

September 11--Love Your Enemy Day

Ian Harris

September 11, 2011 will mark the tenth anniversary of a terrible tragedy, when almost 3,000 Americans were killed by coordinated attacks by 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists. Within a month the Bush administration declared war on Afghanistan, "Operation Enduring Freedom," even though the terrorists involved in the attack did not come from Afghanistan. Seventeen months later the Bush administration invaded Iraq, supposedly to remove the threat of weapons of mass destruction from that country. Ten years later the American people, while commemorating the tragedy wrought by the terrorists, would do well to examine the morality and utility of such militaristic responses to crises.

The 10-year war in Afghanistan has cost us 2,592 US/Coalition lives lost (and rising weekly, often daily), more than \$439 billion, and we've killed more than 8,000 Afghan civilians--two and one half times the number killed in the initial attacks in this country. The war in Iraq, based on lies, has cost 4,791 US/Coalition lives lost (and still sadly counting) and more than \$789 billion. Estimates are that more than 800,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed in that war. In these combined wars 6,026 American troops have lost their lives (and rising). Tens of thousands of veterans are dealing with multiple amputations and traumatic brain injury. A military commander in Iraq has been quoted as saying, "We are making terrorists faster than we can kill them." Terrorism cannot be condoned but we don't have to out-terrorize the terrorists to make our country safe. There are alternatives:

Love Your Enemy: A Campaign to Reclaim Human Dignity Through Nonviolence is an initiative launched by the [Metta Center for Nonviolence in Berkeley](#), CA to break the cycle of humiliation and hatred that the United States has launched as a result of the terrorist attacks on America ten years ago. While many Americans celebrated the killing of Osama Bin Laden earlier this year, proponents of nonviolence regret the barbarism demonstrated by this slaughter.

Osama Bin Laden waged a horrific act against the United States, but that doesn't mean we have to launch an equally horrific act against him—or anyone in any country where he might have been. A more just response would have been to bring him to trial in the International Criminal Court, an initiative adopted by more than 100 nations designed to set up a legal framework for trying acts of terrorism. A court trial would have displayed the injustice of his actions and provided a public forum to judge the horrors of terrorism. A judicial trial could have allowed us to move forward in a healing process. Instead we reverted to the law of the jungle--an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. (As Gandhi pointed out, such behavior leaves us all toothless and blind.) A 10-year war against the Afghan people with thousands of more deaths was and is entirely unnecessary, as was the war on Iraq fought on false premises.

By dedicating ourselves to nonviolence on this anniversary, we will be honoring our Christian roots, where Jesus asked us to love our enemies, and our Old Testament roots, the commandment that says THOU SHALL NOT KILL. Yes, we should be angry about the attacks on September 11, 2001, but we have a choice about what to do with our anger. People attacked the United States because of years of oppression of Muslims by the West (supporting authoritarian regimes throughout the Islamic world, overthrowing an elected government in Iran, and usurping Palestinian people's lands, etc.).

We have responded to the acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001 by bombing wedding parties in Afghanistan, using drones to kill innocent people in Pakistan, attacking Libya, and waging war in Iraq. This is not the way to stop terrorism. This is the way to enflame and create more terrorists. Our strategies create hatred, resentment, and more enemies. We should use this tenth anniversary to rethink our policies and chart a course that respects Muslim values.

A campaign to reclaim human dignity through nonviolence would urge all of us to rethink our notions of security. Instead of national security based upon military might, we should think of human security that would direct our government to implement policies that provide family supporting wages, decent housing, free health care, and accessible education to citizens. We should reconcile with our enemies because the hatred that we carry towards them poisons our relationships and helps us justify their destruction. The U.S. government relies too strongly on a peace through strength approach to resolving conflicts--e.g. brand your opponent as an enemy and wipe him or her out, a theme reiterated through popular and sports culture.

Other responses to conflict are peacemaking, which seeks to reconcile with enemies, and peace-building, which attempts to root out the sources of conflict. We can use international organizations like the United Nations, the World Court, and the International Criminal court to resolve our differences with other nations and rogue terrorists. We can support unarmed democratic movements that seek to reform authoritarian governments. Think of how popular the Peace Corps is! Using that model the U.S. can address needs throughout the world. Adhering to the democratic principles upon which this country was founded depends upon a moral response to crisis, not a bloodbath. May morality, not the biggest bully or toughest guy, win.

Ian Harris can be reached at imh@uwm.edu