

## **Motivated and Displaced Revenge: Remembering 9/11 Suppresses Opposition to Military Intervention in Syria (for Some)**

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*We conducted an experimental test of the displaced international punishment hypothesis by testing whether reminding people about 9/11 would increase support for U.S. military intervention in Syria. A community sample of Americans were reminded of 9/11, the terrorist attacks in London in 2005, or were given no reminder before being asked their support for military intervention in Syria. Results indicated that there was a significant suppression effect of desired revenge for the 9/11 attacks on support for military intervention for liberals and moderates, but not conservatives. Liberal and moderate participants reminded of 9/11 supported military intervention because reminders of 9/11 primed strong desires for vengeance. These findings suggest that reminding people of a severe offense to their country triggers a desire for revenge, which increases the desire to punish a target symbolically similar to the original perpetrator, but only when doing so is politically expedient.*

On February 15, 2003 the single largest organized public demonstration in recorded history took place. Tens of millions of people in over 600 cities across 60 countries joined together to protest the invasion of Iraq (Tyler, 2003; Verhulst, 2010). Although opposition to the war was strongest in Europe, antiwar sentiment was also quite pervasive in the United States. In over 100 cities across the country, Americans engaged in demonstrations to protest a possible war that was viewed as unwarranted, unjustified, and unnecessary (Murphy, 2003; Tyler, 2003).

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Americans had many concerns about the consequences of the U.S. engaging in another Middle Eastern conflict. In the months leading up to the war, polls indicated that most Americans: (1) did not want to see thousands of military lives put at risk (Pew Research Center, 2003b; Washington Post-ABC, 2002), (2) were opposed to invading Iraq because of the lack of support from many American allies (Pew Research Center, 2003a; Tagliabue, 2003), and (3) were not convinced that Saddam Hussein was harboring weapons of mass destruction (Pew Research Center, 2003b). Despite these reservations, when the Iraq War started in March 2003, three-quarters of Americans supported the invasion (Newport, Moore, & Jones, 2003). In this article, we discuss how displaced aggression for 9/11 may have contributed to the surprising level of support for the Iraq War, despite so many signals that the U.S. public had serious doubts about doing so. We also present new research showcasing how the effects of displaced aggression for 9/11 are still alive and well today.

### **The 9/11 Effect**

Why was support for the Iraq War so high when it began in March 2003? One possible explanation was that President Bush successfully persuaded the American public that Saddam Hussein was somehow implicated in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (e.g., Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005). An investigation by a committee in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004 identified “237 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice. These statements were made in 125 appearances, consisting of 40 speeches, 26 press conferences and briefings, 53 interviews, 4 written statements, and 2 congressional testimonies.” The committee identified that at least 61 separate statements brought up 9/11 or al-Qaeda when arguing the United States should go to war with Iraq (U.S. House of Representatives, 2004).

Americans who did connect Saddam Hussein with 9/11 or al-Qaeda were more likely to support military intervention in Iraq (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005; Kull, Ramsay, Subias, Lewis, & Warf, 2003). That said, the percentage of Americans who conclusively believed that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in the 9/11 attacks was only around 30%, nowhere near a majority opinion (Kull et al., 2003). Perceiving a link between 9/11 and Iraq, therefore, provides only a partial explanation for why Americans overwhelmingly supported the Iraq War, despite their very realistic qualms in March 2003.

The frequent reminders of 9/11 in the period leading to the 2003 Iraq War could nonetheless have had an effect on support for the war through other pathways other than directly persuading people that Iraq was implicated in these attacks. Simply reminding the American public of the events of 9/11, for example, may have been enough to reawaken Americans' desires for vengeance. Support for this

explanation comes from research on displaced aggression (Pedersen, Gonzales, & Miller, 2000). When people cannot directly punish offenders they will often turn to the next best thing and lash out at people who are similar to the original offenders in some way (e.g., ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.), in other words, displacing their aggression (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005; Denson, Pedersen, & Miller, 2006; Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, & Polluck, 2003; Pedersen, Gonzales, & Miller, 2000; Vasquez, Denson, Pedersen, Stenstrom, & Miller, 2005). Iraq was a convenient target that was symbolically similar to Afghanistan, al-Qaeda, and Osama bin Laden. It is, therefore, possible that Americans were able to displace their anger, aggression, and desires for revenge from the 9/11 attacks onto Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

