

Psychological aftermath of September 11th

Is there a 9-11 Transition?

by Dai Williams

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Ground Zero (WTC) September 2002

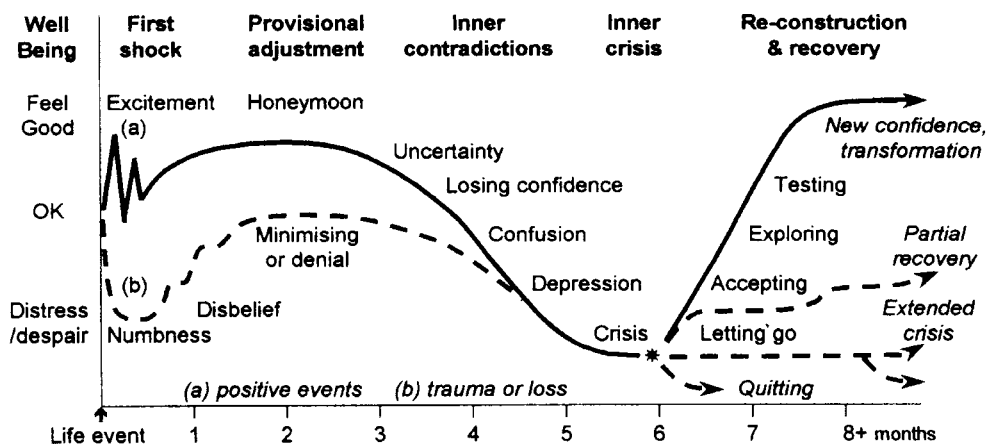
Summary

This paper reviews forecast and observed stages of psychological response to the September 11th disasters in the USA as they may apply in business, political and community organisations. It considers NASDAQ trends as an indicator of psychological climate as well as economic conditions in US commerce. It highlights transition management issues and priorities for government and business organisations managing the psychological aftermath of 9-11 and the War on Terrorism. It includes scenarios for recovery from the current crisis period based on transition psychology ([Appendix 1](#)) and examples of the many trauma support responses to 9-11 ([Appendix 2](#)).

In psychology the term *transition* identifies a complex process that enables humans to respond and adapt successfully to major periods of trauma or change ([1](#)). If such a process is part of everyone's innate coping resources then it must be operating in some way for most of the US population in the aftermath of the traumatic events of September 11th 2001 in New York and Washington - a potential *9-11 Transition* period.

Transitions have several distinct phases and may involve periods of unexpected hazards and opportunities (see Figure 1 below). Most people in western societies may experience at least 10 - 20 transitions in a normal lifetime ([2](#)). Traditional societies evolved rites of passage to prepare and support people through major transition points. These have largely been lost or forgotten in modern, socially fragmented populations.

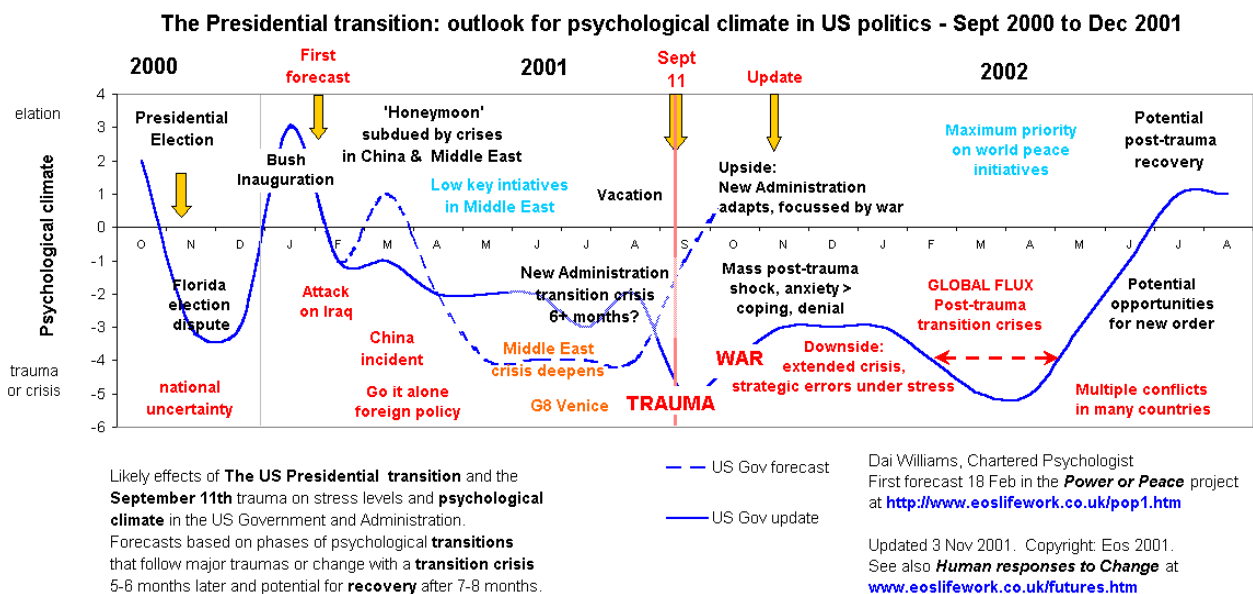
Figure 1: The transition cycle - from *Human Responses to Change*, 1999)



The transition process works within individual human minds. But if groups of people experience the same trauma or change simultaneously they may go through similar phases of crisis and recovery at similar times and have to resolve shared issues or beliefs that are rendered obsolete by the change. These *collective transitions* can be highly disruptive but can ultimately enable groups and organisations to survive and thrive after collective traumas - whether in pre-industrial communities or in modern business corporations.

The transition process appears to be a basic survival process as innate as the *fight or flight* response that enables human to respond very fast to life-threatening situations. But since the transition cycle usually operates over a period of 6-12 months, sometimes longer, its stages and behaviours are rarely recognised as a natural and evolving response to major life events. Transitions include an early coping period that enables individuals to come to terms with immediate changes within 2-3 months, giving the illusion that they have dealt with the trauma or change. Hence personal distress or crisis behaviour 6+ months after a major life-event is often misdiagnosed as a mental illness problem by medical personnel, or as unreasonable behaviour by employers sometimes leading to disciplinary action or dismissal.

Transition psychology has evolved from bereavement and career counselling situations in the 1960's and 70's to being recognised as a strategic aspect of change management in large corporations like Shell since the 1990's (1). However it was not applied to the effects of trauma and change in governments or communities by psychologists or political analysts until 1997 (2). The possibility of a *9-11 transition* was proposed to the first symposium on Psychohistory in York in March 2002 but has not been published (3) except on the Eos website. Earlier forecasts of psychological climate in the new US Government (February 2001, 8) were updated on 3rd November 2001 for the likely **psychological aftermath of September 11th and the War on Terrorism** see **Figure 2** below, and updated on 3rd October 2002 ([Appendix 1](#)).



1. Is there a 9-11 Transition?

If there is a 9-11 Transition then it should be 3 months into an *extended crisis* period by now (July 2002). There are no obvious signs of the psychological "recovery" phase either in the US Administration or economy. Psychological recovery for individuals and groups in transition becomes very obvious with radical new insights, creative policy initiatives, new confidence, increased morale and synergy in political and business organisations e.g. the shift from crisis to recovery in the UK Government from January to April 1998 (4).

