

HEADLINE: Nothing will ever be the same

SUBHEADLINE: Hijackers have changed the way we look at the world _ and at them

From the other side of the planet, through electronic and printed media, through radio and television, we have seen it all: the two planes slamming into the two towers of New York's World Trade Center in a gigantic explosion, towers collapsing in a cloud of dust and fragments, one after the other like wisps of straw, people on fire jumping in terror from the high-rise buildings just before they caved in, people screaming, crying, running for shelter, wandering dazed and terrified.

We have flown over the mountains of debris and the cloak of dust covering the devastated areas for miles around, scrutinised close-up shots of people jumping to their death, watched time and again these most horrific scenes of destruction and carnage.

Although these images have been haunting our minds for hours or even days, we could, at will, switch to other realities in our mostly disaster-spared Suwannabhumi _ Golden Land, or Southeast Asia _ snuggling up to more comforting images and stories.

But on the other side of the planet, the science-fiction like reality goes on.

The colourful pictures are accompanied by a deafening noise, prodigious tremors, unforgettable images and sensations which sweep into the body through every sense organ.

But above all, it's the unspeakable terror and affliction of the victims of the attacks, written forever on their hearts and souls, that will make these images impossible to forget, especially since the aftermath of the attacks _ all the destruction _ will remain for weeks and even months to come while clean-up efforts continue, in both New York and Washington.

Nothing will ever be the same, and that doesn't account for planned US retaliation and their stepping into the spiral of violence which this unprecedented terrorist strike has kicked off.

And in this most hateful spiral of violence meeting violence, let's hope that the US response _ or the Nato response, or even a united G8 response, as the case might be _ will be as close as possible to a ``clean", ``surgical war", avoiding as much as possible the killing and hurting of innocent civilians.

This may well prove impossible.

One of the most harrowing aspects of this devastating attack on the US and the world, is the depth of human hatred displayed, that people would lower themselves to the point of suicide in order to harm and even kill thousands of supposed ``enemies" _ disregarding the most primitive, fundamental and inherent instinct for self-preservation.

There's no doubt this stems from the exclusive and bloody logic of fundamentalist extremism, whatever their skin colour, race, religion or ethnicity may be.

As Kahlil Gibran said in The Prophet, ``He who defines his conduct by ethics imprisons his song-bird in a cage."

If there's anything good from this unspeakable horror, it's that the danger posed by such blind fundamentalists _ and the large-scale massacres they are capable of _ has been exposed to the eyes of the world. A welcome follow-up will be that all freedom-loving nations of the world will rally to fight and overcome this life-threatening fundamentalism.

But the question is: How?

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