

22 Years Later



by Bruce Bawer

“Only days after 9/11, Norwegian author Gert Nygårdshaug sneered at the idea that there might soon be an attack on ‘Oslo or Rome or Copenhagen.’ He was far from alone in his mockery. Then came Madrid, London, Bali, Beslan, Mumbai...The Western European elite played down, even denied, any connection among these events. Yet year by year the truth has become increasingly clear: though the U.S. was the target on 9/11, the front line of the war with Islamism is Europe.”

- Bruce Bawer, [“9/11, Five Years Later: A View from Europe,”](#) December 2, 2006

“If we’d had a president who had dared to speak the truth about our enemies and about the ideology (which is to say theology) that motivates them, and had done so eloquently and stirringly and repeatedly, à la Churchill...it might have made a huge difference...But perhaps not. Perhaps the poison of multiculturalism – the fear of acknowledging that our enemies

were, in fact, our enemies – was simply too potent...The tragic fact of the matter is that ten years after 9/11, we are more ignorant, and more vulnerable, than ever.”

- Bruce Bawer, “[9/11 and the Pastness of the Past](#),” September 11, 2011

“9/11 was a day of heroes and of villains, of stark contrasts between good and evil. Yet how quickly the politicians, journalists, and others in positions of power managed to make a muddle of it all. Instead of witnessing a democratization of the Middle East, we experienced a steady Islamization of the West. Instead of seeing freedom bloom in the Islamic world, we saw a rise in Western censorship and self-censorship on the subject of Islam.”

- Bruce Bawer, “[9/11: Twelve Years Later](#),” September 10, 2013

“His enemies call him a fascist. On the contrary, he’s the first U.S. president since 9/11 who genuinely seems to grasp that Islam is fascism.”

- Bruce Bawer, “[Remembering 9/11 in the Age of Trump](#),” September 11, 2018

“Twenty years on, under the disgraceful Biden, America feels like a damaged and diminished nation – its power weakened, its alliances shaken, its once-unshakable core beliefs largely shattered, not least by the suicidal compulsion to speak well of Islam.”

- Bruce Bawer, “[Celebrating Our Enemies, Twenty Years after 9/11](#),” September 10, 2021

“America has been transformed very quickly into a country that’s so dramatically different from the one we lived in on September 10, 2001, that the twenty-first anniversary of that atrocity can feel almost irrelevant to our present concerns and calamities. But let’s remember that it was on 9/11 that

the shock was delivered to our system that, responded to in precisely the wrong way, saw us wade deeper and deeper into the current muck of doubt, deception, and division.”

▪ Bruce Bawer, “[That Day, Yet Again](#),” September 10, 2022

Sometimes it feels as if it happened just the day before yesterday, and other times it seems lost in the mists of time.

Time is like that.

At first there was intense shock. Then a sharply focused anger, a flourishing of patriotism, and a potent resolve. And then, over the years, increasing confusion, division, self-doubt.

No, we shouldn't have allowed a thirst for revenge, and a desire to remind the monsters of the world who was boss, to turn into an exercise in nation-building in the graveyard of empires and in one of the few Middle Eastern states without a theocratic government. Some of us, who had some knowledge of Islam, sensed that we were headed down the road to disaster. But we were, after all, relative newcomers to the study of that faith, and we were naive enough to think that people with fancy White House titles, people who turned up on all the Sunday morning shows, smooth and glib, and who always seemed to have all the answers, might know better than we did.

There are many ways of looking at 9/11. Every year when the anniversary comes around, 9/11 looks somewhat different, because the moment we're looking back from is different. You can't step into the same river twice.

One positive way of looking at 9/11 is to recognize it as the start of a road to wisdom – for some of us, anyway. Our country was attacked by devout members of a primitive death cult that had taught them to hate our freedoms; we retaliated by trying to democratize their undemocratizable homelands. Instead of kicking out of our own country the adherents of

that religion who obviously held America-hatred in their hearts, our political leaders continued to let them come. Both Republicans and Democrats whitewashed Islam, saying that the jihadists had betrayed it. This was a big lie, an inexcusable lie, a dangerous lie, which in the minds of the 50% or so of Americans who actually bought it served to implant the idea that on 9/11 they *had* been the good guys and we *had* done something to deserve the attacks.

This notion, in turn, reinforced the toxic ideologies that were being peddled to the children of the elite in the nation's Ivy and Ivy-adjacent colleges, thereby helping to turn a generation of privileged young Americans destined for positions of cultural power into America-haters.

As it happened, the turn of the century not only brought 9/11. It also marked a dramatic shift in the ways in which information was spread. CNN had been around since 1980; Fox News and MSNBC came along in 1996, solidifying a 24-hour cycle of both news and opinion. The World Wide Web, introduced in 1991, exploded during the years around the turn of the century, giving us access to alternative sources of information that contradicted official narratives. Eventually we realized just how much we'd been lied to over the years by our political and media establishment, realized just how far removed we were (and had been for a long time) from government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

We didn't stop loving America, but many of us put a greater distance in our minds between the country we loved and the people who ran it.