From the transition model in Figure 1 severe signs of psychological distress or crisis were forecast around **6 months after September 11th** (i.e. March 11th onwards) e.g. internal conflicts in government or civil or labor unrest in New York. But there was little evidence of US community crises in the international media.

Whether the US Administration were making strategic errors then or since (as seen in political transition crises in other countries, [Figure 4](#)) requires a political rather than psychological assessment.

The India-Pakistan crisis took the world media spotlight off USA affairs giving the Administration a slight breathing space, There was serious concern in the UK that the US Government might be about to initiate nuclear strikes at that time and the ongoing crisis in Israel went into its deepest crisis at that time. only to be followed by the combination of business scandals and rapid stock market decline.



UK press headline
March 11th 2002

This succession of crises put continued pressure on the US Government and heightened international tension together with the lingering War on Terrorism. Where these events could be tracked back to disruption following September 11th plus the start of a new war-trauma transition they may be aspects of a wider *global transition* period - not restricted to the US people and business.

Evidence of personal transition behaviour is difficult to identify without direct contact with the individuals most affected. Crisis behaviour for high profile public figures can be seen sometimes e.g. in scapegoating and resignations or threats of resignations ([2](#)). But the US President presents an amazingly calm public image on the media which should be some encouragement to a recently traumatised population.

Trauma support projects in New York and Occupational Health units in large corporations are likely to have far more detailed data on a wide cross section of people directly affected. However they may be working on PTSD diagnoses, not transition psychology. Action research while supporting a severely traumatised community may seem a low priority. But their ongoing observations could be crucial to identifying whether a mass transition process is working through the communities most immediately affected, and what stage it is at.

International media reports about events in the US tend to focus on government issues and government speeches or statements that maintain an up-beat view of American society. In April a contact from New York described very cohesive responses in the communities most immediately affected - as happened in the Omagh community after the terrorist bomb in August 1998. Economic, social and emotional support appear to be key factors in transition recovery ([2](#), [15](#)) and both were good in Ground Zero.

But other reports from New York since March indicate that some people still appear to be in shock or denial of the deeper implications of the World Trade Centre disaster. Deeper psychological implications of the 9-11 disasters may be partly suppressed by US military operations overseas that have taken the spotlight off domestic trauma casualties. The rhetoric of war and its appeal to patriotism have been used in many cultures to divert attention from fear or other domestic problems e.g. in Uganda by Idi Amin in 1971 and in UK by the Thatcher government during the Falklands war.

Some conspiracy theorists suggest that the tragedies may not have been a surprise for the Administration. Whether expected or not their practical aftermath must have been shocking to most senior figures in the Government and military, including the President. Fluctuations in the mental health of political and military leaders are rarely questioned by media or health specialists at the time, only by biographers and historians years later. A rare exception was Professor Hugh Freeman's paper on the mental health of world leaders during the 20th century in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 1991 ([5](#)).

If there is a delayed psychological aftermath to events on September 11th its social symptoms may have been effectively concealed by political and media attention on military and economic events rather than the psychological climate in traumatised communities and across the nation. However if there is a 9-11 transition then it may be a key factor in US business performance in addition to existing economic problems.

Whatever its causes the current crisis in financial market confidence in the US is plain to see, with repercussions in world markets and many other economies.

2. Direct and delayed psychological effects of mass trauma

The basic model of the phases and time-scales of transition was originally developed for individual life traumas and changes. The potential effects of *mass transitions* (e.g. post-trauma effects) in large populations will involve other psychological processes and dimensions as well as the linear "roller coaster" well-being cycle of coping-crisis-recovery ([Figure 1](#)).

Most transition research to date has focussed on individuals (e.g. after separation, bereavement or redundancy) or in employing organisations (e.g. after mergers or take-overs). Its application to other organisational settings e.g. to governments after elections ([4](#)) and countries after wars ([6](#)) has not been widely researched or debated.

Where a major trauma affects a large population its effects may be rather like throwing a brick into a pond. Shock waves propagate outwards changing in size and time of arrival at different places - steepest near the epicentre then shallower and slower as they spread.

Shock waves from under-sea earthquakes warn that although waves may appear shallow in deep ocean they still carry great power that can develop into a *Tsunami effect* when they encounter some other limiting condition (shallow water). The delayed effects of psychological traumas may also seem minimal until individuals or organisations affected encounter some other challenging situation e.g. redundancy or adverse trading conditions.

Similar metaphors may be needed to adapt existing transition theory to the wider psychological aftermath of September 11th across the USA and into other countries. Traumatic effects may have been attenuated with geographic and psychological distance from the original centres of trauma in New York and Washington. The TV images were graphic. But people in other states may have felt less deeply affected by the initial shock, except those who suffered direct personal loss of friends, relatives or business opportunities when air transport was shut down. Many populations have been de-sensitised to images of violence and disaster by ongoing exposure to such images on film and TV over several decades.

Nevertheless there must have been profound psychological effects from events on September 11 for a large proportion of the US population. Governments and business organisations in other countries who were closely involved in the security response or commercial disruption that occurred were also affected.

Perhaps, like the effects of a new government on public confidence, some traumas or changes do not become a serious issue for the general population until the consequences impact directly on their personal lives.

In the USA such personal consequences became obvious within weeks e.g. due to redundancies in the aviation industry and fear of harassment or arrest without trial within ethnic communities suspected of being potential Middle East terrorists by virtue of skin colour.

3. Stress and change in traumatised communities

The most obvious psychological factor for individual and group responding to trauma is *stress*, linked with but different from the psychology of change. *Stress responses* to trauma - from increased anxiety levels to extreme fight or flight behaviour - are more immediate, obvious and better recognised than the phases of transition that occur gradually over many months.

In societies where background stress levels are low (i.e. with relative affluence and stable, supportive social structures) there may be considerable resilience to traumatic events. However a small percentage of individuals and communities already under significance stress (e.g. from poverty or ethnic tensions) are likely to shift from high anxiety to aggressive or violent behaviour when placed under more stress (7).

Individuals who had recently experienced some other major career or personal life event may have already been in some distress before September 11th. They were potentially more vulnerable to the increased stress and transition effects of the 9-11 trauma. This would include most of the new Administration that was likely to be in the crisis phase of its post-election transition (8). It may have been at its least vigilant through the August vacation despite a sudden plunge in share values (see NASDAQ index in Figure 3).

There could also be significant differences in responses to 9-11 from different social and occupational groups in the USA depending on the stress levels they were already experiencing before September 11th. Where community statistics involve both affluent and deprived communities then acute psychological or medical effects in the deprived groups may be concealed.

Stress levels and possible transition effects in US business organisations may have been initially compensated by the comparatively good health and financial security of professional and managerial staff. But even for these groups economic security has become an increasing cause of anxiety over the last 4 months, see inhibiting factors in transition (2).

The *highest stress levels* in periods of trauma or change are likely to occur during the first 3-6 weeks - the *initial shock* period - and again from 5-6 months onwards in the *transition crisis* period. These very high stress levels are important because stress severely affects the quality of individual and collective *decision making*, with serious loss of lateral and long term vision. High stress also affects *interpersonal relations* with reactions ranging from short temper to scapegoating and sometimes direct physical violence.

