

After terrorist attack, Americans face the question 'What next?'

Terrorists are among the most difficult enemies to fight. They often do not represent governments, but are smaller groups that have vowed to use violence to achieve their goals.

And it is often impossible to see them coming.

The United States has been grimly thinking what to do about that, ever since terrorists stunned the nation this week by crashing passenger jets into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon military headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Explosions after the crashes in New York caused the two towers of the 110-story World Trade Center to collapse into a smoky pile of rubble on the streets below. The Pentagon burst into flames as walls tumbled and military leaders were rushed away.

Thousands of people were killed or wounded, making the carefully planned attacks more damaging than the World War II assault on Pearl Harbor that killed more than 2,400 people.

President Bush vowed to do all possible to bring those responsible for the attack to justice.

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning and I assure you freedom will be defended," Bush said. "Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and pursue those responsible for these cowardly actions."

Hard to fight

Immediately after the attacks, U.S. military forces were put on high alert and the CIA, FBI and local police launched a massive investigation.

But U.S. military and government forces have struggled for years to find an effective way to protect Americans from this deadly form of violence.

As its name suggests, terrorism uses violence to cause terror to scare people enough to make them do what the terrorists want, or simply to make a political point.

Terrorists do not just target soldiers and military sites. They often kill private citizens, including children.

A favorite approach of terrorists is setting off bombs in places run by their enemies, or public places crowded with people.

Such bombings have prevented a peace settlement for years in Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics have used terrorism in their fight for control.

Such a bombing by U.S. citizens angry with the government killed 168 people at the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1995.

And last fall the warship USS Cole was attacked in the Middle East, leaving 17 American sailors dead and 39 wounded.

Enemies of U.S.

Terrorist attacks often target the United States because it is the world's only superpower and has influence in many countries.

U.S. support for Israel has made it a target of terrorists in the Mideast who want the U.S. to stay out of the region's affairs.

In February 1993 Islamic terrorists set off bombs at the World Trade Center, killing six people and wounding more than 1,000 others.

In 1983, a truck bomber in Lebanon killed 241 Marines in their barracks in Beirut.

With the latest attacks, however, some leaders are cautioning against jumping to conclusions before facts are in from the investigations. Assuming that terrorists are from some region or ethnic group can lead to false conclusions and unjustified violence or anger, they warn.

In Oklahoma City, for example, leaders at first believed Mideast terrorists had attacked the city's federal building, when the attackers turned out to be Americans.

Still, with targets destroyed on U.S. soil, President Bush and military leaders are making one thing clear: They will go all out to fight terrorists.

It is a huge and difficult task, with no guarantees of success. But U.S. officials feel they have no choice.

To let up on terrorism even a little, they feel, would be to give a victory to terrorists.

This student news feature is part of the "Newspaper Plus" weekly series created by Hollister Kids. "Newspaper Plus" was a finalist for Best Youth Column in the national EdPress excellence competition in 2001.

Think About the News...

1. Terrorism is a problem that could affect all countries. But as the world's only superpower, the United States is expected to take the lead in solving the problem. As a class, brainstorm ways the U.S. could limit terrorism, either alone or working together with other countries.
2. The terrorist attack on sites in the United States has brought calls for more security and safety measures. Search the paper today and find stories discussing ways security might be increased for Americans, their institutions and the government. Make a master list of suggestions. Write a short paragraph describing one proposal. Compare the pluses and minuses of this idea.
3. When violence occurs, people want to reach out to the families of victims. As a class, discuss ways people could help these families. Then write a letter to the editor urging other people to help as well. Make sure your letter is in the correct form for a business letter.
4. Military actions by the U.S. or other nations often are in the news. Find a story involving military forces in today's paper. Write a sentence stating what the forces are doing that is making news. Then write a prediction of what you think will happen next. Check the paper over the next few days to see if you were right.
5. The terrorist attacks in the United States will have effects around the world. Look through the newspaper and make a list of all the foreign countries mentioned in the news today. Note how many times each country is the subject of a story. As a class, make a bar graph to chart which foreign countries were mentioned most. Then write a paragraph explaining why your newspaper might pay more attention to some countries than to others.
6. This week's terrorist attacks stunned Americans because they brought terrorism to a "safe" place in our own country. In the past, leaders have suggested tough steps to prevent future terrorism, including spying on groups that might try it. As a class, discuss ways to fight terrorism in the United States. What rights would you be willing to give up for the effort? What rights are too important to give up?