

EDITORIALS

Cowardly act

God bless America,

a land that will not bend to terror

If fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." These words, attributed to Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto upon being informed of the successful attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, should be taken to heart by whoever perpetrated the appalling carnage on America this morning.

At this writing, it is not known who is behind the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

What can be safely stated is that if the intention of the attacks was to alter American policy in the Middle East — and in the absence of certain knowledge, that is unquestionably the most reasonable speculation — they will prove to be worse than a complete failure.

A failure would simply have meant the U.S. government would continue to support Israel.

Driven by outrage, however, the American people will stand solidly behind their government, as they have before in times of national trauma.

Further, while the destruction visited upon New York is far in excess of anything that Jerusalem or Tel Aviv have suffered — or that any city has suffered through a single action since the Second World War — this sampler of life in Jerusalem is likely to bring more sympathy to the state of Israel than anything else possibly could have. If the attackers thought to scare Americans away from supporting Israel, they simply do not understand America.

There will be few now who have no opinion about the Middle East and fewer still who have any sympathy for the terrorist cause. Indeed, the immediate challenge for President George W. Bush is as much to head off an intemperate reaction as it is to prevent further attacks. There will be a lobby howling for blood, not only of those in whose name the attacks were carried out but anybody who even sympathizes with them.

Of course, it is possible that there was no rational basis for these attacks, that they were carried out for revenge, the sheer satisfaction of hurting those who are hated and despised. It is horrifying to consider, but as these words are being written, people somewhere are celebrating.

That celebration will be short lived. Whenever Americans see that clip of one of their own graceful airliners being flown into a building that through its size and soaring elegance symbolized their own feelings about their country, they too could be forgiven if they allowed reason to sleep. Whoever did this has made for themselves an enemy which will give them no respite.

Yet, it is only those who are responsible who need fear. It is this that makes America great and morally superior to its enemies, that in all its travails it will not retaliate in kind. Unlike its attackers, it will still hold back from the wholesale and deliberate destruction of the innocent. In the midst of horror, mercy will still prevail.

It is why, even today, people would rather be in New York or Washington, than Baghdad, Palestine or Kabul. God bless America.

Our sympathy

There are moments in history, thankfully few, when the whole world stands transfixed, silent in horror and fear. For a split second no one can breathe or think or comprehend. In that moment, each of us knows that the world as we know it will never be the same again.

Today was just such a day. News that likely thousands of Americans were killed by at least four separate terrorist acts of war against the United States remains almost impossible to process. As reports pour in from Washington and New York, the sense of moral outrage builds.

That any group for whatever reason could sacrifice so many innocent lives with such a blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life is intolerable.

Our hearts and prayers go out to those Calgarians who have family and friends living in the cities under siege and who are anxiously awaiting news of their safety.

The city stands with you, in shock and disbelief, ready to lend whatever helping hand is needed.

We extend our sympathies also to the thousands of Americans who live and work in this city, who are as we, dumbfounded at the unprecedented attack upon the sovereignty of their homeland.

The attacks today on the World Trade Center and Pentagon are the worst acts of terrorism ever on U.S. soil. Indeed, never before has there been a large-scale terrorist attack coordinated successfully in more than one U.S. city. In horrifying sequence, two airliners were hijacked and crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, which shortly after collapsed. Another aircraft was crashed on a helicopter landing pad adjacent to the Pentagon and a fourth was downed later near Pittsburgh.

Until today, the worst act of terrorism in the U.S. was Timothy McVeigh's 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168, including 19 children.

This was not just terrorism; these were acts of war. The scope of such provocation pales against the anger it will spark among right-thinking defenders of democracy and freedom.