External sources of stress are usually fairly obvious e.g. actual threats to physical safety, loss of employment or material wealth (falling stock prices). *Internal sources of stress* are less obvious and more disruptive to clear thinking. For example *fear of more terrorist attacks* is a powerful influence on personal and group behaviour, even though the objective risk for members of the public is statistically far less likely than an automobile accident. People in London realised this during IRA terrorist bombing campaigns in the 1970's and refused to be panicked by real but localised attacks.

But more stressful and insidious than fear of external threats is the *inner stress* caused by the progressive breakdown of personal values and deeply held beliefs. This develops 5-6 months after most major traumas or changes (the *transition crisis* period). This may include a sense of losing control over one's life and can cause levels of distress and disturbed behaviour that make include nervous collapse or breakdown.

These *internal conflicts* can be more disruptive to personal judgement and behaviour than external factors, and are rarely recognised except by people familiar with transition theory and their own personal experience of transitions (9). In a transition crisis decision making is not only impaired by stress but also by doubt in the fundamental assumptions about the world that we may have relied on since childhood. Some of these can be invalidated by trauma or change. Contradictions between our inner view of the world and the new reality can cause severe cognitive dissonance (internal mental conflicts).

The *beliefs, core values or expectations* that are jeopardised in a transition crisis are unique to each individual and so implicit that they may not even be recognised. But they may be widely shared within a traumatised community e.g. beliefs that US society was invulnerable due to military superiority, trust that high technology environments (high buildings, aeroplanes) are safe, trust in 'the state' to protect its citizens or trust that ethnic minorities are protected by the Constitution. In view of the Enron scandal these issues of violated personal trust or safety may extend to trust that large corporations are safe to invest in.

The combined effects of *stress* with the less obvious stages of adapting to *change* (transition) are very important to *the quality of organisational processes and decision making* for at least the first year after a major trauma like September 11th. The effects of stress and transition need careful monitoring and management in US organisations this year - from the White House and Pentagon to the Board rooms of Wall Street and businesses through the country and their overseas subsidiaries. These are strategic management, human resource and occupational health issues (14). They are prime factors in the psychological health and climate of organisations.

The cumulative effects of several major traumas and changes on stress levels and psychological climate in the UK Government from 1998-2000 were analysed in **Accidents waiting to happen**, March 2000 (9). Similar analyses can be applied to any organisation.

If extreme stress levels affect individual and group performance and decision making then government strategies in the US may have been affected, and be adversely affecting other organisations, since September 11th. For example heightened levels of security are understandable. **But by frequently re-stating the risk of further terrorist action the Government and military may have sustained and increased national anxiety levels.**

There is an important difference between vigilance and paranoia. Anxiety levels were sustained by the real but curiously ineffective anthrax incidents last autumn and subsequent rumours about other potential terrorist threats e.g. warnings of radiological bombs and bio-terrorism. Whether these were sincere concerns or deliberate PsychOps (psychological warfare operations) engineered to maintain national support for war plans and operations is not known at present.

Whatever their motivation Government communications about ongoing terrorist threats have provided recurring sources of anxiety in addition to very real problems of recession in the US economy. Sustained high stress levels from multiple sources (in addition to the normal stresses of life and work) may be seriously impairing the natural potential of humans and organisations to respond constructively to the traumas of September 11th - to move from psychological (and economic) crisis to recovery. Rather than being a positive focus for national unity against a defined enemy (as in the response to the World War 2 Blitz and IRA attacks in the UK) the War on Terrorism risks developing a paranoid siege mentality in the US. It also risks increasing ethnic tensions in large parts of the domestic population.

The transition process appears to be *a natural psychological response* that has evolved over millennia to enable individuals and groups to adapt successfully to trauma and change. However transitions can be *enabled or inhibited* by a number of factors. Two of the most important factors are *emotional* and *economic security* (2).

Feeding national and international *fear of terrorism* may sustain political or military agendas in the US and other countries. But it *may also be hugely inhibiting the psychological potential of commercial organisations and communities to work through from the crisis to recovery periods of the 9-11 transition*. This breakthrough is essential to restore a healthy psychological climate, and for people and organisations to respond creatively to an already challenging economic environment.

4. Potential medical indicators of a 9-11 transition

There should be a variety of indicators that could identify the stages of a post-trauma transition. Conventional medical diagnoses of post-trauma effects are likely to be based on current PTSD (*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*) models. These recognise the obvious initial trauma and its psychological disruption (panic, flash backs, avoidance behaviour etc) that gradually improve over several months. These may be measured by the frequency of disruptive episodes (e.g. flashbacks) or the number of attendance's for medical support.

By 6 months after a trauma a significant proportion (depending on context and support) of PTSD patients will stop reporting disruptive episodes to medical personnel and so are presumed recovered at least to fairly normal functioning. Those who continue to be disturbed will tend to present more intractable symptoms e.g. clinical depression.

Many of those most directly affected in New York e.g. rescue workers and residents near Ground Zero have had extensive therapeutic and community support. This has enabled them to begin to come to terms with changed lives and a changed world. Such support programmes can be very effective as seen in the work of the Bridge Centre and other support groups in the Omagh community after August 1998.

However if the transition process is not considered, as well as more obvious PTSD diagnoses, then serious hazards and important opportunities for recovery may be missed in organisations and support groups. In 1991 the Kuwait hostage support group in UK was closed down just before the potential 6 month transition crisis point was reached. The first suicide occurred soon after. The Bridge Centre in Omagh has provided ongoing support since 1998.

Medical services are usually targeted on trauma casualties with ongoing symptoms. This may miss the important opportunities for psychological recovery and growth that usually develop in the second 6 months of transition e.g. in Omagh some severely injured children achieved good school exam results 9 months later and there were many positive community building initiatives. Communities in New York are already likely to be developing similar positive responses - gold out of the ashes. But wider communities indirectly traumatised on September 11th may have had little trauma or transition support and may be experiencing significant distress at this time ([13](#)).

The first tangible medical statistics of the psychological health effects of 9-11 was a recent report on the *mental health of children in the greater New York area*. This clearly indicates widespread and continuing distress though the summary does not indicate changes month by month. If these problems are experienced by children outside the obvious high risk communities in Ground Zero then similar symptoms are likely to be experienced by adults as well.

Medical statistics for organisations and communities traumatised on September 11th, or indirectly affected by its economic effects soon after, could be most valuable in tracking the expected 9-11 transition. *Occupational health services* in Government, commercial and public service organisations should have valuable data.

Post-trauma effects are not restricted to classic PTSD symptoms. The distress of the crisis period - a "dark night of the soul" - may become evident in other statistics e.g. increased *sickness absence* and *quitting* jobs or relationships. Such signs of individual distress were likely to increase sharply from February-March onwards i.e. 5-6 months after September 11th. They should return to normal within a year but may give measures of extended crisis periods for individuals and groups. A study of mental health in Kosovo published in summer 2000 reported an epidemic of mental health problems in the year after the 1999 Balkans War.

Far more people will have suffered some degree of trauma than those who reported PTSD symptoms to medical personnel in the first three months. If anxiety, stress and similar health problems have begun to increase significantly since March this year they may be indications of a transition response to the September 11th trauma, or its practical consequences e.g. redundancies. Statistical analyses of medical or work behaviour problems since September 11th could build up a valuable picture of the extent of the potential 9-11 transition across the USA. If they are analysed month by month they may also give some indication of the rate at which psychological effects propagated into different regions or organisations across the States.

