

Short Interview with Haim Harari, November 2001

FORTUNE (Magazine) – Harari, a leading authority on particle physics, also created Perach, a tutorial program for underprivileged Israeli children. The Weizmann Institute is a leading R&D center.

Was globalization itself attacked on Sept. 11? Will the World Trade Center attacks slow the progress of the global economy?

Globalization is here to stay. Even terror is globalized. It is operated from several countries, with terrorist acts in other countries, by a multinational consortium, directed against several nations, using international communications and travel. International science and technology, as well as the communications media of the global village, are used quite successfully by terrorists. And illegal immigration, organized crime, and even antiglobalization demonstrations--all of these, too, are globalized. The ultimate example was the Internet message saying, "Join the worldwide fight against globalization."

What do you think the U.S. is in for now? As an Israeli, you are accustomed to tight security measures and a heightened sense of awareness of potential terrorism. What can Americans expect in the months and years ahead? How does a feeling of insecurity affect daily life?

The first response in the U.S. has been panic and overreaction. This will necessarily change as time passes, as people get used to the new situation. One learns to live with danger, especially if it is relatively minor.

It is crucial to distinguish between national mood and actual danger. The actual danger of terror is quite minor, when you think about it in a rational way. It is clear that AIDS is a bigger threat than anthrax, and that cancer is a bigger threat than AIDS. Smoking is more dangerous than opening an envelope.

Car accidents kill many more people than terror. Within the boundaries of Israel itself (excluding the West Bank and Gaza) the number of people killed in automobile accidents during the last year of "Intifada" is eight times larger than the number of dead as a result of terror (about 500 dead in road accidents and 60 by terror). No one would postpone or cancel a trip to Israel because of car accidents. Why should anyone fear a danger that is eight times smaller?

The daily publication of press reports about potential dangers, together with extensive TV coverage of every minor item related to terror, actually plays into the hands of the terrorists. It gives them a victory at no cost to them. If one phone call and a false threat can close a major airport, there is no need for bombs and hijacking.

To live with terror means to find the right combination of prevention, protection, courage, logic, and most important, a relentless, persistent, and aggressive war against the terrorists and their protectors. I am convinced that the United States will find this combination after a period of trial and error.