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Umbreit, Mark S. Response to Terrorism

Following the terrorist attacks of 11
 September 2001 against people and
 property in the United States, Umbreit
 reflects on the nature of those acts and
 our response to them.

Mark S. Umbreit

9/20/01

On Saturday, September 8th, I was in
 Manhattan, not too many blocks from the
 World Trade Center, at a meeting with a
 new family foundation committed to
 supporting more restorative and effective
 responses to hate crimes in America.
 Three days later, America became the
 victim of the single most deadly and
 massive hate crime (outside the context
 of an existing war) in the history of the
 world.

The sense of sadness and grief we are all
 experiencing is overwhelming.
 Collectively, we agonize over the loss of
 so many precious innocent lives, as well
 as the loss of innocence as a nation that
 has largely been immune to such large-
 scale terrorism. As an individual, I have
 experienced the events of the past week
 more as the loss of a brother or sister or
 parent or friend, than just a national
 tragedy. Having grieved over the death
 of family members and friends in the
 past, and the near death of my daughter
 and wife, the loss of so many innocent
 Americans to such a brutal act of
 terrorism feels very personal.

For most of us, we can't understand how such hate can be
 directed toward our country. Yet,
 contrary to our own perception, many in
 the world look upon America as a land
 characterized by arrogance,
 commercialism, and greed. We must use
 this time of national tragedy to reflect
 upon our nation's priorities,
 policies, and their likely impact upon
 others in the world community,
 particularly upon the most vulnerable
 among us.

The people responsible for the terrorist
 acts of September 11 must be held
 accountable. The thirst for revenge

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What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is a theory of justice
 that emphasizes repairing the harm
 caused or revealed by criminal
 behaviour. It is best accomplished
 through cooperative processes that
 include all stakeholders. [More](#)

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accountable. The thirst for revenge among so many is understandable. Yet, we must act with caution and great calculation of options and unintended negative consequences. If our nation responds with massive military force against terrorists that ends up also killing hundreds or thousands of innocent civilians who are already poor and oppressed, we are likely to fuel the fires of hatred toward America. If we are willing to destroy or even eliminate hostile states that support terrorism, we are flirting with a third world war that pits the west against Islam. In either case, Osama bin Laden wins. We must not let the unintended consequences of our national response play into the hand of this dangerous and highly skilled international terrorist.

How should we respond? I don't pretend to be an expert on international policy and responses to terrorism. However, as an American citizen and as an advocate for restorative justice, accountability, healing, and peacemaking, several practical thoughts are offered.

First, we should use a highly targeted military approach to holding accountable individuals responsible for the attacks on September 11, avoiding large scale and likely ineffective military campaigns with huge civilian casualties. Our highly targeted military response should be focused upon capture of these individual terrorists and bringing them to justice under the rule of law.

Second, it has long been known that airport security in America is far too loose and ineffective. What should we expect when security staff are paid about the same as those fixing hamburgers at fast food chains? It is now time to demand that airport and flight security become a responsibility of the federal government through use of highly trained law enforcement personnel.

Third, we must actively adopt policies to protect the American public against future terrorism. The greatest threat to our nation is not from missiles directed to our cities and towns from identifiable hostile countries. Rather, our greatest threat is from further acts of massive terrorism by highly committed and trained suicide bombers whose hatred has been nurtured by decades and often generations of oppression and threat to their culture. We can't control the actions of terrorists. We can control our preparation for defense of our people. A national policy to begin development and distribution of vaccinations to known types of biological warfare should begin immediately. A single effective terrorist release of certain highly toxic substances could lead to far more loss of human life than the recent terrorist attacks. We should also develop plans for protection against chemical warfare. We can protect

ourselves against much of this, but we must act immediately.

Fourth, in the wake of the horrible national tragedy of September 11, we now have the opportunity to use this suffering as a catalyst to strengthening our diverse communities through greater understanding of each other, more tolerance of our differences and more celebration of our common yearning for freedom, dignity, acceptance, meaning, and ultimately, love, compassion, and service to one another. Specifically, we should actively engage in dialogue with our fellow Muslim citizens, and those of other cultures, to learn more about the strength and beauty to be found within all of our traditions.

Dr. Umbreit is a Professor and the Director of the Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work.

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