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Is a Bankrupt Foreign Policy Worth It?

by Jacob G. Hornberger

Is terrorism rooted in hatred for our “freedom and values,” as the Bush administration has steadfastly maintained ever since the September 11 attacks, or is it instead rooted in a bankrupt foreign policy whose adverse effects are finally rising to the surface?

Before he was recently executed for killing two CIA agents, Mir Aimal Kasi, a Pakistani, told the Associated Press that what he did “was a retaliation against the U.S. government.” Brad Garret, the FBI agent who arrested Kasi in Pakistan, told CNN, “He said he believed that it was wrong that the United States — particularly the CIA — was going into Muslim countries and, in his words, manipulating the governance there to the U.S. best interest. And he says it’s wrong and he wanted to make a statement.”

When Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, one of terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center in 1993, was sentenced, he told the federal judge that the U.S. government’s embargo against Iraq, which UN officials believe has contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, was a principal reason that he had leveled his attack against the World Trade Center.

When Osama bin Laden, whom the U.S. government supported when he was opposing the Soviet Union, issued his “declaration of war” (long before the September 11 attacks), he cited three primary causes: U.S. military occupation of Islamic holy lands in Saudi Arabia, the embargo against Iraq, and U.S. government aid to Israel. In his recently released audiotape message, bin Laden stated, “Why should fear, killing, destruction, displacement, orphaning and widowing continue to be our lot, while security, stability and happiness be your lot? This is unfair. It is time that we get even. You will be killed just as you kill, and will be bombed just as you bomb.”

Is it only terrorists who resent the U.S. government’s foreign policy?

The *New York Times* recently reported that educated Indonesians are convinced that the CIA set off the bomb blast in Bali that killed 180 people. Why? Because they remember that the CIA helped Indonesian generals to effect a regime change in 1965 that resulted in the ouster of the country’s founding president, Achmed Sukarno, “after he incurred Washington’s displeasure for many years.”

Three prominent UN officials — Denis Halliday (assistant secretary-general), Hans von Sponeck (humanitarian coordinator in Baghdad), and Jutta Burghardt (head of the World Food Program in Iraq) — resigned their posts to avoid participating in the long-standing embargo against Iraq because of its horrific consequences on the civilian population.

According to the *Washington Post*, a poll conducted last spring by Zogby International “found that Arabs look favorably on American freedoms and political values, but have a strongly negative overall view of the United States based largely on their disapproval of U.S. policy toward the region.” Polls conducted among Europeans reveal the same phenomenon — Europeans love Americans but they abhor U.S. foreign policy.

What do foreigners see that all too many Americans do not want to see? They see a foreign policy that entails the support of brutal regimes, both with money and weaponry (including the furnishing of biological and chemical weaponry to Saddam Hussein); the ouster or assassination of foreign rulers who meet with Washington’s displeasure, including democratically elected ones; the taking of sides in long-standing, deeply rooted disputes; economic blockades and embargoes that cause untold suffering among ordinary people; U.S. troops stationed in more than 100 countries; and periodic military attacks on countries in various parts of the world.

For decades, the consequences of America’s interventionist foreign policy were not manifest in ways that greatly affected the American people. No longer. Everyone can now plainly see the ever-increasing cost of such a policy, both in terms of continuous threats to our lives from the terrorists and continuous threats to our freedom in the form of responses by the U.S. government to those threats.

We can continue to pretend that all this is rooted in foreigners’ hatred of our “freedom and values,” as the Bush administration continues to maintain, even as it prepares to invade Iraq to effect one more regime change, which most everyone agrees will produce even more anger, hatred, and terrorism.

Or we can ask ourselves a simple but important question, even while continuing to bring to justice people who commit acts of terrorism: Has the time come to end the U.S. government’s role as international policeman, intervenor, and interloper?

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