5. Potential economic indicators of a 9-11 transition

If there is a national psychological aftermath to events on September 11th in the USA then this should become apparent in economic as well as social indicators. If the processes of the transition cycle are working through individuals and organisations then their work performance is likely to be significantly affected at different stages.

Employees in financial organisations that suffered the death of colleagues and major business were likely to suffer increasing anxiety levels and progressive loss of confidence through the first quarter approaching *crisis level* from March onwards. In many cases this transition crisis period may have seriously impaired morale, team working and strategic decision making, from trading floor to board level. Out-of-character behaviour e.g. quitting, indiscretions or serious mistakes are characteristic e.g. Oscar Lafontaine's abrupt resignation from the new German Government in March 1999 - just over 5 months after taking office. Transition crisis points may vary in timing for individuals and groups, or not happen at all - see scenarios for the UK Parliament in Part 2 of *Parliament in Transition*, December 1997 (4).

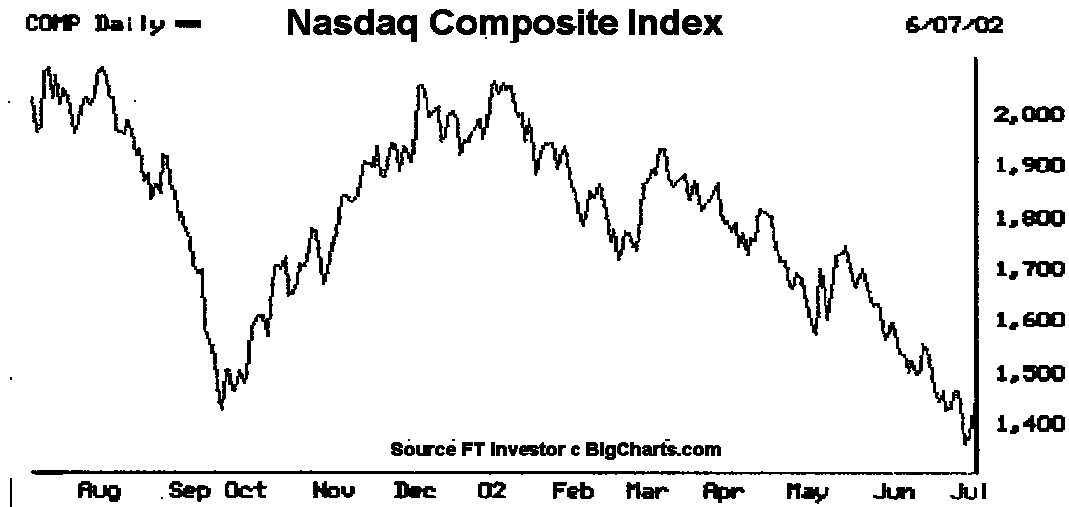
In some cases individuals and organisations may already have broken out of this phase - moving from crisis to psychological recovery. But in many cases individuals and organisations may be temporarily trapped in an *extended psychological crisis* period. Unfortunately the concurrent economic crisis period is likely to compound existing internal and external business problems. Whether transition stress has affected business performance, or whether economic conditions have increased stress levels may be hard to separate out.

If many *senior executives* in US organisations have been going through a collective transition cycle since September 11th this is likely to be reflected in *business performance* - both of individual corporations and collectively across the US economy. One possible indicator of such fluctuations in corporate performance and collective business confidence is the US *NASDAQ* stock market index. NASDAQ trends since September 11th 2001 broadly reflect the classic pattern of the early stages of the transition cycle (see [Figure 3](#)) - initial shock, rapid interim recovery for 2-3 months then leading to progressive loss of confidence and in July to crisis level. [This trend has continued to 29 October, see [Figure 3b](#)].



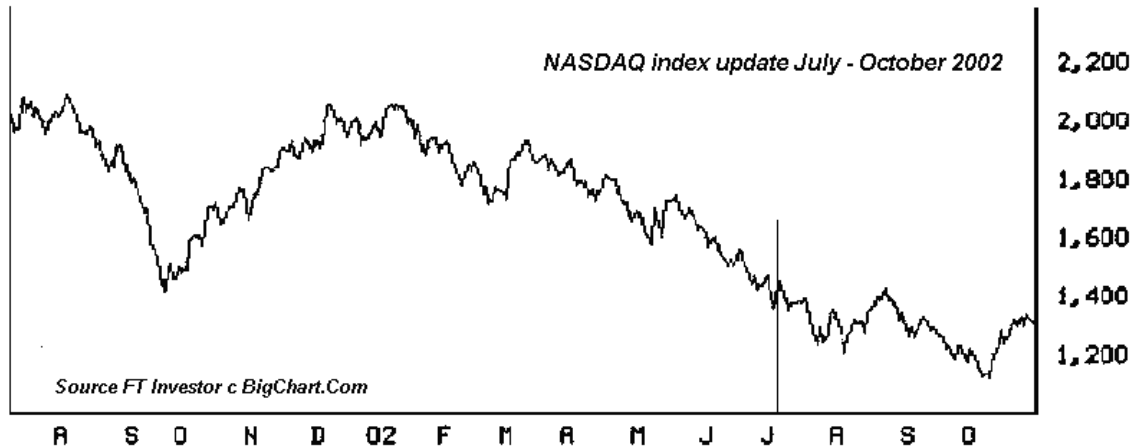
The NASDAQ office is 100 metres from the World Trade Centre site.

Figure 3: The NASDAQ index since September 11th (up to July 2002)



The NASDAQ cycle was trending towards a crisis in April but this decline was attenuated by a temporary lift in March due to oil price increases and another brief pick-up in May. These delayed the economic crisis period (as measured by the index falling to September levels) by nearly two months compared to my first 9-11 transition forecasts proposed last November (see Figure 2 and [Appendix 1](#)). The underlying trend reflected progressive decline during the second 3 months of the 9-11 transition and continuing to date.

Figure 3b: NASDAQ index update since original analysis.



One hazard of the transition crisis period is that organisations or governments may make serious errors of judgement under severe stress. But equally important are the *opportunities in the psychological recovery phase of the transition cycle*. In most transitions there is a potential for individuals and groups to make a rapid turn-around in morale, confidence and performance - if individuals can identify the changes needed to come to terms with the new realities created by September 11th. In periods of transition *the darkest hour is often just before dawn*.

Transition management offers a strategic framework for minimising the hazards and duration of the transition crisis period and maximising opportunities for the powerful recovery period. This has been adapted in **business corporations** like Shell for several years (1). Transition management issues in **political organisations** were explored in the context of the UK 1997 post-election transition in Part 2 and the Review of *Parliament in Transition* (4). Part 2 (**From crisis to recovery**) included an exercise to recognise the transition process from personal experience. It also described the **Defining Moment** experience by which some individuals in high profile political roles break out of the crisis phase:

"Few people appreciate the anger, pain, or fear and the courage it takes to speak out in public to question your party, or to re-define your past beliefs or allegiances. You may be putting your career on the line. History suggests this is a hallmark of integrity."

from *Parliament in Transition*, Part 2, December 1997, (4) at

<http://www.eoslifework.co.uk/pit2.htm#3defmo>

It could be important for economic and political analysts to watch for such defining moments by key characters in US commerce, communities, government and military. These key players are likely to be seen as mavericks so their actions will require courage and careful timing to avoid being scapegoated or culled by their peers or masters who are still in crisis. But for the market and media these people will be the signposts to essential changes and potential catalysts for recovery in their organisations. [See inset on page 12 - CEO calls for end to excessive executive pay, (12)].

