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## **Oklahoma City and 9/11**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

The Oklahoma City bombing 10 years ago holds an important lesson regarding the 9/11 attacks. It is a lesson about terrorist motivation and the consequences of U.S. government policy.

After the Oklahoma City bombing, U.S. officials immediately discouraged discussion about Timothy McVeigh's motivation for committing his terrorist attack. Whenever someone pointed out that McVeigh bombed the federal building in retaliation for the federal massacre at Waco two years before, the response was, "Oh, so you're saying that McVeigh was justified in doing what he did? Are you defending his actions?"

The reason that U.S. officials wished to suppress discussion about McVeigh's motivation was obviously their desire to suppress discussion of what federal officials had done at Waco. Fortunately, however, their attempts at suppression were not successful. Ever-growing critiques of the Waco massacre slowly raised the consciousness of the American people to such an extent that ultimately it became difficult to find very many defenders of what had occurred at Waco.

And notice the result: With no more Waco-style massacres of innocent people, including children, there have been no more retaliatory terrorist strikes against federal officials and federal buildings.

There will always be people in life such as Timothy McVeigh and Osama bin Laden — people who, unable to control their anger, will inevitably seek vengeance against innocent people for wrongful acts committed by their governments.

Thus, there are two ways in which U.S. officials could have addressed the Oklahoma City bombing: They could have continued to commit Waco-type massacres while, at the same time, wage a "war on terrorism" against people who would be likely to retaliate with terrorist strikes. Or they could simply have stopped engaging in Waco-type massacres, which would mean that potential terrorists no longer would have reason to seek vengeance.

After the 9/11 attacks, federal officials once again did everything they could to shut down inquiries into the motivations of the attackers. The reason was to discourage Americans from

recognizing that the terrorists were retaliating against U.S. government policies in the Middle East.

Why is it important that Americans resist such efforts to suppress discussion and debate about the role that U.S. foreign policy played in motivating the 9/11 attackers? The answer is obvious: Just as no more Waco-style government massacres ultimately meant no more Oklahoma City-style terrorist attacks, no more U.S. government interventions in the Middle East could mean no more retaliatory terrorist attacks, such as those at the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001. In other words, if the American people can prevail upon their federal officials to abandon the policies that give rise to anger and a thirst for vengeance, the result could be peace and stability for the American people.

Of course, that would require an examination of the particular U.S. government policies that gave rise to the anger and hatred that motivated the 9/11 attackers, not only to assess the morality and justness of such policies but also to determine whether their continuation is worth being a target for retaliatory terrorist strikes.

The U.S. government policies that motivated the 9/11 attackers all revolve around U.S. government intervention in the Middle East. They include the Persian Gulf intervention that killed and maimed untold numbers of Iraqis, followed by the decade of brutal sanctions that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi children, the stationing of U.S. troops on Islamic holy lands, the enforcement of the illegal no-fly zones over Iraq, the unconditional military support of the Israeli government, U.S. military bases around the Middle East, and, most recent, the invasion and occupation of Iraq that has killed and maimed an estimated 100,000 people.

Ten years ago, the American people asked an important question: Do we want the federal government to engage in any more Waco-style massacres and are such massacres worth more Oklahoma City-style retaliatory terrorist strikes? Their answer was “No.” The question facing Americans today is: Do we want the federal government to engage in any more Middle East interventions and are such interventions worth any more 9/11 retaliatory terrorist strikes?

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