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## A 9/11 Reality Check

By Robert Scheer

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What if eight years ago the World Trade Center had been leveled by a small nuclear bomb that took out most of lower Manhattan as well? How many millions of innocent civilians would we have killed in retaliation? Would we still be a free society, or would Dick Cheney have attained the power of a demented king, having moved on from snooping on our phone calls and outing honest CIA agents to destroying the last vestiges of the rule of law?

As assaults on a society go, the 9/11 attacks, which left 3,000 dead and are sure to be described in this anniversary week as being among the greatest of historical outrages, were something less than that, given the world's experience with the ravages of war. The countless Russians and the 6 million Jews killed by those so finely educated Germans come to mind. The 3.4 million Vietnamese, mostly rice farmers, whom Robert McNamara admitted to having helped kill with his carpet-bombing of their country, are a forgotten footnote. Yet we who have never experienced such carnage on our home front all too easily poke out tens of thousands of eyes for each lost one of our own.

Surely two planes crashing into office buildings and another hitting the Pentagon doesn't compare to the leveling of every major city in Japan with conventional bombing, capped off by the mass murder of hundreds of thousands more at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Speaking of eyes lost, mark the words of Hiroshima's mayor two years ago: "That fateful summer, 8:15 AM. The roar of a B-29 breaks the morning calm. A parachute opens in the blue sky. Then suddenly, a flash, an enormous blast—silence—hell on Earth. The eyes of young girls watching the parachute were melted."

We assumed that the Japanese people would readily forgive us and, having been raised in the spirit of total obedience to their emperor, they accommodated our occupation quite well, even

injecting industrial-grade silicon into their women's breasts to satisfy the erotic appetites of our soldiers.

Americans who blithely claim the moral high ground with every pledge of allegiance to a flag that, because it is American, is assumed to have never been sullied by imperial greed or moral contradiction expect no less than instant and full forgiveness for our "mistakes." Only last month, four decades after he led the massacre of 500 villagers in My Lai, Vietnam, did former Army Lt. William Calley express "regret" for his crimes. He served no time in prison for the point-blank shooting of toddlers, thanks to the commutation of his sentence by Richard Nixon, who might have been anticipating his own need for a presidential pardon.

In blind and wrathful retaliation for 9/11 we wreaked havoc on Iraq, a nation that our then-president knew had not attacked us, and we continue to slaughter peasants in Afghanistan who aren't able to find Manhattan on a map.

We, a people whose nation has never suffered a long and widespread occupation, easily gave vent to our most barbaric impulses, assuming the absolute right to arrest and torture anyone anywhere in the world without revealing his identity, let alone respecting a single one of those God-given rights that we claim for ourselves alone. And even when we identify the few we hold responsible for the attacks on our soil, we refuse them public and fair trials even after years of torturing them.

But we do have a saving grace for our experiment in democracy—although unfortunately it did not exist in the Supreme Court or Congress as a barrier to an imperial vice presidency. It is the power of the lone whistle-blower of conscience, occasionally given voice in what remains of our free press and which can influence presidential elections, as happened quite dramatically this last time around. There are those like Joe Wilson, who exposed presidential fraud masquerading as national security concern over bogus Iraqi purchases of uranium from Niger, and more recently the truth-telling of Ali H. Soufan, a former FBI agent and lead interrogator of terrorists.

In Sunday's New York Times, Soufan, who was involved in obtaining much reliable information from prisoners before they were tortured, observed that the recently released memos cited by Cheney to back his argument that torture was efficient actually "fail to show that the techniques stopped even a single imminent threat of terrorism."

So, Cheney is again proved wrong, but if there had been a larger attack on 9/11, I doubt whether many free souls would be around now to tell him so.