

9/11 Remembered: What Lessons Have We Learned?

Editor's Note: British commentator Martin Clarke offers his perspective on the 9/11 anniversary.

I can't believe it was 19 years ago today as I walked down Grosvenor Street, London, with the American Embassy behind me and learned that the USA was being attacked. My wife called at around 2 p.m. to tell me as I walked back from lunch to my office.

The world went in a different direction that day, and perhaps it was no coincidence that 9/11 is the American emergency dial number. The month preceding the day always confuses a Brit, but today's the day.

It's horrible, and having been to the Twin Towers and the new Freedom Tower, it still hurts. I met and know three people who were there in the towers and survived, and each one was lastingly affected (who wouldn't be?).

I know of others who were close, though I knew none of the 2,977 who died. The fact remains that they were all honest, innocent working people. They all woke up that morning not knowing they would die in only a few hours.

Global atrocities followed, and these will never cease. Lessons were never learned; they never are. And war is still an agenda item.

History repeats itself, and no one can seemingly stop the rot. Peacemakers are few and far between—the mania of it all prevails. Now the autonomous vehicles of war are being prepared, and the rehearsal games with drones and rampant rhetoric can, by accident, become real at any time. The outcome is inevitable, yet we roll on.

COVID-19 was invisible to mankind—an invisible enemy we will not easily rid ourselves of—yet it arrived and killed. It may be another dress rehearsal for a worse enemy still to come. Yet mankind's biggest enemy remains mankind, and that is often as invisible as the virus.

The busy day, the busy life, the American elections, the indexes of world exchanges, the masks we all wear and the pettiness to which we attend continue. We are fragile, yet believe we are invincible. We are susceptible, yet arrogant. We are clever, but so stupid.

We are human.

Yet there is still hope. Look around, see the youth, see the kindness in community, see the elderly cared for. See what you can do for someone else today. Life can be better if we all do something better and if we can take time out to stop living “selfie” but put others in our frame. If we start small, it will get big and become infectious, for through giving, we receive, and through perpetual taking, we tank.

As I walk down Grosvenor Street today, the embassy is no longer behind me, the crowds have gone, the buildings are largely empty, and we can pause at 2 p.m. in silence to remember. The Garden of Memorial is on Grosvenor Square, and it's worth a visit if you pass there one day.

There are no planes to now carry you across the pond—of course—and none that can do the damage done on that awful day. In remembrance of those who died, President Trump will go to the field in Pennsylvania where one was forced down.

Let's try and make the difference. Let's at least try. {eoa}

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