

25 years after 9/11 attack, what has America learned?

BY MATTHEW WARSHAUER
Chicago Tribune

Sept. 11 remains an open wound for America. There has been no triumph, no victory over the darkness that we have continued to generate both at home and abroad. We will never forget the piercing blue sky and the confusion as the World Trade Center's north tower billowed black smoke. Then came the fireball as the second plane blasted through the south tower. We will never forget the gasp from knowing it was no accident. We watched the tragedy that unfolded over 102 minutes, the time between the first plane hitting and the collapse of the World Trade Center.

We knew nothing would be the same. For a time, we saw amazing acts of humanity and the unity of the American people. We maintained that unity through the movement in Afghanistan, but not Iraq. Like the towers, unity collapsed amid President George W. Bush's 2003 call for war in Iraq, a rogue nation, but one that had nothing to do with 9/11. Over the next many months, we watched some of the largest anti-war protests in human history. We went to war anyway, and the world we live in is a direct reflection of that decision. We are now witnesses to the 25 years that 9/11 has wrought. Yet most Americans can't see a simple truth - the twin towers fell across the road to the

21st century. That reality presented America with a choice. Embrace the outpouring of support and grief from around the world and pursue a global movement to address terrorism, one that would evaluate our often-egregious foreign policy. Or embrace never-ending war. That decision has generated the fractious conditions that have made the first quarter of this century untenable for democracy, the rule of law and the idea of justice. In the waning hours of that horrible Tuesday, the president unintentionally recognized the birth of a new generation, asking Americans to pray "for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for

all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened." He defined the 9/11 Generation. America went to war for 20 years. Iraq suffered mightily for an act it didn't commit, with some arguing that "Iraqis have faced nothing short of a lost generation." The U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan in a disastrous rerun of troops fleeing Saigon. As we reflect on 25 years since the towers fell, have we learned anything? "We will never forget." OK, but what are we remembering? The answer for most is what I refer to as the "tragedy and triumph" narrative. The belief that tragedy befell America but that, in her might, she rose up and triumphed. That's a myth. We are still shadowed by

loss at home and a tarnished reputation globally. And we do not remember, not all of us. There's an entire generation that knows little about Sept. 11. Roughly 37% of Americans today were either too young then to understand or were born after the attacks. They were raised in the wake of governmental chaos and war that has numbed them to faith in their own government. Our egregious partisanship is both a cause and a byproduct of post-9/11 America. Patriotism has been torn between those who embrace authoritarianism as a solution to make America great again, and those who hunger for a more hopeful nation, especially as we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and our nation's birth. If by "commemorate," we mean a thoughtful consideration of our past and present, what do America's birth and Sept. 11 have in common?

Any meaningful answer must reflect on America's role in the world. Lexington was the shot heard round the world, a ripple of burgeoning democracy that washed over distant shores and remade the world. America became a beacon of possibility and inalienable rights. Our response to 9/11 was anything but a beacon. It made the world more dangerous. In this important year of our nation's 250th anniversary and of 25 years since 9/11, will we, as Abraham Lincoln offered in the midst of the Civil War, embrace a new birth of freedom? Or will we remain mired in the darkness that has clouded our sight since the billowing smoke of 9/11 obscured our piercing blue sky? *Matthew Warshawer is a distinguished professor of history at Central Connecticut State University and the author of "Creating and Failing the 9/11 Generation."*

Fed's credibility depends on resisting politics

BY CLAUDIA SAHM
Bloomberg Opinion

At Jackson Hole last month, all eyes were on Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh in his first speech at the Fed's annual conference. All thoughts were about the Fed's rate decision next week. Kenneth Rogoff, a Harvard economist who was at Jackson Hole as a lunchtime speaker, offered this advice to a New York Times journalist: "If they can possibly put it off till after the midterms, it would be good for the institution." Given President Donald Trump's attacks on the Fed, he asked: "If you're trying to preserve Fed independence, are you preserving it better by spitting in his face, or are you preserving it better by laying low and waiting until the winter?" But playing politics to preserve independence is a terrible strategy for the Fed. And one of the best explanations comes from a junior economist at the Fed who wrote a paper, now considered foundational to the study of central bank credibility, back in 1983. His name was ... Kenneth Rogoff. Using a stylized model, Rogoff showed that economic outcomes, on average, would be better if the head of the central bank were more averse to inflation than the average person. That extra credibility as an inflation fighter would lower expected inflation and, by extension, actual inflation. One can quibble over the details of his model, but it's an early example of the many research papers that formalize why central bank credibility matters. Rogoff today would likely push back, saying this time is different: His 1983 model did not contemplate a president threatening to fire the Fed chair, or actively trying to remove Fed governors. Maybe, if the existence of the institution is on the line, it's appropriate to think more strategically about politics, and less about inflation. No. It is not appropriate.

