

## Q&A From the 9/11 ashes, a new world is born

In the decade since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the balance of power in the world has shifted. When they come to describe the changes, what will historians say about the last ten years?



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Wreckage at the site of the 9/11 attack on New York city.

**Q It's said that journalists write 'the first draft of history'. What are they writing about the last ten years?**

**A** The newspapers and magazines are awash with wise heads reflecting on how the world has changed. Looking back on the decade since al Qaeda terrorists used hijacked passenger aircraft to inflict a devastating attack on American soil, commentators have tried to make sense of the dramatic changes that followed the carnage of 9/11, and to understand how the consequences of the tragedy affected other world events.

**Q And what do they conclude?**

**A** Overall, there is much criticism of the Bush presidency's reaction to 9/11, and what the editor of the *Financial Times*, Lionel Barber, calls 'pugnacious unilateralism' – going it alone. Many commentators connect that to the decline of old alliances like NATO, whose weakness was revealed by the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan and by squabbling over Iraq. Instead of old-fashioned international alliances, more and more power now belongs to 'non-state actors' like corporations, or terrorist groups.

**Q Is there anything cheerful in the geopolitical mix?**

**A** David Remnick, editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, describes one of the most encouraging changes, and hopes for a new era in the region from which Al Qaeda sprung. 'The death of [al Qaeda leader

Osama] bin Laden, coupled with the events of the Arab Spring, augured at least the possibility of a new age. Violent Islamism no longer seemed inevitable or indomitable. Events in North Africa and the Middle East promised, at the very least, a powerful alternative to both stagnant authoritarian governments and Islamist terror.'

**Q Any other bright spots on the horizon?**

**A** It very much depends where you are sitting. The Brazilians, Russians, Indians and Chinese – also known as the 'BRICs' – can celebrate their countries' rise. But there is a consensus that Europe is looking humbled, after ten years in which the grand schemes of launching a single currency, the Euro, and trying to make the EU the world's leading knowledge economy have both faltered. A debt crisis has affected all nations in the Eurozone, while rising unemployment and low growth have made Europe's economic ambitions look unrealistic at best, even though there has been a successful expansion in the number of member states.

**Q OK, so tell me about these celebrating BRIC countries?**

**A** Well, while the US and Europe are hamstrung by the repercussions of the 2008 financial meltdown (no more unaffordable mortgages or loans) and factors like the high price of oil (up from \$28 per barrel in September 2001 to around \$115 now), these economies are surging ahead. All have growing middle classes and rising prosper-

ity, which will help maintain growth. And China this year became not only the world's number one manufacturer, but now the second largest economy after the US.

**Q Does this mean American power in decline?**

**A** Probably. The ratings agency S&P has recently downgraded the US credit rating, and a former editor of the *New York Times*, Bill Keller, says America's attention has 'turned inward upon a faltering economy.' But other commentators are optimistic about the future. In a special 9/11 anniversary edition of the *Foreign Affairs* periodical, Princeton Professor John Ikenberry says that while we are witnessing the rise of China and the erosion of America's position, it will be possible to build a new international order peacefully, avoiding the 'tension, distrust and conflict typical of a power transition'.

**Q Let's hope he's right. Anything else?**

**A** Well, technology is making a huge difference in parts of the world less under the 9/11 anniversary spotlight – for example, the exploding pool of people in Africa and other developing areas who are able to access the internet via mobile phones. Perhaps the most exciting good news stories will come from that continent in the next decade.

**SOME PEOPLE SAY...**

'The world changed more in the last ten years than it did in the whole previous hundred.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?