Consistent with the displaced aggression hypothesis, displaced aggression effects are especially strong after people are first exposed to unpunished offenders, and for perpetrators who on the surface seem to “get away with it” (Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999; Liberman & Skitka, 2008). The initial public desire to get back at those responsible for the 9/11 attacks was thwarted because the actual terrorists were killed in the attacks and the mastermind, Osama bin Laden, went into hiding. Reminders of 9/11 in the context of a salient opportunity to go to war with targets symbolically similar to the 9/11 attackers may, therefore, have revitalized people’s desire for vengeance, which were displaced on a similar yet nonresponsible target: Iraq.

### **The Staying Power of Desires for Vengeance**

The Iraq War started a year and a half after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, when the attacks were bound to be much fresher wounds on the American psyche. Is it possible for a 9/11 reminder to still affect people’s desires for vengeance over a much longer period of time, such as more than 10 years later? Some research suggests that the answer may be yes. For example, desires for revenge tend to have long-lasting effects. Remembering a serious, angering offense can renew a motivation to seek revenge for that wrongdoing several months after the offense (e.g., Liberman & Skitka, 2008). In addition, angry rumination, most likely an aspect of desire for vengeance, is a precursor to aggressive behavior and may even increase the propensity for revenge (see Denson, 2012 for a review). Consistent with this idea, people’s desires for vengeance for 9/11 measured in 2003 remained strong and predicted continued desires to hunt down terrorists, even more than 10 years later (Gollwitzer et al., 2014). Americans’ anger and desire for vengeance for 9/11, therefore, appears not only to be very strong, but to also be particularly enduring. The goal of this research was to experimentally test the hypothesis that there is a 9/11 effect on Americans’ support for military attacks in a current real world context, specifically, support for military intervention in the ongoing Syrian civil war.

## The Syrian Conflict

More than a year after the Tunisian uprising kicked off the Arab Spring, Syrians attempting to overthrow their authoritarian leader Bashar al-Assad have faced an increasingly violent crackdown from his regime. The U.N. estimated in June 2013 that more than 100,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict (Times of Oman, 2013). The conflict escalated in late August 2013, when approximately 1,400 civilians were killed by a chemical weapons attack in a suburb outside of Damascus (Lederer, 2013), attacks U.S. intelligence officials linked to the Syrian government (Warrick, 2013). The chemical attacks led to a fraught debate about whether the United States should respond with a targeted military intervention in Syria to dissuade the regime from using chemical weapons again.

The debate reached a fever pitch in September 2013 when U.S. President Barack Obama asked Congress to approve targeted military strikes in Syria—the same time period when we collected data for this study. A looming national debt crisis, tough economic times, and weariness from U.S. involvement in two exhausting war efforts have eroded Americans' appetite for military interventions to address problems in the world (Steinhauser, 2013), so it was not surprising that most Americans did not support military intervention in Syria (Steinhauser & Helton, 2013). It is possible, however, that reminding people of a serious transgression against the United States (i.e., the events of 9/11) could trigger displaced international aggression.

Displaced aggression/punishment at the interpersonal level is more likely when the target superficially resembles the original offender (Marcus-Newhall, Pedersen, Carlson, & Miller, 2000); similar effects might emerge in the context of intergroup aggression as well. The similarity of Syria to other Middle Eastern targets of post-9/11 aggression (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq) could increase the probability of displaced anger and punishment (Lieberman & Skitka, 2008; Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006). Additionally, the use of chemical weapons in Syria could have easily been enough of a provocation to complete the triggered displaced aggression cycle, which posits that displaced aggression is even stronger when the target of aggression provides a source of frustration or annoyance (Miller et al., 2003). Putting the events of 9/11 fresh into Americans' memory, and then exposing them to the provocation of real-world chemical weapons use, could be enough to see displaced aggression effects. The tense situation in September 2013, therefore, provided a unique opportunity to conservatively test the DIP hypothesis.

