



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

9/11 Could Have Been Prevented

by Sheldon Richman

From Richard Clarke to Condoleezza Rice, the security establishment agrees on one thing: there was no sure way to stop the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Maybe, maybe not. But if that is correct, it doesn't get the Bush administration and its predecessors off the hook. The very inability to prevent terrorism is a powerful argument against the interventionist policies they followed for decades.

If there is no way to stop a decentralized network of suicidal killers from murdering innocent civilians using low-tech means, that is all the more reason to stay out of foreign hornets' nests. The Founders of this country were right. Intervention leads to trouble.

Is that the lesson being learned from the work of the 9/11 commission? Of course not. Nothing can be permitted to impede America's mission to reform the Muslim world and even the religion of Islam itself.

Americans will not learn the anti-interventionist lesson from their "leaders." So they'll have to learn it themselves. Their lives may depend on it.

For many decades American presidents have thought that they could bring order to the world, particularly the Middle East. This would have been a problem even if U.S. administrations had tried to be neutral. But they were never neutral. They always had agendas. Whether it was the Israel-Palestinian conflict or other frictions in the region, U.S. administrations sought outcomes that satisfied their own politically motivated projects. Justice had nothing to do with the matter. As a result, the United States has a record of helping to overthrow elected leaders in favor of despots, of arming ruthless autocrats, and of bolstering the occupation of property taken from Palestinians. The Middle East is a region rife with injustice — and U.S. policy has been allied with much of it.

Who would not expect such a record to incite hatred against those responsible for it? And it was always to be expected — though not condoned — that fanatical elements among the aggrieved would take their wrath out on innocent Americans.

What makes the terrorist threat so frustrating is that it was entirely foreseeable. Anti-interventionists warned about it for many years. But the overseers of the imperial agenda smugly believed they could pursue their objectives with impunity. When the big attack finally came, they made the best of it: they used it to augment their power and to intervene even more aggressively. The very consequences of their program became grounds for redoubling their ill-advised efforts.

Part of their propaganda campaign is the claim that the Islamists hate us because “we love freedom.” If they did, they would say so. Instead, whenever they explain their hatred, they specify U.S. intervention in their societies. There is no reason to believe they would be attacking a free and noninterventionist America.

The question now is, when will the American people understand? The crimes of 9/11 should have focused attention on the policies that made Arabs willing to commit such heinous acts here. But the Bush administration — and the “bipartisan” political establishment as a whole — made sure that Americans would draw only lessons that did not threaten the interventionist program. Anyone who attempted to point the finger at those policies was stigmatized as an appeaser or terrorist sympathizer. By and large, the news media fell into line.

Let’s take the administration at its word. The horrors at the World Trade Center could not have been prevented by actions taken between January 20 and September 11, 2001. The real issue is whether they could have been prevented had U.S. administrations followed the noninterventionist advice of the Founding Fathers. The answer is obvious.

Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation in Fairfax, Va., author of *Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State*, and editor of *The Freeman* magazine.

This article was originally published in April of 2004.