Some Ways We Will Change
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by Dr. G. Terry Madonna and Dr. Michael Young

Much of American history has been written as a response to military challenge and a reaction to national crisis. The litany of past momentous events resonates in national memory – Lexington and Concord, the burning of Washington, D.C., in 1814, the firing on Fort Sumter, the sinking of the battleship Maine and the Lusitania, and, of course, Pearl Harbor.

As in the earlier cases, the momentous events that occurred on September 11, 2001, will forever shape the nation’s history, and our thinking about world affairs and national security. Some of the changes to come seem clear. Others will surprise us. A few will come quickly. Most will occur over time. As a whole, they will be profound in the collectively transformative influence they will have on us.

Here are five that loom most clearly:

End of the illusion of safety --- After September 11, we will no longer feel as physically safe and secure as we have through out most of the nation’s history. We have seen, in effect, the end of American innocence – an innocence that derived from some 150 years of geographic, cultural, and political insularity, from the administration of George Washington until the eve of World War II. Not even the Cold War, that 40-year struggle with communism, caused Americans to fear really for their safety in their own homeland. Indeed, 20th century wars did much to reinforce the belief that we could project ourselves overseas militarily and economically while remaining invulnerable at home. Never again will Americans feel this way. In a real way, never again will Americans feel really safe.

The nature of the enemy ---Americans are pained to learn that we are not universally loved -- that decades of humanitarian and foreign assistance, and sacrifices for freedom and democracy abroad seem like just one more good deed gone unrewarded. One thing is clear, however; not only are we not universally loved, we are deeply hated by some. Americans do not like to have that said, and are loath to admit it. But ultimately we must adopt a certain realistic notion that some people will never like us and will seek to destroy us no matter how much we attempt understand them. Those who hate us do so for a variety of reasons -- but most fundamentally, modern terrorists do, because we are an open, secular society, tolerant of diversity, committed to freedom, especially religious freedom, comfortable with change and modernity, and the major superpower with a presence in parts of the world some find intolerable. They hate our values, our lifestyles, our government, and our institutions. It is not an enemy with whom we can reason or negotiate. It is not an adversary who someday will be a friend. This is an implacable foe – and there will be no peace between us until terrorism is eliminated root and branch.

Americans broader world view ---Americans are sometimes accused of being ethnocentric, generally understood to mean that we see the world narrowly through a prism that exaggerates our own importance. The charge is probably unfair, but there is a kernel of truth to it. As a people we have demonstrated a general
unwillingness to learn much about the world more broadly and specific cultures more particularly. Americans, for example, know little about Islam, despite the fact that more than 1.2 billion people practice it, and in America more people are Muslim than Episcopalian. Similarly, among Americans the general knowledge level about other countries is low compared to citizens of other industrialized nations, a condition likely to change. The events of September 11 will stimulate many more Americans to a deeper interest in foreign affairs and international problems. This is good. In modern times, no successful foreign policy can be formulated if the American people remain ignorant and apathetic of the customs and traditions of other societies.

A foreign policy of core values --American foreign policy will return more and more to an articulation of American core values. During the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. was criticized for exporting its core values: capitalism, democracy, and freedom. The conventional wisdom of the period was that U.S. cold war rivalry with the communist world could not prevail unless we muted our basic themes to accommodate the anti-capitalist, pro-socialist sentiments thought to be abroad in the world. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum. We won the cold war --communism collapsed ignominiously -- and capitalism and freedom prevailed, a happy fact that has led to the present world order. It is no coincidence that many terrorists operate in countries that have non-industrial economies, no democratic traditions and authoritarian rulers. That is the great divide in the world today: American values of capitalism, freedom and, democracy versus the values our enemies hold and prefer. To win this war we must export more than just Hollywood, McDonald's, and Pepsi. America is a great and generous nation, and our enormous success is directly related to the core values we have cherished.

Freedom vs. security --Finally, there are the changes that will impinge on our freedom as Americans. It is clear that the ease with which terrorists can strike will mean an alteration of American lifestyles. It will not be an easy change. In recent times, most Americans have come more fully to understand and to embrace our traditions of civil liberties. Indeed, for many, these personal freedoms comprise much of what it means to be an American. But in the times ahead we must adjust and adapt these fundamental rights to the exigencies of war. Nor is this different from past wars or great tribulations. In fact, civil libertarians have long acknowledged that collective security may trump personal liberty in times of critical national emergency. But while making these changes we also need to be mindful of one of history’s most reliable maxims -- those who value security over liberty usually end up with neither. In war-time we cannot be totally secure or totally free. As we have in the past, we must find and strike a balance between security and freedom. Critical to balance is an understanding of the important distinction between inconveniences and true threats to civil liberties. It is an inconvenience to go through an arduous airport check-in and checkout procedure, not a deprivation of civil liberty. The extension of wiretap authority, however, is more than an inconvenience. How much authority we grant to the federal government to restrict basic freedoms should be the subject of a vigorous national debate. Simply put, we should grant all the authority necessary to ensure the safety of the American people while aggressively protecting civil liberties.

So, here we have five changes that are likely to arrive, and there will be more -- perhaps, a lot more. Change may be the only constant in our lives. We can’t choose not to change, and as Americans we should embrace it. America always has been about change. No country in history has seen or managed more change then the United States. And we have done it, while retaining fidelity to our core ideas. That’s one thing that won’t be changing.