By the end of George W. Bush's presidency, the moral clarity and resolve of the immediate post-9/11 period had been lost. We were in Afghanistan and Iraq, and supposedly it all had something to do with 9/11, but what exactly? The refusal of both Republican and Democratic politicians, and of the mainstream news media generally, to honestly address the

fundamental facts about Islam had made it difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the very meaning of the attacks or to formulate a sensible response to them. A country that after 9/11 had been (at least briefly) almost wholly united in patriotism was now, because of differing attitudes toward America's response to 9/11, more disunited than it had been in a long time.

Then, in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, along came a relative newcomer to national politics who had two distinct attributes, both of which ultimately helped secure his victory. For one thing, his father had come from one Muslim country and the candidate himself had been raised in another; for millions of *bien pensant* Americans, voting for him was a way of apologizing for whatever we had done, in our cruel colonialist past, to make the jihadists hate us so much. For another thing, Obama was black, and his campaign rhetoric about "one America" promised guilt-ridden white Americans absolution, suggesting that his elevation to the Oval Office would put the question of racism – which we'd been repeatedly told was America's original sin – behind us once and for all. For millions of voters, Obama was nothing less than an answer to our prayers, a gift from the gods, a golden prince with a silver tongue who'd been sent down to take what had been broken and to put it all back together again.

Upon taking office, of course, Obama revealed quickly enough (although a few wise souls had been on to him all along) that he was nothing more or less than a high priest of America-hatred. With remarkable speed, he proceeded to turn what had, after long struggle, become essentially a post-racist society into a society centered increasingly on, and separated increasingly by, notions of group victimhood and grievance. The destructive power of this transformation was immense. A big part of the reason why so many children of white progressive parents have identified as transgender during the last few years is that they can't bear thinking of themselves

as members of an oppressive class.

It took the advent of Donald J. Trump to fully awaken many of us to the degree to which the Republicans and Democrats were a “uniparty,” run by an inside-the-Beltway caste for the benefit of themselves, their elitist friends and cohorts, their corporate benefactors, and, in many cases, nefarious foreign interests who made it possible for them to buy multimillion-dollar mansions on Capitol Hill salaries. As the scales fell from our eyes, more and more of us found ourselves pondering with deep distrust the motives of politicians of both parties who’d sent the brave children of patriotic Americans to fight in faraway lands.

It was Trump who spoke up powerfully against needless wars and who raised the issues that truly affected ordinary American lives. Bring back jobs. Build the wall. Deport illegals. For decades, in the holy (and misbegotten) name of “free trade,” both parties had let China become the manufacturing hub of the world even as they let America’s own manufacturing heartland turn into the Rust Belt. Utterly indifferent to the welfare of their own hard-working, long-suffering constituents, our leaders acted as if these developments were inevitable, irreversible – the product of cosmic forces.

Trump’s rise on behalf of those neglected Americans sent up a howl by the political and media establishment that was heard round the world. When he dared to make what should have been the self-evident point that the American government should first of all care about Americans, he – along with the criminally neglected patriots who cheered him – was labeled a racist, a xenophobe, an Islamophobe, a white supremacist. The establishment righteously savaged him for calling shithole countries “shithole countries” even as they cheered Hillary Clinton for calling the hard-working middle Americans whom they’d betrayed “deplorables.”

Even before Trump was elected, the D.C. swamp creatures

conspired to take him down. Now, three years into his successor's term, they're still working their mischief, more and more nakedly, and are going not just after him but after an ever-widening circle of his supporters. Laws and practices and institutional changes that were put in place after 9/11, supposedly to protect our freedom, are now being used to restrict our freedom. After 9/11, the feds and social-media giants began working together to deplatform jihadists, but eventually were more focused on deplatforming opponents of the Democratic Party. The Homeland Security Department, which still oversees the ridiculous and intrusive security theater at our airports, is fighting climate change even as criminals flood across the southern border. The FBI, transformed after 9/11 into a domestic intelligence service, has developed into a chilling Democratic Party Stasi, targeting traditionalist Catholics, arresting friends of Trump, and hiding Biden family crimes. The Department of Justice smiles on left-wing rioters and vandals but has detained for years MAGA fans who walked peacefully through the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. As I write this, it is being reported that the DOJ wants to imprison Owen Shroyer, a journalist, for giving a speech that day in Washington, D.C.'s Freedom Plaza.

By contrast, Muslims in America are above criticism. Nothing an individual Muslim says or does can change this. Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar – who, with her family, found sanctuary in the U.S. after her father, a longtime subordinate for Somalia's Stalinist dictator, was forced to flee that country – married her brother for purposes of immigration and/or student loan fraud, has repeatedly expressed hatred for Jews and white men, has been involved in ballot harvesting, has committed multiple campaign-finance violations, has called for the defunding of the Minneapolis police, has defended Hamas and Iran, has described Angela Davis as her idol, has shared stages with people tied to Islamic terrorism, and has called America a racist nation. And yet because she is a Muslim, no mainstream media organ will dare to report honestly on all of this.

Back in 2015, Project Veritas reported on several leading universities where administrators or faculty had approved or aided in the formation of “Pro-ISIS Clubs” proposed by an undercover reporter. While the Muslim Brotherhood has a Facebook page, social-media censors routinely delete criticism of Islam and yank the accounts of repeat offenders.

Have I strayed far from the topic of 9/11? Not really. Twenty-two years after 9/11, the freedom that our attackers hated is slipping away from us with terrifying speed. And though we didn't know it at the time, it was on that now distant September morning that we started down the road to this sobering moment of crisis.

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