## The Effects of Political Orientation

Political orientation could moderate the relationship between desire for revenge and support for U.S. military intervention abroad. Conservatives,

particularly authoritarian conservatives, tend to be more supportive of war efforts than liberals or low authoritarians (Cohrs & Moschner, 2002; Doty, Winter, Peterson, & Kimmelmeier, 1997; Granberg & Corrigan, 1972; Izzett, 1971). Indeed, conservatives more strongly supported a military response to the 9/11 attacks than liberals (Henderson-King, Henderson-King, Bolea, Koches, & Kauffman, 2004). This conservative proclivity toward bellicosity could be the result of ideological differences in thresholds for negative emotion. Conservatives have been shown to be less tolerant of negative emotions, like anger, resulting in a greater desire to lash out in response to that anger (Skitka, Bauman, Aramovich, & Morgan, 2006; Tomkins, 1965; Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006). Given this possible dispositional inclination toward war support, conservatives who desire revenge for a nationally relevant offense may be more supportive of U.S. military intervention efforts than liberals.

Alternatively, people's support versus opposition to U.S. involvement in wars throughout recent history may be more situationally dependent than dispositionally determined. Consistent with this idea, Jones (2005) found that whether those on the right or left support a given military intervention varies a great deal, and other research indicates that public opinion tends to mirror that of political elites. For example, Zaller (1992) found that when liberal and conservative elites both supported the Vietnam War in 1964, people who attended to politics and current events showed similar nonpartisan support for the war. By 1970, however, political elites had become much more divided about the war (liberals became increasingly against it, whereas conservatives continued to support the war effort), a division that was widely disseminated in the popular press. A subsequent division of support for the war emerged among politically aware liberals and conservatives in the mass public. Similar patterns of results have been observed in public support for both World War II and the 2003 Iraq War (Berinsky, 2007). In other words, public opinion followed rather than shaped elite opinion. When war efforts are supported more by Republican than Democratic leaders, conservatives tend to follow suit. Conversely, when war efforts are supported more by Democratic than Republican leaders, a similar divide is observed in public opinion (Berinsky, 2007; Zaller, 1992). Although military involvement in Syria in 2013 was not a very popular idea, these results suggest that people on the political left should be more likely than those on the right to support military involvement in Syria, and/or to be susceptible to increased support for military intervention following a reminder of 9/11, because military intervention was being advocated by President Obama (a Democrat).

In summary, we hypothesized that reminding people of a serious and nationally relevant offense (the terrorist attacks of 9/11) would heighten subsequent support for the punishment of those responsible for using chemical weapons in Syria compared to those reminded of a nonnationally relevant offense, or those not reminded of any previous offense (*9/11 Hypothesis*). Moreover, desire for

revenge should mediate the effect of the offense reminder on subsequent punitiveness toward the Syrian offenders, but only for those who were reminded of 9/11 (*Displaced International Punishment (DIP) Hypothesis*).

Additionally, the effect of revenge for 9/11 on support for military intervention in Syria could be stronger for conservatives compared to liberals due to conservatives' dispositional proclivity toward war support (*Dispositional DIP Hypothesis*). However, because the U.S. military strike against Syria was being pursued by President Obama, it could be the case that only liberals who desire revenge for 9/11 would be willing to support military intervention (*Motivated DIP Hypothesis*).

## Method

### Participants

A total of 198 participants from the United States were recruited and paid \$.30 to participate in a web-based survey via Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. Ten participants were excluded due to failing at least two out of three instructional manipulation checks, leaving a final sample size of 188 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.04$ ,  $SD = 14.15$ ; 55.3% female; 84.6% European American, 6.4% Asian, 3.7% African American, 3.7% Latino/a, 0.5% Native American, remainder other or unknown).<sup>1</sup>

### Materials and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three (Priming type: none, international offense, domestic offense) conditions. The domestic offense priming manipulation described a terrorist attack against American citizens (9/11 terrorist attacks), the international offense prime control condition described a terrorist attack against British citizens (July 2005 London bombings), and the no-prime control condition had no reminder of a prior offense (see Appendix for complete stimulus materials). After assessing their desire for revenge for each of the prime conditions, participants then read about the recent events regarding the chemical weapons attack in Syria and possible U.S. military action (see Appendix). They then responded to items assessing their support/opposition for military intervention in Syria.

