

## A War of Terror



By Nate Smelle

As of Saturday, Sept. 11, two decades will have passed since Osama Bin Laden orchestrated the attack on the World Trade Centre in Manhattan. Now, having gained 20 years more of experience navigating life in this post-9/11 world, we must ask ourselves: what has humanity learned from the events on this infamous day - and the countless other terrorist attacks since - that will help us create a more peaceful and prosperous existence for all?

Immediately after the Twin Towers fell, there was wave of racially-motivated violence against anyone with a skin colour other than white. Some of this retaliation manifested in the form of blatant violence against the Muslim community. In the days and months following 9/11, mosques were burned, and people of the Muslim faith were stomped down in the streets by a dysfunctional faction of racist goons out for blood.

I recall the undeniable and overwhelming feeling of loss, anger, fear, and depression I experienced when photographing Ground Zero a couple months after 9/11. Covering the plywood walls around the site was a frustrating display of these emotions and the ignorance it inspired in many individuals. One image sticks out in my mind; a valuable lesson in what we need to overcome as

species that has been etched on my brain for eternity. On the wall there was a poster pasted by a local pub, proclaiming, 'Closest beer to Ground Zero.' As I stood there marveling in disgust at this symbol left behind by the greed worshiping buffoons who helped create the circumstances leading to the 9/11 attacks, I noticed that beside it, scrawled in marker were the words, 'Kill N' Arab.'

As terrifying and deadly as these acts of physical violence were for the Muslim community, there were even more sinister forces at play behind the scenes as elected officials and policy makers in the United States and Canada plotted their next move. Arising from the ashes of the World Trade Centre as the clean-up crew of first responders searched for bodies, was what came to be known as the 'War on Terror.' Since Canadian troops hit the ground in Afghanistan on Oct. 7, 2001, Canada has spent an estimated \$18-billion; and the U.S. more than \$2-trillion - yes \$2-TRILLION - fighting to overthrow the Taliban, and as many supporters of the War on Terror have said, 'keep the world safe.'

As a result of this war 158 Canadian soldiers were killed. According to researchers at Brown University, an estimated 69,000 members of the Afghan security forces have also been killed; along with 51,000 civilians and 2,300+ U.S. soldiers.

Now, as the U.S. moves forward with former president Donald Trump's plan to withdraw their entire military presence in Afghanistan, the future of this war-ravaged country is again in jeopardy. Despite all of this collateral damage, last week, over a period of just 10 days, the Taliban has taken over the country once again.

Thinking of this gut churning waste of energy, time, and money over the past two decades, it is clear that Martin Luther King Jr. was right when he said, 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.'

Though it can be argued that our societal consciousness has evolved in the past 20 years; we certainly have a long way to go when it comes to understanding the value of peace.

With each of the numbers in mind, we must now ask ourselves how effective our efforts to attain peace, prosperity, and security through killing were? And, whether all those lives, and all that money spent on this War of Terror in Afghanistan was worth it?

As far as I'm concerned, my answer to this question is the same as it was in 2001 - no!

I will leave you with a few words I watched being written in chalk on the sidewalk outside the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa back in 2001:

'You cannot bomb the world into peace, but you can bomb it into pieces.'