

Commemorating 9/11

Posted: 09/02/2013 12:37 a

As we should, our nation will pause for the twelfth time next week to honor the victims of the 9/11 attacks and reflect on the heroism and dedication of those who have sacrificed their lives to save the innocent and fight the battles resulting from these attacks.

But a quick glimpse at any newspaper or television news show these days will show that we are still reckoning with the forces that led to 9/11 and struggling to develop a just and effective set of policies to prevent such atrocities in the future. Syria, Egypt, NSA surveillance, Guantanamo, intelligence on WMDs, government secrecy, drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, the USA Patriot Act - the list goes on. History would have proceeded had 9/11 not occurred, but surely, history has been altered by 9/11 and many of today's controversies were either directly caused by or have a direct linkage to ideas that motivated 9/11 and the government actions unleashed in response to the attacks.

It would be nice if we could say with confidence that twelve years after 9/11 we fully understand the political, historical and religious ideas that motivated 19 men to board planes to commit mass murder; that we have an effective means to confront these ideas and halt their proliferation; and that the policies we have developed to stop subsequent attacks have widespread support around the world due to their unquestioned morality and efficacy. But we cannot. Some polls suggest that almost half of all Americans do not believe that al Qai'da executed the 9/11 attacks. If there is such public confusion over this fundamental - and unquestionably proven - fact, how much more misunderstanding must there be about what al Qai'da stands for, why it continues to confront us around the globe, and how so many of today's conflicts continue to revolve around the very issues that motivated al Qai'da to attack us in the first place.

I invite all of you to commemorate 9/11 in a different way this year. Join me in a free, on-line course, available to anyone around the world with an Internet connection, to study "9/11 & Its Aftermath." The course contains video lectures, readings, interviews with experts, and, most importantly, an extensive discussion forum where we will have a global dialogue about this deeply challenging and incredibly important topic.

The course begins with taped lectures from the site where the World Trade Center towers once stood to review what happened on that horrific day 12 years ago. We then focus on increasing our understanding of the al Qai'da ideology and the phenomenon of radicalization. We look at why our counterterrorism efforts prior to 9/11 were inadequate for preventing the attacks that day, and attempt to comprehend the tremendous challenges that were facing America and the rest of the world in the immediate aftermath of the attacks.

In 2014, the second part of this course will cover how the United States and other countries around the world responded to 9/11, to include discussions about the use of force in Afghanistan and Iraq, drone strikes, intelligence collection and its impact on civil liberties and privacy, profiling, border security, and a variety of other counterterrorism policies.

I don't pretend to have all the answers to these issues. Indeed, my job as instructor is to ask the hard questions and encourage you to deepen your understanding of these topics so you can engage in the public debate in a more informed and more persuasive manner.

You can take this course to gain a certificate of completion (if you take the quizzes and write the short papers). Or you can come on-line to just to watch some lectures, read the course materials, and discuss the issues on-line with your fellows students from around the world (forget the quizzes!).

About 10,000 students are signed up already. You can easily sign up too, free of charge, by going to: <https://www.coursera.org/course/911aftermath>.

The course starts on September 9 courtesy of Duke University and Coursera. Come join us and I'll see you on-line.