First, playing politics would mark a real shift. Consider that, in any two-month period from 1984 to 2024, the Fed changed its target 45% of the time. In the two months before a federal election - midterm or presidential - it changed its target 43% of the time. In other words, there is no evidence that the Fed's decisions are affected by the timing of elections. More recently, the Fed hiked days before the 2022 midterms, and cut rates before the 2024 election. A more systematic study finds no evidence of manipulation. The exception - the Arthur Burns Fed supporting Nixon's reelection - has been connected to higher inflation and remains the example of what not to do at the Fed. Second, the Fed does not have to play politics to protect itself. Congress built the Fed precisely for moments of political pressure; if the Fed won't lean on its protections now, when will it? Earlier this year, the Supreme Court blocked Trump's attempt to remove Fed Governor Lisa Cook, even as it allowed the president to remove heads of other agencies in a separate decision. The Fed is special. To have that protection and then cave to politics would undercut the Fed's own case for independence. My advice to the Fed: Forget the electoral calendar and stay focused on the economy. Rogoff is right that the Fed should not spit in Trump's face, but he's wrong that it should let politics affect its decisions. What makes his advice so troubling is that it comes from someone who holds the Fed in high regard and knows the research better than anyone. As his own model showed, credibility lives in what people believe the central bank will do under pressure. It is precisely when the pressure is greatest that the Fed's credibility is won or lost. *Claudia Sahm is the chief economist at New Century Advisors and a former Federal Reserve economist.*



U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting July 31 at Camp David, the presidential retreat, with, from left, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth.

The United States is running out of weapons. Blame Congress

BY DAVID M. DRUCKER
Bloomberg Opinion

"Protecting our nation from those who would do us harm is the first and most important responsibility of government." That's from the website of Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat. But it could be any lawmaker, or any president, Democrat or Republican. Almost all proclaim it, and by their own standard, almost all are failing - as they have for years, with no end in sight. The U.S. still maintains the world's most powerful military. Those unmatched capabilities provide deterrence, global influence and economic prosperity. There's just one problem: We're running out of bullets. In Washington, D.C., the preferred parlance is "munitions shortage," a development that some military analysts are calling a crisis. In plain English: Stockpiles of critical offensive and defensive missiles are severely depleted and shrinking, and our domestic industrial base is inadequate to the task of swift replenishment. Worse than that, Democrats and Republicans in

Congress are dithering, as is lawmakers' habit when bipartisan cooperation and difficult votes are required. President Donald Trump, for his part, is insisting - predictably - that this issue is a fiction perpetrated and perpetuated by a "treasonous" media. This challenge is hardly the fault of this Congress, or this president, alone. But it does exist, and it is jeopardizing military readiness. "This is not a way for a global leader like the United States to treat a military it expects to be able to respond to crises anywhere at any time and fight and win without question," former Defense Department comptroller Elaine McCusker told me. "The crises we face now come from years of decisions - across administrations and sessions of Congress." For the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, the Pentagon was given roughly \$1 trillion. That's not chump change, and no doubt some taxpayers might be interested to know where their money went, if not to restock dwindling munitions inventories. McCusker, who has studied and written about this issue as a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, ex-

plained that about 60% of the armed forces' budget is prioritized for "must pay" bills: Salaries and benefits like healthcare; upkeep of military bases, which are languishing; as well as troop training and combat exercises. That leaves about 40% for weapons innovation and modernization and (theoretically) for refilling equipment and ordnance reserves. And as defense sources have emphasized, there is even less cash available for those crucial priorities, because the military was ordered into battles neither Trump nor Congress had budgeted for, including action in the Caribbean and an Iran war now in its seventh month. But the source of the problem long precedes the Iran war - and, for that matter, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The seeds of today's munitions shortage were planted in our 1990s Cold War triumph over the Soviet Union. Washington treated that victory as an opportunity to significantly reduce military spending, essentially forcing consolidation of the defense industry and related supply chains. So, even if Congress and Trump flipped on the spending spigot tomorrow,

fresh missile supplies wouldn't roll off assembly lines for at least two years, likely longer. Yes, Republicans are sympathetic to Pentagon requests to boost defense spending. But they often disagree among themselves over how much money to approve and how to spend it. Democrats, meanwhile, are philosophically less inclined than Republicans to approve trillion-dollar-plus military budgets. But Democrats are lately more resistant than usual to greenlighting any amount of money, for any military purpose. They fear doing so would function as a de facto supplemental funding bill for the Iran war that Congress has never signed off on. Voters, they worry, would view such legislation as tantamount to financing a conflict that is unpopular with voters broadly, when midterm elections are near. The perilous irony is that this sort of incompetent government inaction is it's the surest way to invite another sort of unpopular war - the sort forced upon us by a hubristic adversary that we have no choice but to fight. History is watching; America's enemies are, too. *David M. Drucker, a columnist covering politics and policy, is also a senior writer for The Dispatch.*

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