

OPINIONS

More than two choices

Editor, *The Beacon*:

We are moving beyond shock and into a period of forceful action in response to the horrible terrorism of Sept. 11 and subsequent acts of bioterrorism. Most Americans feel an urgency to do the right thing.

How can we make sure we will hit the right target? Getting clear on who the enemy is, how to understand them, and what to do with them will be crucially important.

In our urgency, here are some points to consider to help keep us on track.

Were the suicide missions "reckless"? Webster's defines the word as "lacking in caution, deliberately courting danger, irresponsible." In my last essay published in *The Beacon*, I used the word in reference to the recklessness of individual hijackers — what kind of person would think like this and act with such self-destructiveness? Surely their systematic organization did not show their recklessness, but the key point in understanding them is that they held fanatical convictions that made their individual actions absolutely reckless with regard to their own lives.

Are there any parallels with the U.S. involvement in Vietnam? Of course not completely, because history does not repeat itself and every situation is distinctive. But it is important to remember that most of the doubts about our reasons for entering the war only surfaced years after our massive involvement began. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed with near-unanimous votes in Congress in 1964, just as the votes for action against terrorism did last month. We cannot imagine anything but unity against terrorism now, but broad support can wither quickly.

Are there any alternatives to massive military responses? I suggested a world court, and perhaps there are still better ideas out there. While a court scene does not seem potent in itself to curb terrorism, I also advised enlisting the massive power of media and popular culture, such as the world attention that goes into the Olympics.

A court surrounded by embarrassing publicity about the enormity of suffering would stun potential supporters of such acts of terror.

Is this a campaign for the hearts and minds of world citizens? No matter what we do, there will be a dimension of this. If we increase the cost of terrorism through massive military action, we run

the risk of allowing the terrorists to portray us as terrorists. Sadly, many people around the world already have reason to believe this of our foreign and military policies. Why add to this?

In addition, how much destruction would be needed to make it prohibitive to engage in still more terrorist acts? With individuals reckless about their own lives and safety, I wager that destruction of their fellows and their landscape will not reduce their fanatical imaginations, but whip it up to feverish pitches.

We keep hearing that there are only two choices: side with terrorists or with a policy of military retaliation. Is our imagination limited to that stark contrast? If we keep talking war and making war, that will encourage terrorist responses. But if we treat this as a campaign of intelligence operations to identify and arrest the leaders, of activities to reduce our military footprint and foster good will, and of publicity to discredit terrorist actions in embarrassing and lurid detail, we have a better chance of stopping the support of terrorism before it is fanned into murderous passion.

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