It is possible to ask whether we overreacted to 9/11 only because of the hard and steady work of countless state, municipal and federal counterterrorism officials who have succeeded in preventing its repeat, or something even worse. After a decade without any such attacks (albeit with some near misses), and with increasingly frequent and invasive security procedures permeating our daily lives, the costs of our reaction may be more immediately evident than the benefits. But another attack would change that calculus overnight.

One way in which Americans have overreacted, however, is emotionally—by assuming, as we so often do, that our experience of terrorism was qualitatively different from the experience of Europeans, Indonesians, Indians, Africans and others. We have since watched and admired the courage and determination of the British after coordinated attacks on subways and buses in July 2005, and of the Indians after the 10 coordinated shooting and bombing attacks in Mumbai in November 2008.

The world likewise watched the many acts of bravery and heroism on 9/11, from firefighters and police to the group of passengers who rushed the cockpit on United Flight 93. But as a society we were unable to resume business as usual in the way that the British and Indians and many others have done. Because the sensation of vulnerability to violent attack on American soil was so new to us, we gave the terrorists the satisfaction of knowing that they had changed our lives dramatically.

The lesson here is the power of resilience over revenge. As emotionally satisfying as the killing of Osama bin Laden and the attacks on other al Qaeda leaders are, in the long run they are a less effective response to terrorism than enhancing the resilience of our infrastructure, our economy and our people. If we are prepared for an attack and can return to normal as quickly as possible, even while grieving—with our planes flying, our markets open and our heads high—we can diminish the impact and hence the value of that attack in the first place.

Ms. Slaughter, a professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, served as the director of Policy Planning at the State Department from 2009-11.