

Crossed Memories: Perspectives on 9/11 and American Power

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American Images of Islam and Muslims, September 11, 2001, and Their Impact on Muslim Society

Rosnani Hashim

Introduction

September 11, 2001 was a historic moment in human history. Unlike any previous war, the bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were perpetrated against a civilian population in its own land without even attempting a prior declaration of war. They were unprecedented in world affairs, not in their scale and character, but in the target. These horrendous terrorist attacks flouted international law and changed international politics profoundly. The September 11 event also was historic in the sense that it was telecast live to all corners of the earth such that its vivid images were captured indelibly in human memories.

Yet, while nearly everyone felt shock and sorrow for the victims, many observers around the world also harbored more complicated emotions. Most Muslims, I believe, shared the same feeling upon witnessing this event. They all prayed hard that the attackers would not be of the Islamic faith because they knew from previous experience that Muslims were likely to be blamed. When the Federal Murrah building in Oklahoma City was bombed in 1995, Muslims were accused as the attackers even before any evidence were collected. That accusation resulted in racist attacks, harassment, and vandalism against Muslims. Then, when the real criminal, Timothy McVeigh was arrested, no apology was tendered to the individual Muslims attacked, to the Muslim community in America, or to Muslims worldwide.

Muslims throughout the world condemned the attacks of September 11—regardless of the faith or race of the attackers—because it is against the spirit of the