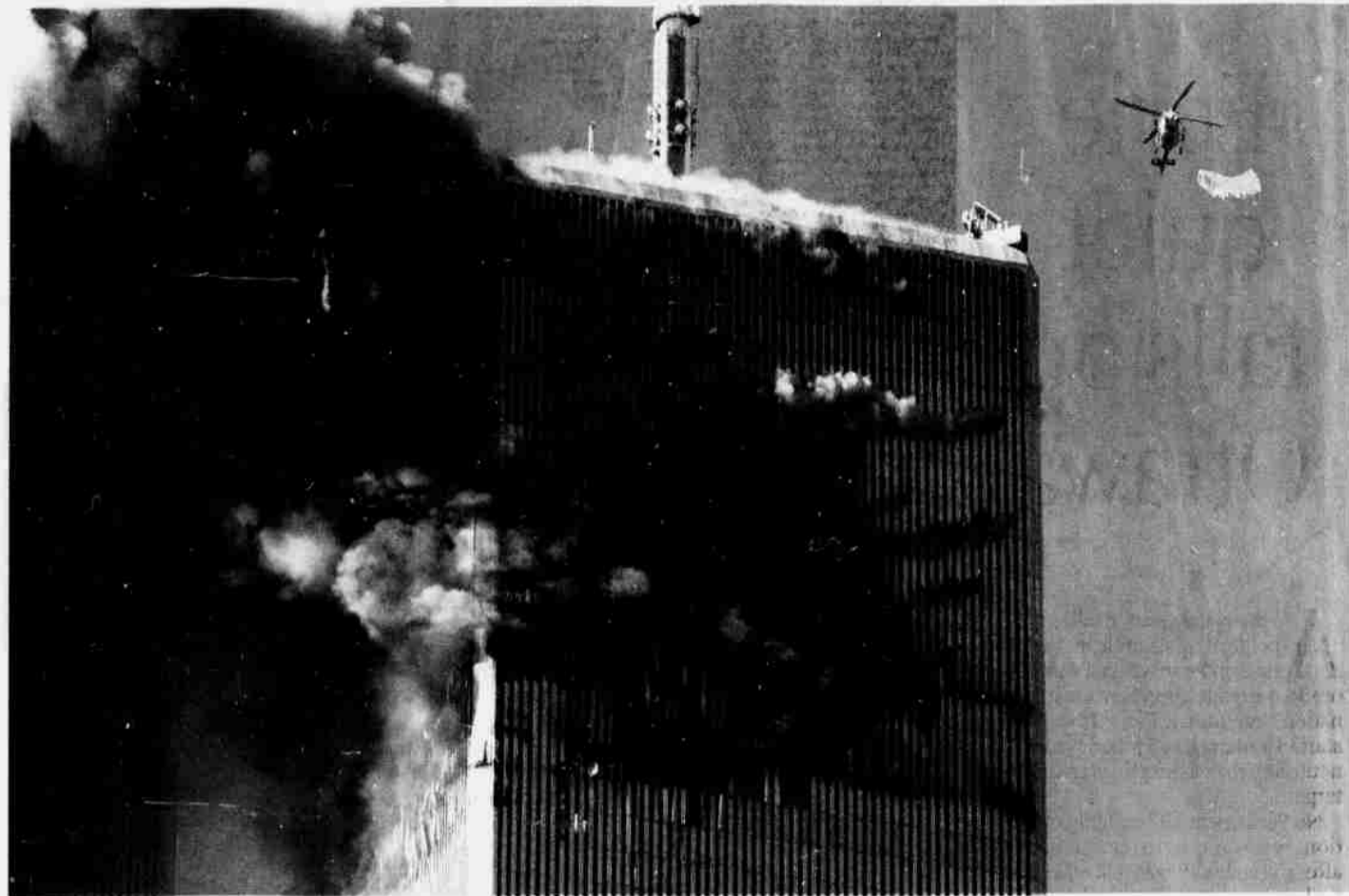
Terrorism has always, and will always be, the ultimate in cowardice.

To those in Calgary personally affected by this tragedy, we offer our heartfelt consideration and support. To all those offended by this outrage, we stand with you in condemnation.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

"It is impossible to fully comprehend the evil that would have conjured up such a cowardly assault."

Prime Minister Jean Chretien



The World Trade Center in New York burns early this morning. Reactions of horror from around the world have been pouring into the U.S. as the death toll continues to climb. World leaders including Pope John Paul have condemned the attack.

Reuters

One level below going to war



DON BRAID

OPINION

Canada's federal government is taking extraordinary measures to deal with an "absolutely unprecedented" security threat to North America, says a renowned international expert.

"There's a special meeting of cabinet — they may not call themselves war cabinet, but that's what they are," says Jim Stanton, president of Ottawa-based Jim Stanton & Associ-

ates. The firm does emergency planning work with many federal and provincial agencies.

"Right now they will be fed everything they need from all our embassies and legations around the world. That information will be analysed and shared with the Americans — when they're threatened, we're threatened."

Stanton said that even when both Canada and the U.S. were at war twice in the 20th century, there were no attacks even a fraction as serious on domestic soil.

"This is absolutely unprecedented even when we've been at war against some of the most powerful nations on Earth," he said. "In a very fundamental way, our view of the world has changed today."

"When crisis happens there's a turning point where it will never be the same — a decisive, critical time that threatens great danger."

"Clearly, we're in that. How this is handled is absolutely crucial."

Stanton felt that U.S. President George W. Bush's response was properly calm, sympa-

thetic and firm, clearly designed to avert overreaction.

"Now what has to happen is that Canada and the U.S., will activate their emergency plans."

"I would guess that the U.S. has advanced their state of readiness at least one level up — which is probably one level below going to war. They can switch to war mode very, very quickly."

But he adds the obvious — that it's impossible to respond to an unknown enemy.

"And how do you stop people who are prepared to die?"

"There were people on those aircraft who knew they were going to die. That was their mission."