*Desire for revenge.* Desire for revenge for 9/11 was assessed using a measure commonly used in research on 9/11 (see Gollwitzer et al., 2014; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003; Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004). Participants were provided with the stem "When thinking about the terrorist attack on 9/11

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<sup>1</sup> Leaving these participants in the analyses did not change the pattern of results.

(in London in July, 2005) to what extent did you feel . . .” followed by the completions “a desire to fight back,” “a desire to hurt those responsible for the attacks,” “a compelling need for vengeance,” and “that the people who did this were evil to the core,” with response options that ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much* ( $\alpha = .88$ ).<sup>2</sup>

*Support/opposition.* Support or opposition to U.S. military intervention in Syria was assessed using two items asking participants, “If negotiations stall or a diplomatic agreement fails to be reached, do you support or oppose the U.S. using military force in Syria?” Participants responded by selecting whether they support, oppose, or were uncertain. Participants who indicated that they either supported or opposed military intervention branched to a question that assessed their degree of support/opposition by asking, “How strongly do you support (oppose) the U.S. using military force in Syria?” with response options ranging from 1 = *slightly* to 4 = *very much*. Those who responded that they were uncertain branched to an item that asked whether they leaned more toward support or opposition, or were still uncertain. Those who indicated leaning toward supporting or opposing military intervention were coded as 1 or  $-1$ , respectively, and those who again marked uncertain were coded 0. These items were combined to form a single support/opposition bipolar measure ranging from  $-4 = \textit{very much oppose}$  to  $+4 = \textit{very much support}$ .

*Manipulation check.* One item served as our manipulation check to make sure that participants in the 9/11 prime condition did consider the events of 9/11 more so than the other conditions while responding to questions about the events in Syria. This item asked participants, “To what extent did thoughts about the 9/11 terrorist attacks occur to you while responding to this survey?” and the response scale ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*.

*Control measures.* To rule out possible alternative explanations, we controlled for multiple measures in all of our analyses, including age, gender, education level, news consumption, and familiarity with the events taking place in Syria. News consumption was measured by presenting participants with the stem “How much attention overall do you pay to . . .” followed by the completions “international news,” “state or national news,” “local news,” “political news,” and “news on the internet” with response options that ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much* ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Familiarity with the events that took place in Syria was

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<sup>2</sup> Participants in the no prime control condition did not receive these items because they were not given any prime stimulus materials. Asking participants in the no prime condition about their desire for revenge for either 9/11 or the 2005 London bombing could in itself have primed these events even in the absence of descriptions of these attacks.

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations for All Experimental Conditions for Each Dependent Measure

Dependent measure	Priming condition		
	9/11	London	No prime
Manipulation check (9/11 salience)	3.39 <sub>a</sub> (1.11)	2.18 <sub>b</sub> (1.44)	1.84 <sub>b</sub> (1.24)
Desire for revenge for 9/11 / London bombing	3.73 <sub>a</sub> (1.07)	3.03 <sub>b</sub> (1.15)	n/a
Support for military intervention in Syria	-0.66 <sub>a</sub> (2.63)	0.01 <sub>a</sub> (2.97)	-1.03 <sub>a</sub> (2.70)

*Note.* Means are estimated marginal means controlling for age, gender, education level, news consumption, and Syria familiarity. The response scales for the manipulation check and desire for revenge ranges from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. The response scale for support for military intervention ranges from -4 = *very much oppose* to +4 = *very much support*. Standard deviations are in parentheses. For each measure, means with different subscripts are significantly different  $p < .05$ .

measured with “To what extent would you say that you are familiar with the events taking place in Syria at this time?” with a response scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these control measures, political orientation (“To what extent are you liberal or conservative?” with a response scale ranging from -4 = *very much liberal* to +4 = *very much conservative*) was included as a moderator in the path analyses discussed below.

## Results

Our manipulation was successful; participants in the 9/11 prime condition considered the events of 9/11 more than those in the London Bombing control condition,  $F(1, 180) = 30.89, p < .001, \omega^2 = .03$ ; and those in the no prime control condition,  $F(1, 180) = 50.42, p < .001, \omega^2 = .05$ . Additionally, there was no difference in prevalence of 9/11 thoughts between the London Bombing control and the no prime control conditions,  $F(1, 180) = 2.39, p = .12, \omega^2 = .001$ .

