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HEADLINE: EXERCISE CAUTION, EXPERTS SAY ;
Desire for revenge could cause even more problems

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BODY:

Attacks on New York and Washington have stirred talk of retaliation, but those who study terrorism caution against a quick-hit military response.

They instead encourage people to beware of conspiracy theories and suggest President Bush and his advisers heed the lessons of history -- and even remember how nations once dealt with pirates.

Police work and prudence are what's needed before the United States can formulate its response to last week's deadly attacks, said John Mueller, professor of political science at Ohio State University.

"There's an intense frustration and strong desire to lash out. But what you've got to remember is that the main perpetrators are dead," Mueller said.

The attacks should be handled as a crime, not war, he said. "There's a natural tendency to believe that because this is a big event, it's caused by big forces, when it's really somebody who just got lucky with two potshots."

He pointed to conspiracy theorists who linked John F. Kennedy's assassination to the CIA and the Mafia as an example of linking unrelated events.

Military historian Richard H. Kohn said the U.S. armed forces might not be the answer to the attacks.

"The military is a very blunt instrument and is really best-suited for killing people, destroying things or capturing land," said Kohn, who teaches at the University of North Carolina.

"It's not altogether clear that this is the best instrument to deal with this kind of thing and, more importantly, to remove the terrorists' ability to repeat this kind of thing."

Further, it could make things worse.

"If we overreact, we're likely to generate a whole new group of opponents, which is exactly what these groups would like us to do," Kohn said.

But the United States has other options, said Mary Ellen O'Connell, professor of international law at Ohio State. It could exercise universal jurisdiction, which allows a country to take countermeasures, such as secret infiltration.

Universal jurisdiction is a tenet of international law, an informal but widely agreed upon set of principles hundreds of years old. It was used in the Nuremberg trials, which produced more than a dozen convictions of Nazi war criminals in 1945-46, and more recently against ousted Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic.

A movement to create an official world court for criminals, known as the Rome Statute, has been ratified by 37 of the 60 countries necessary.

"The origins and rules of universal jurisdiction are very old. It was used against pirates and slave traders before. Today, it's used for crimes of genocide, racism of the apartheid kind and crimes against humanity -- like the widespread abuse of people in Yugoslavia, and the kind of crime we had on Tuesday," O'Connell said.

If war is declared, it's not likely to occur quickly, scholars predicted. The United States first must establish a link between the terrorists and a country or countries and carefully plot a strategy from there.

The United States has declared war only five times -- the War of 1812, the Mexican War of 1846-48, the Spanish-American War of 1898 and World Wars I and II.

A war declaration requires Congressional approval -- which is more than just a symbolic gesture, said Donald Robinson, professor of government at Smith College.

Korea and Vietnam were two wars seen as failures that lacked formal Congressional approval, he said.

"What we have learned is that if we are not going to have a declaration of war, we do need careful Congressional deliberation and consideration of the evidence and proposed strategy," Robinson said.

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GRAPHIC: Photo, Gary Tramontina / Associated Press,, Terrorism experts are warning of the need for a carefully measured response, rather than an angry reaction to the hijacking of four airliners. Any, revenge-minded actions could create myriad problems, they say.