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Why They Hate Us **by Sheldon Richman**

What's more obnoxious than a person who constantly whines about the real and imagined injustices committed against him while ignoring his own injustices against others?

A country that does the same thing.

One of the great myths accepted by the American people is that historically, the United States — more precisely, the U.S. government — has been a gentle giant, powerful and rich but entirely peaceful and well-meaning, and slow to anger when wronged. The truth is nearly the diametric opposite.

We often hear American politicians and commentators reciting a list of “terrorist” acts committed against the “United States.” It typically includes the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the 1996 bombing of U.S. Air Force housing in Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* in the port of Aden in Yemen. Reciting this string of attacks supposedly demonstrates, without further argument, that the United States has been the major victim of violence on the world stage — unprovoked violence perpetrated by “Islamofascists” because we are free and represent democracy. Indeed, it is widely believed that the attacks on September 11, 2001, were in part the result of “our” failure to retaliate for those unprovoked earlier attacks.

But this is sheer balderdash. The attacks, while often criminally misdirected, were hardly unprovoked. They were not bolts out of the blue. On the contrary, they were seen by the perpetrators as retaliation against the world's dominant imperial power.

The last century-plus of U.S. foreign policy has largely been a story of aggression and empire-building. American presidents have intervened and interfered in every region of the world, not in self-defense, but in the name of U.S. “national interest,” which in reality means the interest of well-connected corporations and their ambitious political agents who felt appointed by history to bring order to the world. In the view of the policy advocates, the best interests of America, as they conceived them, and the best interests of the people of the world coincided. Of

course the people of the world were given no say in the matter. What was in their interest was decided for them by American policymakers and their foreign agents.

Most Americans haven't gained by this approach to foreign affairs — in fact, they have paid dearly in money and lives. But not as dearly as those on the receiving end of that policy. For all the pious moralizing about democracy and human rights, American foreign policy has treated foreign populations like garbage, beginning with the brutal repression of the Filipino uprising against American colonial rule from 1899 to 1902. That war and its related hardships killed 250,000 to a million Filipino civilians and 20,000 Filipino rebels. In other words, foreigners have been regarded as highly as the Indians were.

How many Americans know that?

Intervention and blowback

Since that time American presidents have intervened, directly or by proxy, in countless places, including Cuba, Haiti, Colombia (Panama), Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq, Guatemala, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. On many occasions American administrations have engineered regime changes (sometimes with assassinations) to install leaders friendly to "American interests." Rarely has intervention occurred without the murder of innocent civilians, degrading hardship for survivors, and arms and (taxpayer) money for repressive "leaders." The paradigm is the 1953 intervention in Iran, when the CIA helped drive an elected, secular prime minister from office so the autocratic shah could be restored to power. His brutal U.S.-sponsored repression of the Iranian people finally provoked an Islamic revolution in 1979, creating an anti-American theocracy that has been a thorn in the side of U.S. presidents ever since.

Coincidence? Of course not. Americans may be ignorant or forgetful; the victims seldom are.

To this day we routinely hear references to the Iranian takeover of the U.S. embassy and the 444 days the American hostages were held. Rarely do those references mention that the flare-up of violence followed a quarter century of cruel dictatorship, in which torture was a state policy — all sponsored by U.S. administrations. One can criticize the embassy seizure and the holding of hostages. But it is wrong to think that America was an aggrieved party. But that's how it works in big-power politics. An imperial force can wreak all kinds of havoc in a weaker foreign country, but there is no outrage in the domestic population until the victims strike back, usually with pathetically meager force compared with what the aggressive power employed.

Iran was neither the first nor the last case of "blowback," the CIA's term for what happens when a foreign operation explodes in one's own face. Indeed, American foreign policy from the end of the 19th century onward can be viewed as a series of blowbacks.

None of this means that innocent American civilians deserve to be killed or injured in retaliation for the government's conduct. The American people did not "invite" the 9/11 attacks. Not even the U.S. government did that, if by "invite" we mean "sought" or "welcomed." Arguing that issue is a distraction from what really matters.

The point is that U.S. policy in the Middle East was bound to create victims who sooner or later would want revenge. That they were less than discriminating in whom they sought revenge against does not alter that fundamental fact. To comprehend is not to excuse. If a victim of a crime goes on to commit a crime himself, that should not be a reason to ignore the initial crime. A country keeps itself safe from terrorism first by not forcibly imposing itself on others.

Every imperial power has been the target of what is called "terrorism." But this term itself should make us suspicious. To be sure, horrific crimes against innocents are included under that label. But one must ask how legitimate the concept is in light of the fact that applying it to any U.S. conduct is impermissible virtually by definition. Something is wrong when the United States in the eyes of many Americans is incapable of committing terrorism, but any resistance to U.S. impositions is condemned with that term. Who controls the definitions controls the future.

How many Americans have any inkling of the crimes — yes, crimes — their government has committed against foreign people in their name over the last century? Most don't know and don't care — and that's fine with their rulers because when vengeful foreigners assault American civilians (unjustifiably) or military occupiers, U.S. leaders and jingoist supporters can say, "America was the victim of another unprovoked attack. Why do they hate us?"

Anyone who is the least bit familiar with history will know the answer. It doesn't take much effort to learn the truth. Reputable scholars and journalists have turned out a library full of books in the last six years documenting the U.S. government's record as an international bully. There's no excuse for ignorance.

Let's stop whining and get curious. As Walt Kelly's Pogo put it, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

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