

Facing Reality

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Winston Churchill said this to the members of the British House of Commons in May 1935, “There is this confirmed unteachability of mankind, the unfortunate habit of civilized societies to sleep until danger nearly overtakes them.

It is possible that the dangers into which we are steadily advancing would never have arisen. But when the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure.

There is nothing new to the story. It is as old as Rome. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind.

Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong — these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.”

[From a speech by Winston Churchill to the British House of Commons "Air Parity Lost", May 2, 1935]

Before 911 we ignored numerous and obvious global warning signs somehow believing the fantasy that devastating terrorist attacks would not happen in the US. This view prevailed despite the 1994 attack on the World Trade Center, attacks on our embassies in Africa, the attack on the Cole, the numerous attacks against other nations, intelligence reports and Al Qaeda pronouncements! It certainly did not require the in depth skills of a brain surgeon to realize the potential for a catastrophe at home.

Collectively and individually, we are all subject to the human trait of denying reality and not acting when action is critically needed. 911 was a major tragedy and upset. Many things changed. Governments set up new institutions and committees. Intelligence agencies and police departments around the world reorganized. New national and international security strategies were developed.

While certain things have changed, most of us in the private sector have fallen back asleep since 911 and only pay lip service to the grave dangers we face in the world today.

We expect the elusive “others” in government who are struggling uphill to resolve or prevent armed conflict or terrorism to “save the day” while we ignore it all and/or complain. We get very caught up in our own day to day concerns while the world gets increasingly more dangerous. This myopia is one of the greatest threats we face.

Most problems created by man can be solved by man. But they won't be if we ignore them to the extent that we are and believe that the government can handle it all. They have the potential to do a lot but there is lot we all can do.

The future being created for our children and grandchildren is one of ever-increasing danger. Yet, we continue to make many low priority daily activities, self-interest and our immediate obligations the sole focus of our lives while ignoring and compromising our security and our children's future.

If we collectively and individually continue to ignore the various threats we face, they are more likely to happen.

Had Al Qaeda attained weapons of mass destruction to use on 9/11, there would have been massive and incomprehensible destruction throughout the entire New York, New Jersey and Connecticut area with millions dead.

Washington would have also been destroyed! After such an occurrence, the likelihood of a massive retaliatory nuclear attack by the US would be possible. Where that could end up is in worldwide chaos and/or worse!

Einstein said this decades ago.... "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking. Thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe." Very few have taken his comments to heart while the evidence for his statement accumulates.

Contrary to Churchill's challenge in the 1930s, the 21st century is in the nuclear, technological and information age with suicidal actors and several nuclear armed states. The time has come for breakthrough diplomatic solutions, infinitely more comprehensive and realistic homeland security measures and serious private citizen involvement.

While we salute those who work diligently to protect us, it is in our opinion totally irresponsible and unrealistic to expect the government to do it all or to assume they have all the answers they need.

They certainly are doing critically important things but there is absolutely no evidence to suggest they have all the answers they need. The problems are numerous and many are not being solved.

It is also not true that we don't have the time to do something important. Our future is on the line.