

FLC 301/Fall 2001

Instructor: H. Kurthen

**Minutes of 9/12/2001
on the suicide attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon
by
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The class discussion centered on the question if the attack was an unexplainable act of mindless destruction or if knowledge about "globalization" processes can help us to find answers. The following Q&A list is a breakdown of most common responses to a questionnaire provided by Professor Kurthen.

Question: Who was possibly responsible for the 9/11 assault on the World Trade towers and the Pentagon?

Answer: The most common class response was that Osama BinLaden was suspected to be responsible plus any number of known terrorist groups. Other answers: Islamic fundamentalists, U.S. citizens, airport security

Question: What were the possible political objectives of the assaults and what part/group of the U.S. system was targeted?

Answer: (a) Objectives: to send a message to the U.S. people & government, to shake the foundations of the U.S. society, to prove that the U.S. is not invincible, to create economic disruption, to make the U.S. "oppressors" feel how other people outside the U.S. (3rd world) feel U.S. sponsored "terror," to get attention for pressing issues (e.g., Israel-Palestine), to attack a "value" system that is seen as wrong

(b) Targets: WTC towers = symbol of global financial capitalist system, Pentagon = symbol of global superpower/policeman

Question: What was (a) the possible starter of the assault and (b) what are the root causes of "terrorism" today?

Answer: It is difficult to distinguish starter and causes. Mentioned as causes was the Israeli occupation of Palestine, global capitalism and its detrimental effects on peoples and nations abroad, absolute hatred of anything Western as a result of ignorance/illiteracy/lack of education, inability of powerless individuals/groups/nations to redress their grievances through meaningful alternative actions, lack of dialogue/communication between U.S. and other nations and peoples (Example: recent U.N. Durban/South Africa conference on racism abstained by the U.S.).

Question: What is terrorism? (Examples: state terrorism versus terrorism of non-state actors)

Answer: State Terrorism is a politically motivated violent act that does not follow rules of engagement sponsored by a state against another state, its institutions and/or citizens. War is a specific form of interstate violence which follows "legitimate" rules of violent engagement (Geneva Convention, prisoners of war, soldiers are distinct from civilians, etc). It starts and ends with a formal

declaration respectively surrender of a state (Example: Gulf war 1991). Terrorist acts of non-state actors do not follow "legitimate" rules of engagement or declarations. Terrorists do not wear uniforms and badges but try to hide among civilians. They may or may not target deliberately civilians, depending on their objectives. Political terrorists are often treated and tried like criminals or simply hunted down and tortured/killed without trial.

Question: Did the media so far do a good job on reporting the event? What did you like or dislike?

Answer: Students liked real time information, media helped to coordinate help/support, showed solidarity/bonding among New Yorkers, variety of opinions offered by knowledgeable experts. Dislike: Reporting rumors, sensationalism, traumatic repetition of scary events, lack of integrity and context of reporting, tendency to generalize/exaggerate, creation of emotional mass hysteria/fears, brain washing through uninformative slogans, Hollywoodization, melting of reality with virtual reality, desensitization of public

Question: Was "America" on attack?

Answer: Everyone agreed. Targets mentioned were New York City and Washington, DC, the U.S. government and military brass (Pentagon), American capitalism, the American way of life (values, politics, business)

Question: How should the U.S. Government react to the assault. What action do you prefer and which do you fear?

Answer: Most students want those responsible for the attack (and who possibly survived and helped the suicide attackers) to be caught and punished by the U.S. government. Others also mentioned that the government should remain calm and worry/grief with the families of victims plus intensify security measures to prevent a repetition of similar attacks. Some students feared that innocent Muslims or people of Middle Eastern origin will be used as scapegoats to deflect from government security failures. Most students are afraid of a spiral of retaliation because "an eye for an eye leads to a world of blinded people."

Question: How should the U.S. population respond?

Answer: The class agreed that the population needs to remain composed, strong, and help each other out by, for example, donating blood, money etc. Nobody supports vigilante reactions. Also the people should trust their government but at the same time keep an eye on them as well. We should not become a victim of manipulation by whoever it may be (terrorists, media, opportunistic politicians).

Question: What is the likely fall out of this event? How likely is a crackdown on civil liberties and violent revenge on domestic and international suspects of the attack?

Answer: Most felt emotional damage had be done and that an international conflict ("war on terrorism") was imminent. Most students also expected a crackdown

on civil liberties. This raised the question whether we should be leery of our own government and the motivations of lawmakers and politicians to use the event for partisan purposes. On the sidelines an argument began about whether the hijackers were "sane" (rationally planning the attack) or mentally "insane" because they took their own lives as well as those in the building. A comparison was made with soldiers who volunteer although they are aware there may be a high risk of being killed.

Question: Is Bush's plan to develop a 120 billion dollar missile defense system a protection against further terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland? What are the alternatives?

Answer: The class was fairly split about this question. Some felt that the missile defense would help deter further threats, while others thought the attack shows that future threats are not coming from missiles. Instead the U.S. should invest the money in intelligence, airport security, etc. The idea of removing the root causes of the terrorism was also brought up, such as changes in U.S. foreign policy (Israel/Palestine), curbing arms exports, support for the U.N., foreign aid, etc.

Question: What does this event have to do with globalization?

Answer: Some students expect pessimistically that with U.S.-led continuation of globalization processes (Western capitalism, cultural penetration and political-military dominance) terrorist acts will necessarily increase because some countries/people/religions/groups perceive U.S.-led globalization as an encroachment on their cultures/values/way of living creating resentment and resistance (see Jihad vs. McWorld).

Question: What would you like to discuss in the FLC regarding this event.

Answer: Students would like to discuss the root causes of terrorism and the global repercussions of terrorism if it continues. Also, students would like to know why the U.S. is hated so much abroad? Why is it seen as such a threat to other peoples and cultures? What kind of protection is possible and necessary (missile defense, more intelligence...)? What solutions exist?