There were no differences in support for military intervention in Syria as a function of priming condition,  $F(2, 180) = 2.11, p = .12, \omega^2 = .01$ . As can be seen in Table 1, participants for the most part were not supportive of military intervention. With that said, the means trended toward weaker opposition in the terrorist reminder conditions than the no prime control condition. Consistent with the displaced international aggression hypothesis, desires for vengeance for 9/11 were associated with increased support for military intervention in Syria,  $r = .20, p < .05$  (see Table 2 for all correlations).

Even though there were no overall differences in support for military intervention as a function of priming condition, we decided to examine the hypothesized indirect path of 9/11 reminder predicting support for military intervention in Syria

<sup>3</sup> Excluding these control variables does not change the pattern of results in any analyses.

**Table 2.** Correlations of Control Variables, Desire for Revenge, and Support for Military Intervention in Syria

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	–							
2. Age	–.03	–						
3. Political orientation	–.01	.05	–					
4. Education	–.03	.07	–.17*	–				
5. News consumption	–.04	.23*	–.07	.12	–			
6. Syria familiarity	–.23*	.14*	.03	.11	.57*	–		
7. Desire for revenge	–.12	–.01	.19*	–.08	.10	.34*	–	
8. Support for military intervention	–.01	–.04	–.07	–.00	.08	.02	.20*	–

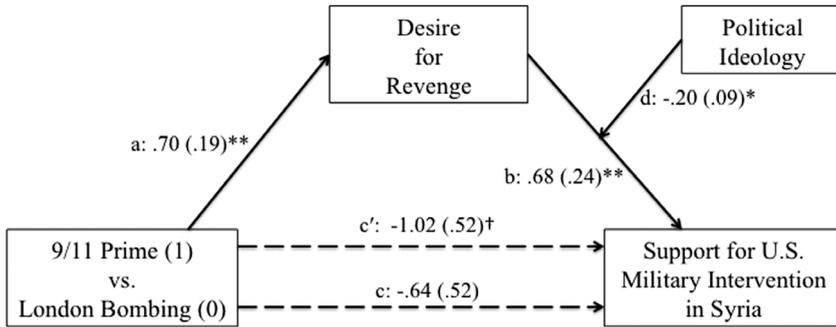
\* $p < .05$ .

through desire for revenge because this path was predicted by the trigger component of the displaced international punishment hypothesis. Much research has noted the importance of examining indirect effects, especially when driven by theory, over and above total and direct effects in mediation models (e.g., Hayes, 2009; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011).

Instead of a mediating effect of desire for revenge on the association between 9/11 prime condition (compared to London Bombing prime) and support for military intervention in Syria, we found a significant suppressor effect for desire for revenge. Statistical suppression occurs when adding a suppressor variable to a regression equation significantly strengthens the relationship between the independent and dependent variable (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In other words, a suppressor variable distorts the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable when not accounted for in the model (suppressing the total effect). Suppression is present when the indirect effect through the suppressor variable has a sign opposite of the total effect (Rucker et al., 2011).

According to MacKinnon et al. (2000), assessing suppression involves evaluating three regression equations. First, one regresses the mediating variable on the independent variable. One then regresses the dependent variable on the independent variable. Finally, one regresses the dependent variable and the mediator on the independent variable to see if the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is strengthened with the mediator in the model. If the direct effect is strengthened, then a suppression effect is present. For this study, our first regression equation, using a contrast that coded the 9/11 prime condition as 1 and the London Bombing prime condition as 0,<sup>4</sup> confirmed that participants in the 9/11 prime condition desired more revenge than those in the

<sup>4</sup> Participants in the no prime control condition were excluded from these analyses because they did not answer the revenge items.



**Fig. 1.** Suppression analysis of the effect of 9/11 prime on support for U.S. military intervention in Syria. Numbers represent unstandardized regression coefficients ( $SE$ ). Path  $c$  represents the total effect of the independent variable on support for U.S. military intervention in Syria; Path  $c'$  represents the direct effect of the 9/11 prime on support for military intervention controlling for desire for revenge. Political ideology (path  $d$ ) moderates the relationship between desire for revenge and support for U.S. military intervention in Syria.  $^\dagger p < .10$ .  $*p < .05$ .  $**p < .01$ .

