

Americans must become more defensive about terrorism

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If America is to survive terrorism, Americans need to change their culture and attitude toward self-defense.

The truth is that Americans have been taught for decades that any violence is a crime, even if it is for self-defense. In some instances, it has led to greater loss of life in situations where there is one gunman against a crowd of many.

We have been taught that we should run away from danger. We have been taught that we can only use violence as a last resort, and even then we may find ourselves in trouble with the law if we can't prove that letting an assailant get away wasn't an option. And even though concealed carry is the law in most states now, buying pre-paid legal insurance is being encouraged because those who have used their firearms in self-defense are being sued by their assailants or are being prosecuted.

Culturally and legally, we need to change this. When a lone gunman enters a nightclub filled with several hundred patrons and starts shooting, loss of life would have been greatly diminished had enough people known how to neutralize the threat. He could have been subdued before he could kill so many people.

Yes, perhaps a few of the brave people who ran toward the danger might have been killed – but the total loss of life would have been just a few people instead of 49.

In World War II, our armed forces were filled with young men who selflessly volunteered to fight for our country, some of them even lying about their real age in order to enlist early. They were accurately called the “Greatest Generation,” because they were willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of their country.

But now Americans – including Christians in America – don't all exhibit this kind of willingness for self-sacrifice. That also has to change.

Last week, I wrote that churches needed to prepare themselves for attacks similar to the one in Orlando. Churches, especially very large churches, are a target of opportunity for a number of reasons.

First, churches have large attendances of hundreds, even thousands of people, giving a terrorist the ability to kill more people at one time.

Second, Muslims are being taught to hate Christians, making churches an attractive target.

Third, little resistance to an attack would be expected at a church, because they know that Christians are peaceful.

Finally, our buildings and sites are not designed to help us defend against attacks.

The last thing we want in our churches is for them to resemble a TSA security check, but we want our attendees to feel secure, and we want those who might attack us to know that we are not an easy target. This means that security must be obvious to a terrorist but not intimidating to a churchgoer.

We know that most attacks that have taken place in crowded places were gun-free zones. I have resisted the idea that we should carry guns in churches for a very long time, but the truth is, that decision is being made for us. It is just a question of how – do we designate a security force, do we encourage concealed carry, or do we hire outside security?

Churches should seek out and get training in how to defend against a gunman. There is no excuse for allowing a gunman to kill without meeting resistance.

For example, in 2007, a lone gunman (not a Muslim in this instance) entered the New Life Church in Colorado Springs and began firing, killing two bystanders. An off-duty police officer, Jeanne Assam, immediately pulled out her weapon and walked toward the assailant firing it, killing him. Had she not done so, there would likely have been many more people killed.

Other techniques I have seen essentially train large groups of people to pile on the assailant until he is disarmed. Whatever the method, even though some loss of life will occur, it should include disarming the assailant as quickly as possible.

Since most church facilities are existing, making them safer in terms of planning and construction techniques is going to be difficult if not impossible. New construction will be a little easier to design for security, but in either case, it will likely be very expensive. More exits, hardened construction, and design to make security accessible but not intimidating to churchgoers are just a few considerations.

Unfortunately, we live in a time where we have to accept the fact that terrorism is going to affect how we live and worship. The sooner we go on the defensive, the fewer lives that will be lost.



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