6. Other potential 9-11 transition indicators

As well as medical statistics and inspired interventions other transition indicators in organisations and communities may include accidents and crime statistics. Unfortunately such data is not often available on a community or societal level for many months. But almost real-time data should exist within larger public and commercial organisations.

Data gathering re more serious symptoms of the psychological aftermath of 9-11 through US Government or media sources has been difficult. It is complicated by increasing security restrictions, media censorship or self-censorship, and ongoing news management (propaganda or "spin") by authorities. It would not appear to be in the national interest to report a **national mental health crisis**, although a national commercial crisis is obvious. Also public paranoia appears to have been systematically reinforced by the Administration and military to maintain support for ongoing military operations and increased defence spending.

Psychologically the characterisation of the War on Terrorism as an ongoing and ever-present threat, rather than seeing September 11th as a once-off event, may attenuate both the denial and crisis phases of the 9-11 transition. This indefinitely extended psychological crisis condition has serious mental health, economic and public order (crime) implications for the USA. Such effects on communities experiencing ongoing conflict and deprivation can be seen in the Afghan and Palestinian populations. Significant increases in levels of paramilitary violence occurred in Northern Ireland 6-9 months after the Omagh bombing (RUC statistics). **Fear and violence in stressed populations** questioned relationships between anxiety levels and violence in Kosovo (7).

7. Recovery scenarios for the 9-11 Transition

If a 9-11 transition process is working through the USA then it is now [July 2002] likely to be in the extended crisis phase for many individuals and organisations. In communities and organisations the transition process will eventually enable individuals and groups to come to terms with the initial trauma or change and their new reality i.e. its wider implications for their lives, work and environment.

Individuals in healthy, well-resourced populations will usually work through the transition process to the positive and powerful recovery phase within a year, often within 7-8 months. This was the basis for the 9-11 transition crisis and recovery periods forecast in Figure 2. This was ***the most optimistic scenario*** for the 9-11 transition. But early recovery does not seem obvious yet in US business or government.

In the US financial markets two temporary shifts in confidence delayed the expected crisis period from March-April until June. The current crisis in financial confidence in the US is now obvious. Corporate accounting frauds provide a simple explanation. But the ***underlying crisis in psychological climate*** due to the aftermath of 9-11 may be having far more pervasive effects and lead to more fundamental questions about political and economic values, policies and practices in the USA.

The ***wider ramifications of the 9-11 trauma*** on US business, transport and ethnic tensions, compounded by the commitment to the War on Terrorism, have developed a climate of fear and deteriorating economic confidence. Both conditions are factors that inhibit psychological recovery for individuals in periods of transition due to trauma or change (2).

These factors, and the attenuated impacts of the initial trauma across the US economy and society, suggest that collective crisis and recovery periods are likely to take longer to work through than is usual for individuals. Even in favourable conditions the 1997-98 post-election transition crisis in the UK Government lasted 2-3 months longer than expected before a rapid and very visible recovery in March-April 1998 (4).

Until key individuals in Government, business or society reach their own personal defining moments then ***a more likely scenario is that the 9-11 transition crisis may continue for several more months***. This is likely to be reflected in deepening financial uncertainty and with increasing health and social order problems.

Downside risk scenarios include a risk that the US Administration may attempt to deflect attention away from growing domestic crises by launching another military campaign overseas e.g. proposed escalation of the ongoing war against Iraq into a major offensive. This does not address the domestic consequences of the 9-11 transition and would trigger a vast transition cycle in the Arab world in addition to those already unfolding from the Afghan War and the Intifada transition in Israel/Palestine.

But there could also be a very positive ***transformation scenario*** in the 9-11 transition. As individuals work through their personal responses to 9-11 the transition process is likely to produce some ***inspired contributions and new insights*** for resolving current problems within the US and in its international relations.

These may come from ***within the US Government or military, from business organisations and in communities***. The individuals concerned may initially appear to be ***mavericks*** going against established policies or unquestioned beliefs that are no longer valid since September 11th.

These individuals will be the *catalysts for change* to whatever new order is likely to emerge from the 9-11 transition. I expect to see not just one, but 4 or 5 new leaders with the charisma of Martin Luther King emerging in the recovery phase of the 9-11 transition in the USA - within the next 6 months.

An example of a key public figure reaching a personal *defining moment* in the UK Government in January 1998 was *Mo Mowlam's* decision, against all advice to talk with paramilitaries in the Maze prison in Northern Ireland. Within 24 hours she had opened up a new initiative for the peace process - and a vital *turning point* for the new UK government's internal transition crisis (see [Figure 4](#)). In November 1999 Northern Ireland leader *David Trimble* made a similar radical decision to end decades of intransigence between Catholic and Protestant politicians. His defining moment led to the formation of the Northern Ireland Assembly within weeks.

A growing number of individuals in the USA may already have reached a defining moment or psychological turning point in their personal 9-11 transition. These may include some of those most deeply traumatised in New York e.g. bereaved relatives who went to Afghanistan to make links with families bereaved by US bombing and set up organisations like "Peaceful Tomorrows".

Individual defining moments may seem insignificant in the context of a national economic crisis and ongoing war. But they may indicate that *many other people are near to reaching personal turning points too* - first rays of dawn to bring hope in America's dark night of the soul after September 11th. The numbers of other people moving from crisis to recovery may increase rapidly once a few individuals show the way - catalysts for recovery and positive change in the transition process.

CEO Calls for End to Excessive Executive Pay

In a remarkable speech on the first anniversary of September 11th William McDonough, Federal Reserve Bank President, raised deep questions about the moral responsibilities of US business (12). Challenges to established practices or deeply held beliefs are characteristic of *defining moments* in the careers of public figures in times of change.

These are reasons to look forward to a positive sea change in many aspects of American society that should gain momentum in the second half of 2002. However this could be delayed by major strategic errors or hi-jacked by deliberate sabotage within government or the military.

A dire warning of failing to recognise psychological transition management can be seen in the psychological crisis in Israel and Palestine. The predicted transition crisis period following the Intifada trauma and new Israeli government transitions appears to have been extended and deepened by strategies that break every rule of transition management. Severe oppression of whole communities has perpetuated conditions that inhibit psychological recovery from trauma i.e. emotional, physical and economic insecurity (2) - crucial to building confidence for peace talks. Even worse the increased tension is likely to have increased the level of terrorist atrocities - suicide bombings started 6 months after 350+ people were killed in October - November 2000. Psychologically security operations have greatly increased, not reduced the risk of terrorist action (8).

US society should be far more robust psychologically than communities like Palestine or Afghanistan because of the relative wealth and good health of the majority of the population. Unfortunately the effects of September 11th, economic uncertainty and ongoing anxiety over terrorism will have increased general stress levels over the last year even in affluent groups.

The recovery stage of the transition process is almost inevitable sooner or later for most individuals. Political and economic conditions may inhibit the recovery phase but cannot stop it. The insights involved are unique to each person and hence ultimately invulnerable to political or media manipulation.

For millennia human societies have evolved because of their inherent capability to survive and thrive after periods of the deepest trauma or change e.g. as seen in Germany and Japan after World War 2. Individual and collective transitions appear to be crucial to this psychological adaptation.