London Bombing prime condition,  $B = 0.70$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $t(120) = 3.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .09$  (Path  $a$  in Figure 1). A second equation regressing support for military intervention in Syria against the 9/11 prime contrast indicated no 9/11 prime effect overall,  $B = -0.64$ ,  $SE = .52$ ,  $t(120) = -1.23$ ,  $p = .22$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$  (Path  $c$  in Figure 1). Third, if desire for revenge is a suppressor, entering it into this second equation should significantly strengthen the 9/11 prime effect. Results showed that desire for revenge was a significant predictor of support for military intervention in Syria,  $B = 0.68$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $t(117) = 2.81$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .06$  (Path  $b$  in Figure 1), and adding revenge into the model strengthened the 9/11 prime effect to marginal significance,  $B = -1.02$ ,  $SE = .52$ ,  $t(117) = -1.95$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$  (Path  $c'$  in Figure 1), a result that confirmed a suppression effect.

In addition, the indirect effect of 9/11 prime on support for military intervention in Syria through desire for revenge was moderated by political orientation. Participants who were reminded of 9/11 desired more revenge for the events of 9/11, and this desire for revenge conditionally predicted support for intervention in Syria as a function of political orientation. The indirect effect of the 9/11 reminder on support for intervention in Syria through revenge was strongest for liberals (1  $SD$  below the mean),  $B = 0.79$ ,  $SE = .30$ , 95% CI [0.32, 1.52], slightly weaker but still significant for moderates (mean level of ideology),  $B = 0.48$ ,  $SE = .24$ , 95% CI [0.11, 1.08], and nonexistent for conservatives (1  $SD$  above the mean),  $B = 0.16$ ,  $SE = .30$ , 95% CI [-0.38, 0.82] (Hayes, 2013). In other words, a reminder of 9/11 increased American liberals' and moderates' desire for vengeance more in the 9/11 than the London Bombing condition, which in turn increased

their support for (and suppressed their opposition to) U.S. military intervention in Syria.

### Discussion

The results of this study suggest that American liberals and moderates who thought about a nationally relevant offense (the 9/11 terrorist attacks) displaced their aggression and need for vengeance by supporting U.S. military intervention in Syria, data supporting our *Displaced International Punishment Hypothesis*. Although our American sample generally opposed military intervention in Syria, a reminder of 9/11 for liberals and moderates, in a sense, prevented (or suppressed) them from opposing U.S. military intervention in Syria as much as they would have in the absence of the reminder.

These results further reveal the long-standing consequences of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The enormity and unexpectedness of the 9/11 terrorist attacks led Americans to feel especially angry and vengeful (e.g., Sadler, Lineberger, Correll, & Park, 2005; for a review, see Skitka, Saunders, Morgan, & Wisneski, 2009). Desires for vengeance—at least in response to a transgression on the scale of 9/11—has an extremely long shelf life, given our results revealed that even a very simple reminder of 9/11 was sufficient to increase bellicosity more than 12 years after the transgression (see also Gollwitzer et al., 2014). The results of this study are remarkable for at least two reasons: (1) the number of years that have passed since the September 11, 2001 attacks, and (2) that a reminder of 9/11 could awaken desires for 9/11 vengeance and, therefore, (a displaced) willingness to support military intervention in Syria in a population that is extremely wary and weary of war.

The moderating effect of political ideology on desire for revenge predicting support for military intervention in Syria supports our *Motivated DIP Hypothesis* and corroborates polling data collected immediately after the Syrian chemical weapons attack. A Gallup poll administered on September 3–4, 2013 indicated that Democrats were more in favor (45% approval) of a military strike against Syria compared to Republicans (31% approval; Dugan, 2013). These findings further substantiate the idea that Americans often see U.S. wars through partisan lenses (Jones, 2005) and are motivated to support the policies that are in line with their ideological elites. Because President Obama was the one calling for a military strike against Syria, liberals were more likely to endorse the effort than conservatives when a reminder of 9/11 reawakened a desire for vengeance.

Our results experimentally confirm the Bush Administration's possible intuition about the power of evoking previous transgressions to build greater support for a bellicose response toward a new target. The results of this study experimentally supported the hypothesis that reminding Americans of 9/11—even many years later—has the power to suppress opposition to military involvement against

targets symbolically similar to the 9/11 instigators when military involvement is being advocated by one's preferred political party, and in a context in which opposition to military involvement is quite high.

