

# THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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## One Year Later

A Survey of Recent Articles

For all the solemn remembrances one year later, the historic meaning of September 11, 2001, is yet unknown. Did the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon bring about a lasting change in the way Americans see themselves and conduct themselves in the world? Or were they just another tragic incident, destined to be long remembered, but ultimately to have no larger historical significance? The nation's journals of opinion have been full of speculation.

A spirited response to the notion that "everything changed" comes from *The New Republic* (Sept. 9 & 16, 2002), with 10 pieces on "What Hasn't Changed": Americans' interest in foreign news (down after a brief upsurge), Afghanistan (still mired in chaos and poverty), and homeland security (still a bureaucratic mess). Senior editor Gregg Easterbrook notes that Americans continue to tool around in SUVs even though they spend \$6 billion or more annually on oil from Iraq. There's been virtually no change in energy policy. Foreign policy, however, is a different matter.

"It goes against the American grain to admit that the United States is now an imperial power," observes James Chace, former editor of the liberal *World Policy Journal*, writing in a symposium in *The National Interest* (Fall 2002), "but the magnitude of the American economy, its military budget, and its new will-

ingness to intervene unilaterally and massively across the globe all mark a decisive turning point in American history."

To avoid having other great powers coalesce against it, cautions Chace, who now teaches political science at Bard College, the United States needs to exercise its hegemony in a reassuring, "nonthreatening" way—adhering to the rules of the International Criminal Court, for instance, and embracing multilateral agreements. Or it might even "lead the world into a new internationalism," helping, for example, to form a new international police force.

Charles A. Kupchan, a professor of international affairs at Georgetown University, sees mainly peril in such views. It is "premature to announce the opening of a new era and the consequent emergence of new geopolitical fault lines," he declares in *The National Interest*. New tactics are evident, but "Washington still needs to focus on managing relations among major states, integrating rising powers into global markets and councils, and using multilateral institutions to promote cooperation, peace, and development." If it fails to do that, elimination of the Qaeda network may come "at the expense of the alliances and institutions that remain the bedrock of international peace and prosperity."

G. John Ikenberry, a political scientist at

Georgetown University, agrees. “America’s nascent neoimperial grand strategy threatens to rend the fabric of the international community and political partnerships precisely at a time when that community and those partnerships are urgently needed,” he writes in a *Foreign Affairs* symposium (Sept.-Oct. 2002). Another warning comes from a noted foreign intellectual friend of the United States. America’s leaders need to turn down “their bellicose rhetoric and think in terms not of apocalyptic crusades against evil, but of humdrum global policing against crime,” argues Sir Michael Howard, an emeritus professor of modern history at Oxford University, in *The National Interest*. Virtually every European state has been living with terrorism for decades, he points out. “Outside the United States, [9/11] has been seen as provoking the need not for a ‘war,’ but for better intelligence, better police work, and closer international cooperation in dealing with the problem.”

“Unilateralism and isolationism are ideological twins,” observes Michael Hirsh, a former foreign editor of *Newsweek*, writing in *Foreign Affairs*. “They both spring from the same exceptionalist impulse, a deep well of American mistrust about the rest of the world, especially Europe.” What many Americans seem to have forgotten, he says, is that “during America’s periods of intense (if reluctant) engagement overseas, the world that they had wanted to keep at ocean’s length became largely their world. Every major international institution—the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, NATO, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade—was made in America.”

That may be, but the rising costs of global engagement could well revive American isolationism, says Kupchan. “In the long run, America’s leaders may well find the country’s security better served by reducing its overseas commitments and raising protective barriers.” Americans will tire of worldwide engagement. “The popular comparison [of 9/11] to Pearl Harbor may well prove erroneous, for the difficult struggle against terrorism is ill suited to engendering public attention and sacrifice over the long term.”

**T**hough perhaps “only for a moment,” 9/11 did prompt Americans to rediscov-

er “the significance of citizenship,” notes Paul A. Rahe, a historian at the University of Tulsa, writing in a symposium in *The Journal of the Historical Society* (Spring 2002). The assaults “brought home to Americans in the most brutal way possible that, as Americans, [we] have enemies.” No “international community” will defend us, he says, because despite “wishful thinking,” none exists.

Spiritual exhaustion is what historian James Hitchcock, of Saint Louis University, discerns in the events of the past year. Writing in the same journal, he declares, “More Americans attended church services to mourn the dead and to pray for the safety of the country. But while religious leaders and public displays of religious feeling offered some comfort, they did little to prove their relevance to the national crisis.”

While radical Muslims see their conflict with America in religious terms, observes Hitchcock, most Americans do not. They “prefer to believe in individual error [rather] than in evil.” The aversion to being “judgmental” has become so prevalent that religion in America has lost “the spiritual resources even to recognize evil, much less combat it.”

The attacks of September 11 “brought to life the perennial villains in our master political narrative: religious fanatics, sectarian violence, zealots with bombs,” says Gerard V. Bradley, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame, also in the *Journal of the Historical Society’s* symposium. “The leading historical effect of that infamous date may be to confirm what we already took for granted: Secularism is safe.” That’s a mistake, he thinks: “The last century certainly records the dangers of secular ideologies.”

No other act of terrorism has done as much damage as the attacks of that September day last year did. But instead of being a portent of equally awful horrors to come, they may well remain singular events, just as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979–81 did, suggests John Mueller, a political scientist at Ohio State University, in *The National Interest*. Terrorists “will find it difficult to match or top” what Al Qaeda’s 19 hijackers accomplished that day. Like crime, terrorism will never end, he says, but the spectacular destruction of 9/11 may never be repeated.