Reflections on grief on the first anniversary of 9-11, September 11th 2002:

Walking meditation through Strawberry Fields,
Central Park, New York



Trinity Church, focus of thousands of tributes
from across the USA and around the world.



8. Transition recovery potential

The rate of recovery from a transition crisis for individuals can be much faster than the earlier decline, developing in weeks rather than months (see [Figure 1](#)).

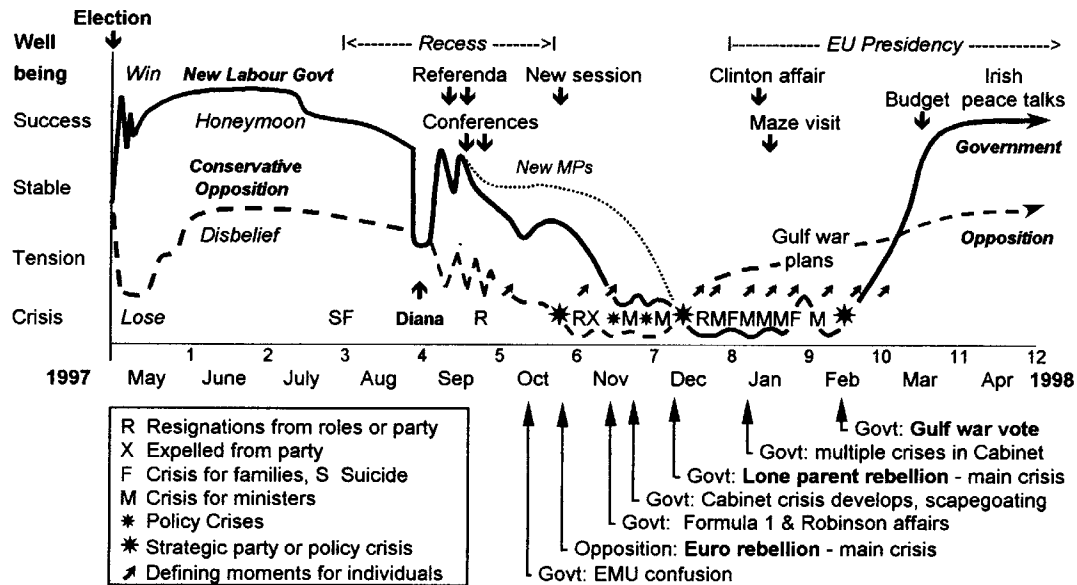
Once individuals and groups "**let go**" of obsolete ideas or expectations they can move forward rapidly. Within 2 months of the UK Government's post-election transition crisis in January 1998 the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, produced a widely acclaimed Budget that won new confidence in financial markets. By April 1998 Prime Minister Tony Blair was able to conclude the historic Good Friday Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland see [Figure 4](#).

In US commerce some organisations may have already begun to explore radical shifts in business strategy in recent weeks, despite the stock market crisis. Bold decisions also include positive initiatives likely to involve and increase confidence among staff. So ***despite tough market conditions and gloomy economic predictions some organisations will survive and begin to thrive soon***. These will be potential role models for other organisations to make similar changes.

Financial analysts may already see organisations that are showing signs of the green shoots of psychological recovery in response to 9-11, regardless of the economic environment. ***The search for organisations reaching these turning points may be more productive than identifying organisations still headed for failure***. Banks that may be highly risk averse at this time can greatly help or hinder such organisations "on the turn".

The transition processes of crisis and recovery appear to operate spontaneously. How fast and effectively they work through depends on insightful individuals and on the wider environment. But in business, community and political organisations the transition process can be facilitated by *Transition Management* strategies (1, 4, 10). These offer quite alternative ways of dealing with crisis periods and harnessing the remarkable energy and creative potential of the transition recovery period.

Figure 4: Psychological climate - honeymoon, crisis and recovery - in the UK Parliament during the 1997-98 post-election transition (4)



9. Crisis management responsibilities in government

A huge responsibility falls on governments in periods of national crisis and transition. As well as managing an unstable psychological climate throughout the country they have to deal with their own personal and organisational transitions. Sooner or later this must involve *updating basic policies or commitments that are clearly untenable in the new environment*. Invariably some old policies have to be let go or radically redefined. Such changes require leaders or other key public figures to display considerable courage and integrity (see *defining moments* in section 5).

Governments that can manage their own changes skilfully can be role models to their party and nation. Failure to do so in democratic countries will eventually be resolved by a change of government in succeeding elections. Psychological transition management is potentially a new and important area of political science (1).

Modern governments have great control over the media and national agendas. A classic symptom of *leaders in crisis* is to *over-control* their own organisation and any other institution they can. Another characteristic of individuals and groups in crisis is a tendency to *scapegoat individuals or other groups* - either by internal repression or external aggression when under great personal stress. National leaders under severe stress are liable to start wars (9).

Radical changes in government or military policy are held back by another psychological process - **group think** - identified by Irving Janis of Yale in 1977 after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Collective rationalisation of bizarre policies, self-censorship, conformity and negative stereotyping of out-groups (e.g. "terrorists") are typical characteristics (11). Group Think is very hard to shift. Total collapse of policies or operations that relied on Group Think assumptions may expose obsolete or deluded assumptions.

The 9-11 transition crisis may be a rare opportunity for US society to identify and re-define existing group think issues that have evolved in the US government, military, business and society in recent decades. These issues will be for Americans to identify. Such a major national transition period may touch many areas of American life. Issues may include anomalies between values cherished within American society and the Constitution with the operation of US business and military interests overseas. They may include attitudes to the environment, business practices or democratic processes, and to ethnic and religious tolerance.

Several of the deeper issues facing American society before September 11th may have been embedded in the philosophy and agenda of the new US Administration. The disaster happened before the new Government had worked through its post-election transition i.e. before it had time to re-align election promises or policies that may have been unviable. This put immense priority on military and security issues and must have diverted resources from economic, social and international relations issues. These neglected areas may be unstable now.

The crisis phase of transition holds great potential for positive strategic change as well as for grave strategic errors. Soon one or more senior figures in the new US Administration or military are likely to question some of the policies of the last 18 months and to propose ***radical policy changes***. This could be the President himself or any of his key advisers. Or it could include leading figures in Congress or the Senate both Republicans and Democrats.

Such personal initiatives for change may cause temporary disruption and pressures for resignation or dismissal. But such figures will be ***key players in moving the 9-11 transition from extended crisis to its recovery phase.***

Such a shift is likely to be reflected in stabilising economic confidence e.g. with the NASDAQ returning at least to December 2001 levels possibly in 4th quarter this year. But market confidence and economic conditions in the US are unlikely to stabilise until the psychological climate in the USA shifts from crisis to recovery in the 9-11 transition.

This ***psychological climate change*** is likely to be about far more than economic or national security policies. It is about a courageous willingness to question deeply held beliefs and to re-assert those that have provided the most stable and cohesive elements of American society. It is likely to involve challenging beliefs, policies or actions that threaten basic human values - integrity, equity, dignity, justice and respect - in both domestic and international affairs.

The responsible use of America's military and economic power must be near the centre of these issues. Military and economic control may also come into question - increasingly concentrated among a few small but powerful groups that seem able to evade democratic and legal accountability both within the USA and internationally.

10. Issues from the 9-11 Transition proposition

The observations and reflections offered above raise several issues:

1. *Need for analysis of the psychological aftermath of September 11th:*

The psychological transition cycle that usually occurs after any major personal trauma or change must be affecting thousands or millions of people in the USA in the aftermath of September 11th. But I have not seen academic or public debate about the 9-11 transition proposed here.