A displaced international punishment effect can have important real-world implications even beyond intergroup relations. If desires for revenge for nationally relevant attacks can increase pugnacity toward unrelated and uninvolved foreign targets, political leaders could potentially garner support for political agendas involving warlike efforts against removed nation states. Simply reminding partisans of relevant domestic attacks from foreign nations might be enough to obtain political support for attacking foreign targets, even when people clearly see many negatives to going to war.

Although our study provides a persuasive test of the role of vengeance in displaced international punishment, we should caution that we only tested our hypothesis in a single specific context, that is, U.S. military intervention in Syria. However, the context in which we did find effects speaks to their robustness for a couple of reasons. First, the Syrian conflict was a real-world situation in which an actual U.S. military response was a distinct possibility. Therefore, participants' responses to our items undoubtedly better reflected real life opinions and attitudes than would responses to a manufactured or imaginary scenario. Second, our effects emerged in a climate of widespread disillusionment with any kind of U.S. military engagement. Most Americans preferred a diplomatic response to the Syrian crisis rather than a military one (Pew Research Center, 2013). Finding any evidence of movement toward supporting a military intervention in this context—given the current climate of isolationism—is therefore remarkable.

Future research testing the displaced international punishment hypothesis could examine possible moderators and boundary conditions for its effect on punitiveness toward similar yet unrelated targets. For example, specific individual differences could make certain people more prone to fall into the trappings of a vengeful response to nationally relevant offenses. Also, finding a mediating variable, such as war weariness, for the link between 9/11 reminders and decreased support for military intervention in Syria while controlling for revenge would be a worthwhile endeavor. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if lesser-known and less impactful national offenses than 9/11 would have the same effect on desire for punishment for a displaced target.

In conclusion, reminding people of relevant national transgressions can invoke desires for revenge that can be displaced onto unrelated targets, even in a population that is highly skeptical of military engagement. Although more research is needed to better understand the scope of such effects, this research takes an important first step in understanding the role of vengeful desires in support for military involvement in international conflicts.

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## Appendix

### 9/11 Prime

On the morning of September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists from the Islamist extremist group, al-Qaeda, hijacked four commercial airplanes, deliberately crashing two of the planes into the upper floors of the North and South towers of the World Trade Center complex and a third plane into the Pentagon in Arlington, VA. The Twin Towers ultimately collapsed because of the damage sustained from the impacts and the resulting fires. After learning about the other attacks, passengers on the fourth hijacked plane, Flight 93, fought back, and the plane was crashed into an empty field in western Pennsylvania not far from Washington, DC. The attacks killed many people and injured even more.

### London Bombing Prime Control

The July 7, 2005 London bombings were a series of coordinated suicide attacks in London that targeted civilians using the public transport system during the morning rush hour. On the morning of July 7, 2005, four Islamist home-grown terrorists detonated four bombs, three in quick succession aboard London Underground trains across the city of London and, later, a fourth on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. Many people were killed and even more were

injured in the United Kingdom's first suicide attacks. The explosions were caused by homemade organic peroxide-based devices packed into backpacks. Among those killed were several foreign-born British nationals, foreign exchange students, parents, and other British civilians.

### **No Prime Control**

No text was given.

### **Syria Chemical Weapons Attack Description**

The United States is preparing for a possible series of limited military strikes against Syria, the first direct U.S. intervention in the two-year civil war, in retaliation for President Bashar al-Assad's suspected use of chemical weapons against civilians. On August 21, 2013, a half-dozen densely populated neighborhoods near Damascus were jolted awake by a series of explosions, followed by an oozing blanket of toxic sarin gas. The Obama administration claims to have evidence that these attacks were administered by the Syrian government, and have resulted in over 1,400 deaths, including over 400 children. In response to the threat of an attack, Syria has signaled a willingness to turn over its supply of chemical weapons to the international community. Talks are therefore now underway between the Obama administration, Russian leaders, and the United Nations Security Council to work out a proposal for international monitors to take over and destroy Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons without the use of force. In the meantime, president Obama has asked congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force in Syria while these talks are taking place.

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