

International Crime, Not War

By Tom Barry and Martha Honey

America is living through a tragedy of unprecedented depth. Our might—military and economic—has been targeted, and our vulnerability exposed. We are shocked, outraged, determined to respond. Yet we awake to a new day sickened by the cruelty and insanity of this political violence—and uncertain if we, too, want blood on our hands.

Will vengeance, even when guided by the best of America's surgical strike technology, ease this tragedy and end the cycle of terror? Upon reflection and based on past experience, we know better.

The crime was horrific. Never have so many Americans died from violence on a single day. It felt and looked like war. Our national security came under direct attack, and the resulting carnage was comparable to the worst of war—Pearl Harbor, firebombing of Dresden, Cambodia, and Normandy. President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have called the crashes “acts of war.” But having four commercial airliners commandeered by political fanatics is not war, it is international terrorism, albeit at its worst. No nation or peoples have declared war on the United States. In terms of intent and character, the political violence yesterday in Washington and New York bears more similarity to the terrorist bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City than to Pearl Harbor. Yesterday certainly was a day of infamy, but it was not—and should not be—the beginning of war.

America and all nations concerned about peace, justice, and dignity will need to respond. But the response should be deliberate, just, and humane. In the past, the U.S. has responded to terrorist attacks with military strikes that were misdirected, mistakenly targeted, and counterproductive. The 1986 bombing raids on two Libyan cities, the bombing of a Baghdad neighborhood in 1993 in response to rumors of a

planned assassination attempt on former President Bush, and most recently the air strike on a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant mistakenly believed to be chemical weapons factory associated with Osama bin Laden are three cases that should remind us of the folly—and terrorism—of vengeful retaliatory strikes.

Talk by our leaders of war and retribution, while possibly boosting our patriotic spirit, is dangerous and irresponsible. The politics of vengeance will do little to protect us, and will only fuel more terrorism. But neither can we passively accept our helplessness and vulnerability.

We need to mourn, bury our dead, and move on—but not to business and foreign policy as usual. What's needed now is a new U.S. resolve to address—and not simply react to—the causes of political violence in the post-cold war world. Our president's father promised at the onset of the Persian Gulf War to establish a “new world order” but it's a promise that has gone unfulfilled. Instead, over the past decade we have seen rising global disorder and conflict. Rather than gathering the world's nations together to address the scourges of international terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts, and the polarization of poor and wealthy nations, the U.S. has relinquished its leadership role. Arrogance, unilateralism, isolationism, and imperialism are the terms now commonly used by the international press and scholars to describe the U.S. role in global affairs.

The attack on America's centers of power was an extremist reaction to what is perceived as a new world order where only the U.S. calls the shots. But it was, first and foremost, a crime against all humanity. If there is to be justice in this incident and if there is to be the rule of law in international affairs, the U.S. should seek the solace and support of the international commu-

nity. Despite differences with U.S. foreign policy, especially in the conflicted Middle East, nations around the world have been quick to express their own outrage and willingness to join with America to fight and reduce the causes of international terrorism.

As Americans deliberate an effective response to this tragedy and crime, we must first reject the call for war. The gauntlet goading us to militaristic responses that treat human life as callously as the terrorists treated ours must be categorically rejected. As with any other crime, the perpetrators and their accomplices must be brought to justice—in the courts of law, not according to the fundamentalist “eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth” precepts. In recent years, we have made encouraging progress in establishing and enforcing international norms for human rights and crimes against humanity. This is an opportunity to forge a broader international coalition—bringing disparate nations together in a common determination to fight against such crimes against humanity. A first principle, then, must be that we treat this as an international crime, not an act

of war, and that the rules of law should guide international response.

A second principle that should guide U.S. policy is that our investigation, pursuit, and prosecution should as much as possible count on consultation with and the cooperation of the world community of nations. Any government suspected of harboring or otherwise aiding these international terrorists should answer to concerted international pressure, not just American outrage. If indeed, military action is deemed necessary, it should carry the approval of the UN Security Council—otherwise the U.S. too will be violating the basic principles of international law.

While charting the appropriate response, the U.S. government must also begin the long-overdue task of formulating a security policy that truly protects Americans from new global threats. As critics have insisted, the Bush administration’s promise that a national missile defense system would protect us looks increasingly hollow. If terrorists want to attack us, they can do so from our own soil and with our own aircraft. Our politicians would dishonor the dead, however, if they focused the new security debate

solely on issues of intelligence reform and defense technology. More fundamentally, the U.S. needs to take a hard look at the policies and political structures that fan the flames of terrorism—to understand why such anger in the Middle East and elsewhere is directed at America. The task of forging a security policy not just on our response capability but also on addressing the new causal factors for war and terrorism is surely America’s greatest challenge—and our success will be the true measure of our character.

Terrorism is mainly the weapon of the politically weak, frustrated ideologues, and religious fanatics. The U.S. should *not* retaliate in kind—not allowing any compulsion for revenge or the affirmation of U.S. military might to divert America from its moral principles and global leadership responsibilities.

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Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

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