claims (which I think are stupid) but why they have remained so popular. Some of them have come from reputable sources (such US and British politicians). They are not all crackpots.

The theories reveal an underlying anxiety in the community that we are not being told the full truth. As in the TV series, “the truth is out there somewhere”. Life is not what it appears. There are hidden forces at work. Never before has the US been so rich and powerful – and yet it is also worried. September 11 tapped into a vein of nervousness.

✓ THE US-LED ATTACK ON AFGHANISTAN

The US Government quickly announced that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the attacks and that it would go after him. Despite being so slow to forestall the attacks, the Government was quick to respond. This irony has added to the conspiracy theories. Ironically, the Government was much quicker to identify the mastermind than the identities of the 19 hijackers. Osama bin Laden was a guest of the Taliban Government in Afghanistan.

✓ AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its current period of instability began in 1973, when the king was overthrown. His cousin Mohammad Daoud declared the country a republic, with himself as president. The communists fought back in 1978, with Daoud being shot dead. The Soviet Union decided to intervene to try to maintain order on its southern border but was in fact drawn into a quagmire. About a million Afghans lost their lives as the Red Army tried to impose its rule. The US supported the southern tribes against the northern tribes, which were supported by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union withdrew in February 1989. A civil war waged until the southern-based Taliban took control of about 90 per cent the territory. The Taliban (meaning “seekers” after religious truth) confined women to their homes, banned entertainment and television, and cracked down on the growing of opium. When the Taliban first came to power in Kabul in September 1996, with the full force of their religious zeal, they banned all sports events – even flying kites. Only three governments gave the Taliban Government full recognition: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The US, while critical of its human rights policies, liked its firm stand on drugs. Most of the heroin sold on western streets begins life in Afghanistan. Some of the farmers do not even know that their crop is illegal – they simply know that they can make more money from it than from other crops.

Osama bin Laden, having been chased out of Sudan by the US, went to Afghanistan as a guest of the Taliban Government.



AN ALTERNATIVE GRAND STRATEGY



What Else Could the US Have Done after September 11?

The first conflict of the 21st century has been fought with techniques much like those of the previous centuries. It remains to be seen how successful the US's grand strategy will be against the al-Qaeda network.

Indeed has the US walked into a trap? Anyone smart enough to plan the September 11 attacks would have also factored in a US military retaliation. They knew they would not have got away with it for long. They could expect to be detected. Indeed, a harsh American reaction may have been part of the calculations. Terrorism is partly designed to provoke a harsh response by a government so that (in theory) the resulting oppression will lead to a public backlash in favour of the terrorist organization's political aims. Therefore a standard US military campaign would be fighting on the agenda drawn up by Osama bin Laden. Therefore, the US could be led into in an ambush of some sort. Five years on, the US and its allies are still bogged down in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden is still a hero to many alienated young Muslims.

What else could the US have done after September 11? An alternative grand strategy could have been based on denying the other side an opportunity to win martyrdom status in the many developing countries where US economic and foreign policy is not liked. Here are five steps that could have been followed.

First, the US could have said that it would not walk into a trap. It would not attack Afghanistan because the Afghanis had already suffered so much from the Soviet invasion and subsequent civil war and drought.

Second, the US could have decided, instead, to provide extensive amounts of foreign aid (to win the hearts and minds of Afghanis and others in the Islamic world). This would have neutralized the "Islamic" factor by showing the ("Christian") US's generosity in assisting one of the poorest countries in the world.

Third, the US could have offered a very big reward (such as US\$500 million) to entice groups such as the Russian mafia (or even the Taliban) to hand over Osama bin Laden dead or alive. Half a billion dollars sounds a large sum of money – but it is less than the cost of a bomber. The US believes in capitalistic incentives – why not use the market to encourage people to find Osama bin Laden?

Fourth, the US could have created an ad hoc international tribunal try Osama bin Laden, if he were captured alive. This would have emphasized the importance of the international rule of law and the new International Criminal Court (which the Bush Administration has opposed).

Finally, in the meantime, President Bush should have used the national sense of crisis generated by the attacks to launch a campaign for energy independence so as to reduce US reliance on imported oil. This could have included encouraging the manufacture of smaller vehicles, the development of transport habits that involved less use of automobiles, and the creation of alternative energy sources. Additionally he could have used this sense of crisis to raise (and not lower taxes) and so as to avoid expanding the government debt.

This grand strategy would have required a great deal of advocacy, not least because so many Americans (if the conventional media are to be believed) just wanted Afghanistan destroyed. However, such is the leadership role of US presidents - if they want to assume it. The president of the day can talk an issue up - or he can talk it down. It would have required President Bush to ask if there were another way to behave and so encourage creative thinking based on human rights norms.

September 11 presented the US with some opportunities for creative thinking – and it missed them. The White House staff missed an opportunity to be more creative in their response to September 11. The new millennium could have begun with a new way of dealing with international conflict. But that opportunity was missed.