PTSD models will have been used by medical personnel, counsellors and therapists for relatives and communities directly affected by trauma and loss. But many more people are likely to be affected by transition effects and the delayed psychological crisis period expected 6+ months later.

More psychological analyses and interpretations are needed, including transition analysis, preferably by analysts with more direct knowledge of the US government, economy and social systems. The organisational symptoms of transition can be recognised by anyone familiar with the process - not just by psychologists.

Economic and political analyses need to consider psychological dimensions of trauma and change in the USA, and a timeframe that extends 1-2 years before and after September 11th 2001.

2. *Need for transition management strategies*

If a post-traumatic 9-11 transition period is under way then Transition Management strategies already developed for use with individuals and organisations e.g. in Shell ([1](#)) could be of major benefit to individuals, organisations and communities in the USA. Transition awareness is also important to maintain trust and cohesion within organisations in periods of rapid or severe change ([14](#)).

I would be very interested to hear what transition management strategies other organisational analysts would recommend.

3. *Differing vulnerability in periods of transition*

The transition model is subject to individual differences. Some individuals may be more vulnerable than others e.g. if they experienced a major life event within the 12 months prior to 9-11, or due to varying social and economic circumstances.

Detailed research into psychological effects of September 11th will need to take these into account.

4. *Delayed effects of trauma and change*

The impact of major traumas on larger organisations and national populations like the USA may be concealed or delayed depending on how directly people were affected at the time. The propagation of psychological trauma may be delayed by weeks or months until individual's lives, wealth or work are directly affected e.g. by redundancy or loss of investments.

There should be analogies for these delayed effects within existing organisation theory or practice.

5. ***Transition tracking to forecast crisis and recovery***

Transition theory enables forecasts of periods of increased risk (in the transition crisis phase) and amazing opportunities for development, growth and change in the recovery phase. These apply to individuals, groups and organisations.

The first 9-11 transition forecast (3rd November 2001) indicated a delayed crisis phase from March 2002 onwards. It was too optimistic for the recovery phase. ***Scenario planning*** is important in transition tracking and forecasting for large groups. Some crisis and recovery scenarios have been suggested in Section 7. A detailed description of transition tracking methods was developed in the Power or Peace project (8) and is available to other researchers and change support workers on request.

Analysts with more direct knowledge of US business and society will be better able to identify symptoms of crisis and recovery e.g. on the effectiveness of strategic decision making in the US Government and business. Is the NASDAQ a relevant indicator for monitoring psychological climate in the USA? What other social, medical or economic indicators are available with real-time data?

6. ***The War on terrorism and Global transition scenarios***

One consequence of events on September 11th was the launch of the War on Terrorism on October 7th 2001. This created direct and indirect traumas in many other countries. These may have started other large scale social, political or economic transition periods with crises developing from April onwards - sufficient to start a series of national transitions or to exacerbate existing ones.

The cumulative effect of mass transitions in several countries and regions may trigger a ***Global transition*** period through 2002-2003. This could involve widespread social, political and economic instability. Any further major traumas e.g. new wars could add to international economic chaos and massive political unrest.

Transition management principles could be applied to analysis of international as well as national periods of trauma or change. Stabilising the psychological climate in international affairs was an opportunity missed by the US and UK governments in 2nd quarter 2001 (8) - possibly contributing to the September 11th disasters. Stabilising strategies will be vital if a global transition is to be pre-empted or at least managed to mitigate potential crises and optimise prospects for psychological recovery.

Other analysts can apply transition analysis to signs of ***crisis and recovery periods in other countries*** affected by September 11th and the Afghan war. Were the most recent crises in Israel / Palestine and the potential war between India and Pakistan in April-May 2002 indirect reactions to 9-11, or to the Afghan War and War on Terrorism transitions? If so could transition theory contribute to analysis of options for stabilising these regions in coming months, and for harnessing the potential of transition recovery periods for new peace initiatives? How have other countries and governments been affected by the trauma of September 11th or the subsequent War on Terrorism?

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Conclusions

Transition psychology is not widely recognised though it offers valuable insights for managers, consultants and counsellors who are familiar with it and to individuals coping with periods of trauma or change in their personal lives or organisations. If mass transitions occur in countries and governments then the 9-11 transition will be a major test of transition theory.

Transitions contain unexpected and potentially hazardous periods of crisis. But the process appears to contain natural and powerful processes for healing the effects of trauma and change. The proposition that a 9-11 transition may be working through in the USA ultimately offers a powerful message of hope to people and organisations that may be experiencing deep distress at this time, 9 months after September 11th. It offers more optimistic prospects for psychological and economic recovery in the coming year than economic forecasts may suggest - provided that governments and corporations recognise the importance of managing the psychology of change and transitions, and put highest priority on stabilising national and global conditions.

But transition psychology is only one model of human responses to trauma and change. I would like to hear other perspectives on the psychological aftermath of September 11th for the people of the USA and their possible effects in other countries.

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Reflection

History says don't hope on this side of the grave.
But then once in a lifetime
the longed for tidal wave of justice can rise up
and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea change on the far side of revenge.
Believe that a farther shore is reachable from here.

*Extract from The Cure at Troy, by Saemus Heaney
from the tribute CD for victims of the Omagh bomb, 1998*



Waterside shrine to firefighters and police near Ground Zero

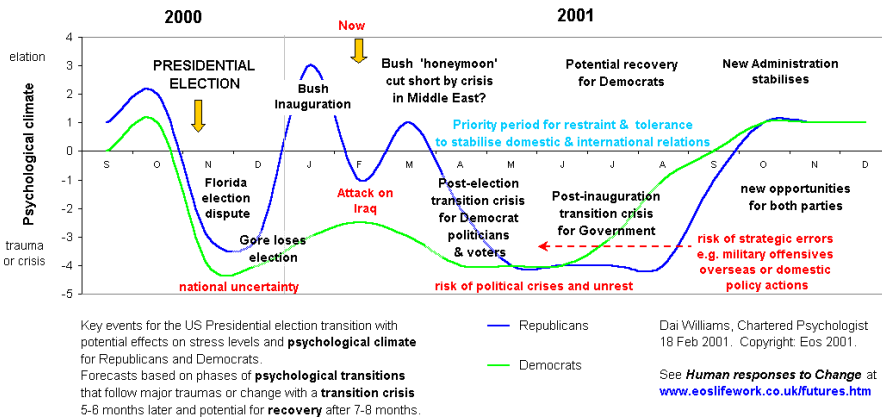
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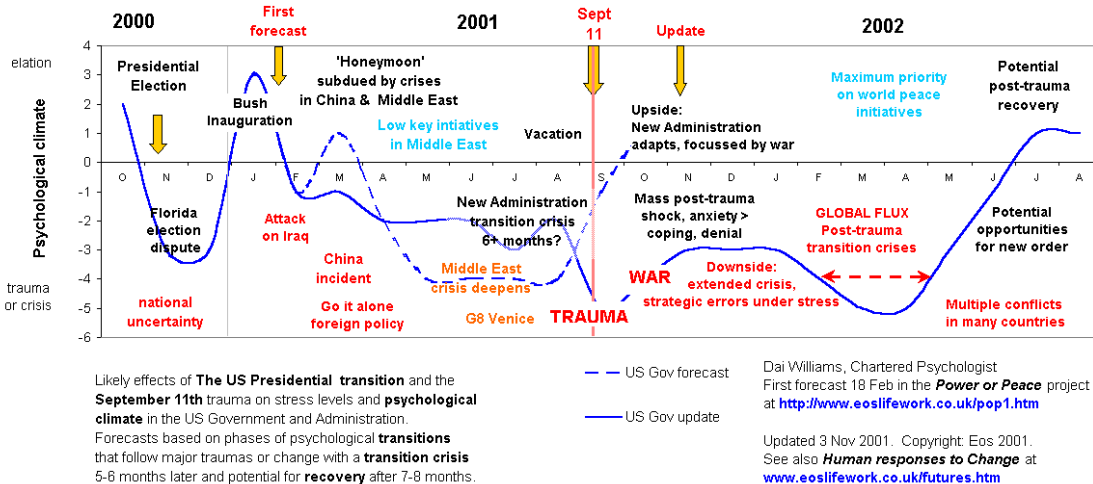
Several of the above references are discussion papers by the author available in full or summary form in the Community Projects index of the Eos website at <http://www.eoslifework.co.uk/Comindx.htm>

