

Fear of the Unknown

By SEAN HANNON

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O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.

Measure for Measure. Act ii. Sc. 2.

When the terrorists crashed our planes into the two towers, it was Osama Bin Laden's plan not simply to destroy a couple of buildings, but to tear at the very fabric of who we are as a nation and bring chaos and ruin to our lives and to the world. It was a surgical strike aimed at where he thought the heart of Americans resided. He sought to infect us with despair and vengeance that would consume us as much as it has consumed him. As he watched the buildings fall, he smiled in anticipation of our nation falling to its knees, clutching its heart in fatal spasms.

Instead, we rose. And for a full year we showed the world some of the best in our nature. Our grief was palpable, our compassion toward the victims unmatched, our resilience and strength to move forward and rebuild amazing to behold. We targeted our attackers with precision, working with the invaluable assistance of sympathetic nations, and took pride in our resolve to patiently ferret the enemy out of their caves one at a time. We have been defiant in declaring to an angry enemy "You cannot touch us. You cannot change who we are!"

But we are changing, and the infection is threatening to spread in such a way as to make us unrecognizable from the nation we proclaim ourselves to be.

This infection... fear of the unknown... is allowing us to act in despicable and immoral ways. In the name of homeland security, we are making American citizens of suspicious skin color disappear with no legal representation. We learned nothing from our shameful treatment of Americans of Japanese descent in the 1940s.

This infection... fear of the unknown... is governing our perceived need to topple a foreign nation based on our *suspicion* that it is a threat to us. No longer needed is proof that another country is directly threatening our survival. We are now willing to embrace the spectre of war, and dispense carnage and untold human suffering, all because the hairs on the back of our neck are standing up... from what *might* happen.

This infection... fear of the unknown... has crippled our ability to stand shoulder to shoulder with other nations in shared respect and responsibility toward each others' welfare. Our voice has become arrogant, patronizing, and dismissive of all concerns save our own. We have declared ourselves to be the leader of the world, and therefore the world must yield, or else. We believe ourselves to be the moral center of the planet, and therefore we may act immorally with impunity. And if we suspect you of being among "the evil doers", whether you be a sovereign nation or an ordinary citizen of our own, we will act with all speed to eradicate you, proof and due process and international law be damned. Because we are right, and we are America! We have been offended as no others have been. And we will not rest until the world is purged of ALL POTENTIAL THREATS to our security. The list is growing... the infection is growing... the fear of the unknown is growing... and Bin Laden is smiling.