"But I can assure you that there will be very detailed communications with the U.S. We have shared plans and networks that are open all the time. We are always communicating with them."

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Many will look to the prophecies



JOE WOODARD

OPINION

Given the carnage of the terrorist attacks on the United States, the temptation to look for prophecies of the disaster and signs of the Apocalypse, the End Times, will become overwhelming, say religious studies experts.

And the first focus of the search for apocalyptic prophecy will almost certainly be the 16th century French mystic Michel Nostradamus.

In 1555, Nostradamus, a Jewish physician, forced-convert to Christianity in St. Remy, France, began writing what would become a collection of almost a thousand quatrains, four-line stanzas arranged in "centuries" of 100 stanzas, obscurely predicting future events.

The quatrains that seem most to bear on the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon are Century X's stanzas 72-74:

"The year 1999, seventh month, From the sky will come a great King of Terror. To bring back to life the great King of the Mongols, before and after Mars to reign by good luck.

"The present time together

with the past Will be judged by the great Jovialist: The world too late will be tired of him, And through the clergy oath-taker disloyal.

"The year of the great seventh number accomplished, it will appear at the time of the games of slaughter: Not far from the great millennial age, When the buried will go out from their tombs."

University of Calgary religious studies professor Irving Hexham is unimpressed.

"All this Nostradamus stuff is rubbish," Hexham said.

"You can only see predictions in his quatrains after the events he's supposedly predicting. So it's like seeing faces in a cloud."

Despite the magnitude of the American tragedy, Hexham, an evangelical Christian, dismisses attempts to see the Apocalypse or End Times in the events.

"It's horrible, but even if 50,000 people died at the World Trade Center, we should remember that four times that number of people died in a single night, in a single fire-bomb raid on Hamburg (in 1944). And Hamburg still continued to live and function as a manufacturing centre."

After Nostradamus, the search for apocalyptic prophecy will look to the Bible, particularly Christ's prediction: "You will hear of wars and rumours of wars" (Matthew 24) and the predictions of the End Times in the New Testament's Book of Revelation and the Old Testament's Book of Daniel.

Biblical literalist and Christian social commentator Bill Shaw of Medicine Hat said that the World Trade Center attack

seems to herald a "new phase in human history," but that "it's too early to say whether there's any prophetic content in the attacks."

"It's always been known that a small group of fanatics could bring a modern nation to a halt," Shaw said.

"But there's still no way of knowing just what the prophetic content of these events is."

"I do find it interesting, however, that they're (the Americans) opening schools for prayer all over the nation, after so many court decisions banning prayer in schools."

University of Calgary religious studies professor Eliezer Segal said that the temptation to look for specific predictions of world events in the Bible comes from a confusion of the Judaic prophetic tradition with the ancient pagan Greek oracles.

"The prophets weren't painting scenarios about specific events to happen in the future," Segal said.

"They were speaking to their own times, warning people of the consequences of their own behaviours and consoling them with God's mercy, should they remain loyal to God."

"Of course, after those times past, there was a temptation for later generations to look on those warnings as oracles of the events happening in their own days."

But every generation faces the temptation of seeing the End Time coming within 50 years of their own lives, the professor suggested.

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OTHER VOICES

THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL APPEARED TODAY IN A SPECIAL EDITION OF THE DETROIT FREE PRESS:

There she stood, Lady Liberty, welcoming the world to America's shores. Behind her, smoke and dust poured from the collapsed towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. The split screen showed more smoke and destruction in Washington, where the Free World — and those who long for freedom — look for strength and leadership.

This, too, was a day that will live in infamy.

America was attacked today — with devastating impact. Freedom was rocked to its foundations by suicidal terrorist strikes in New York and Washington, and two apparently related aircraft hijackings that ended in crashes. Each new report was more incredible than the last. The death toll will be in the thousands. The images on television seemed unreal, the emotions overwhelming.

The impact on this nation's sense of security will be profound. Suddenly, Americans in America are more vulnerable than we were ever willing to believe. But we are not defeated. We will not surrender to the cowardly forces of terrorism, who would bring America to her knees.

The first reactions must be the necessary ones: Contain the damage, recover the bodies, treat the injured, secure the nation and keep the peace. President George W. Bush should extend all the resources of the federal government, including the military, to assist local authorities in this work.

The president also should set aside a national day of mourning for the victims. They died for freedom, as surely as the victims of Pearl Harbour.

At another level, America must marshal its forces, gather intelligence and lean hard on its allies and dependents around the world to aid in the pursuit of those responsible for these attacks. There should be no safe haven for them anywhere, and any nation that would offer sanctuary is as culpable as the terrorists themselves.

Lady Liberty still stands tall. Shrouded in smoke. Covered in dust and blood. She is crying. She is afraid. She is angry.

But she will not yield.