Appendix 1 Psychological climate forecasts for the Presidential Transition, 18 Feb 2001, first update for a possible 9-11 Transition, 3 Nov 2001 and second update on 3 October 2002.

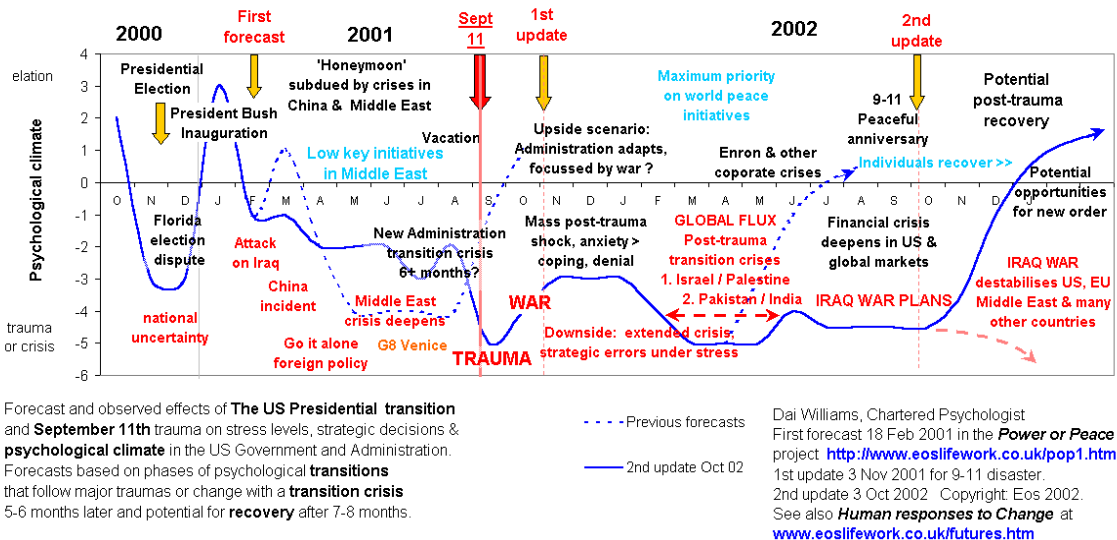
The Presidential transition: outlook for psychological climate in US politics - Sept 2000 to Dec 2001



The Presidential transition: outlook for psychological climate in US politics - Sept 2000 to Dec 2001



The 9-11 transition: psychological climate tracking in US politics - Sept 2000 to Jan 2003



Appendix 2

9-11 trauma support in the USA - organisations and Internet resources

The following links offered online information, advice, support or news of research projects on the Internet in the first year after the September 11th disasters. Other research or community support projects are in progress e.g. in New York, links to be added when available.

The level of advice varies from statements by professional organisations to articles by individuals. News and links for other support or research projects would be appreciated - please Email Dai Williams eosuk@btinternet.com with details or recommended sites.

APA - American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/sep01/trauma.html> (September 2001)

Psychology Mobilizes to Help a Nation in Pain

Psychologists and APA have responded to Tuesday's attacks by providing volunteer services and educational support to those directly and indirectly injured.

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/traumaticstress.html>

Managing Traumatic Stress: Tips for Recovering From Disasters and Other Traumatic Events

The National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

http://www.ncptsd.org/facts/general/fs_effects.html

Effects Of Traumatic Experiences

<http://www.ncptsd.org/facts/disasters/index.html>

Disaster Mental Health: Dealing with the After-effects of Terrorism

NIMH - National Institute of Mental Health (USA)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/outline/responseterrorism.cfm>

Helpful information following terrorist acts (PTSD, Depression) 14 Sept 2001

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/events/prrapidgrants.cfm>

NIMH Awards New Grants In Response to Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001 (18 April 2002)

National Mental Health Association

<http://www.nmha.org/newsroom/system/news.vw.cfm?do=vw&rid=401>

NMHA Submits Testimony for FY 2003 Mental Health Funding Increases

(15 April 2002):

OBSSR - Office of Behavioural and Social Sciences Research

<http://obssr.od.nih.gov/Activities/911/attack.htm>

Assessing the Effects of the Attacks on America

University of Illinois

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~disaster/help.html>

How to help disaster victims

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~disaster/facts/emotion.html>

Emotional reactions to disasters

United Way of New York

<http://www.uwnyc.org/640/>

Comprehensive Study Finds Problems Mount For "Indirect Victims" of WTC Attacks (23 April 2002). New York City's Human Services Face Tough Times Ahead Led by Employment, Housing and Mental Health Issues

http://www.uwnyc.org/640/beyond_ground_zero.pdf

Counselling Today Online

<http://www.counseling.org/ctonline/news/Terrorism0102.htm>

Terrorism, mental health tackled at summit Jennifer Simmons (Counselling Today Online) 16 Nov 2001

Self Psychology - advice for Flight Attendants re 9-11

http://www.selfpsychology.org/papers/davey_2002a_flight_attendants.htm

The Effects of the Trauma of September 11 Helen Davey, PhD

Homeopathic treatment of Trauma

<http://members.aol.com/recovery911/manual.html>

Trauma treatment manual - Ed Schmookler (1996, 9/01)

<http://www.lyghtforce.com/HomeopathyOnline/Issue5/articles/schmookler.html>

Homeopathic treatment of trauma

Net Pets

<http://www.netpets.com/disaster.html>

September 11, 2001 assistance page

Valuable listing of relevant web links

Trauma support organisations in other countries**Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies**

<http://www.astss.org.au/>

ACISA - The Australasian Critical Incident Stress Association

<http://www.acisa.org.au>

Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies

<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/>

Australian Trauma Web

<http://www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/ptsd/>

Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Mental Health

<http://www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au/>

Canadian Traumatic Stress Network

<http://www.ctsn-rcst.ca>

European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

<http://www.estss.org>

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

<http://www.istss.org>

Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation

New project and website developed from the Omagh trauma support team.

<http://www.nictt.org>

Listing reviewed **30 October 2002**

for inclusion with *Psychological aftermath of September 11th - Is there a 911 Transition?* available in the Eos Community Projects Index at <http://www.eoslifework.co.uk/Comindx.htm>