✓ Dealing with Fear

Terrorism may take place no matter what arrangements are made. After all, murder is still committed within societies, even though it is prohibited and there are the police and prison services - which do not exist at the international level. At the personal level, it is important to note that the object of terror is to terrorize. If you are terrified, then the terrorist has won. Therefore, people who cancel travel plans etc are giving into terrorists. As Winston Churchill said at the height of the German bombing "blitz" on London on July 14 1941: "You do your worst - and we will do our best". Terrorism can be reduced by it cannot be eliminated.

✓ A Better International Order

The potential for "terrorism" can be reduced by addressing the underlying causes of violence. This would mean, among other things, a greater sense of US multilateral engagement with the world, rather than a withdrawal from multilateral involvement in global affairs. For example, President Clinton in 1999 was angered by the Congress's refusal to provide sufficient funds for US foreign operations: "It is another sign of a new isolationism that would have America

bury its head in the sand at the height of our power and prosperity", claimed the president. The fiscal year 2000 foreign operations bill totalled US\$12,600 million, US\$1,190 million less than the president requested. "It is about half the amount available in real terms to President Reagan in 1985 and it is 14 per cent below the level that I requested". The president warned: "If we underfund our diplomacy, we will end up over-using our military". That turned out to be a good prediction.

The proposed grand strategy would require the US's re-involvement in creating a better international legal order. The US needs the international co-operation it has thrown away. The "isolationism" identified by President Clinton has increased. Indeed, not only has the US decided not to become a party to the Rome Treaty for the International Criminal Court but three weeks prior to the September 11 tragedy Congress was debating a proposal to further reduce US contributions to the UN to "undercut" the ICC initiative. Therefore, the US could have reaffirmed its commitment to wanting to work with other countries through international organizations to develop the international legal order.

✓ **A New Foreign Policy Philosophy**

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend". Is this a good philosophy on which to base foreign policy? The US's current problems suggest not. The US supported Pakistan and its allies – notably the Taliban - within Afghanistan, in opposition to Moscow's allies in the northern part of the country. Pakistan and the US did not want their "enemy" to gain control over the country. Since September 11, the US has changes asides and is now working with its former enemies against the Taliban to defeat Osama bin Laden.

This foreign policy philosophy has two weaknesses. First, it can lead to embarrassment. Afghanistan is only the most recent example. In 1979, the Shah of Iran (a firm US ally) was driven from power by conservative clerics, who regarded as the US as the "Great Satan". Saddam Hussein in Iraq thought he could exploit the chaos in the post-Shah Iran by invading the country in 1980. The Iran-Iraq war was one of the 20th century's longest conflicts. But the eight years of war resulted in a stalemate. The US helped arm Iraq against its enemy Iran.

Then in August 1990, Saddam Hussein suddenly invaded Kuwait. This time the US objected and helped Kuwait. That campaign required US troops fighting Iraqi personnel armed with US equipment. After the war, the United Nations sent in inspection teams to check on Iraq's progress towards disarmament. One of the reasons why the UN used US advisers is that they often encountered US equipment and so needed US advice on its military significance.

This is "blow-back": a policy that eventually results in the opposite of what was intended. Thus, in both Kuwait and Afghanistan, the US has had to fight troops it initially helped arm.

Second, this philosophy leads to a fear-driven foreign policy. It is based on being suspicious about the rest of the world and always thinking the worst of everyone else. The Cold War – one of the most expensive government projects in world history – is a good example of how countries can live in fear of each other. The arms race was often based not so much on the then current military situation but on “worst case scenarios” of what the other side could produce in the future – and so one had to prepare now for that future worst case scenario. In effect, each government was racing against its own fears – and not the actual ability of the other side. This same process is now underway with President Bush’s national missile defence system, whose implementation could lead to the erosion of nuclear arms control.

Here is an alternative philosophy (from the Jewish tradition): “The strongest person in the world is the person who can make their enemy their friend”. The US military should take a lesson from the US business community and ask: “how can we win friends and influence people?” Such a foreign policy philosophy would require a new approach to settling problems. It would be based more on what unites countries - rather than on what divides them. This would include the need to work together on protecting the environment and disarmament.

It would also require giving more foreign aid. The US now gives the developed world’s lowest level of foreign aid (as a percentage of gross national product): 0.10 per cent. The UN target (which is met by only four of the 22 developed countries) is 0.7 per cent GNP. Americans have not always been this mean. At the end of World War II, the US helped rebuild western Europe via the Marshall Aid programme, in which for some years the US transferred 2 per cent of its GNP each year to western Europe. This generosity was also in the US’s interest: an economically flourishing western Europe was a good market for US goods and a determined foe of Soviet communism.

The lesson is clear: you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. In military terms, you do not win hearts and minds by putting people in coffins. The US should have a charm offensive to win friends – and not create enemies.

Keith Suter