

The Norwegian response

From the Editors in the [August 23, 2011](#) issue



Attribution [Some rights reserved](#) by [L.C.Nøttaasen](#)

Norway prides itself on being peace-loving, free and open. It maintained its neutrality during both world wars (although many Norwegians resisted when the Nazis occupied their country). Though it belongs to NATO, it refused to host nuclear weapons during the cold war. Known for awarding the annual Nobel Peace Prize, Norway brokered the Oslo Accords in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinians and has worked to mediate other conflicts around the world.

So it was a huge shock to normally tranquil Norway when anti-Muslim, anti-Marxist extremist Anders Breivik, claiming that he was acting to ward off "Muslim domination," set off explosives in downtown Oslo and went on a shooting rampage at a political camp for youth, killing 77 in all. This was the Norwegians' 9/11 moment, said some, and the country would never be the same again.

Yet Norway's leaders have urged caution in responding to the massacre, and its people have shown calm and solidarity in their expressions of grief. At a memorial service for the victims, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said, "My greatest thanks goes to the Norwegian people, who appeared responsible when needed, who kept

their dignity, who chose democracy." He reaffirmed the need for "dialogue and tolerance" in the land, and he expressed the hope that when political work resumed, leaders would "behave with the same wisdom and respect as the Norwegian people" had shown.

Mindful of the American response to 9/11, Norwegians apparently want to avoid overreacting and seeing themselves only as victims. They don't want to adopt a bunker mentality. "We do not want barbed wire, roadblocks and weapons as part of everyday life in Norway," said Norway's police chief. Before the bombing, the only public building in Oslo that was secured against terrorist attacks was the U.S. embassy.

After 9/11, the United States embarked on two wars that proved to be ill-considered and financially ruinous. It countenanced torture and secret rendition of prisoners. It allowed the degradation of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The crimes of 9/11 were, in significant ways, different from the crimes committed by Anders Breivik. For one, the U.S. was attacked not by a lone extremist but by a militant group that made clear its wish to destroy America. Yet as we Americans mark the ten-year anniversary of 9/11 and look back on the nation's response to that horrific crime, many of us will admire Norway's calm and considered approach and its effort to respond in a way consistent with its deepest values and hopes.