

Why Terrorists Hate America

by William Blum

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Why do terrorists hate America enough to give up their lives in order to deal the country such mortal blows? Of course it's not America the terrorists hate; it's American foreign policy. It's what the United States has done to the world in the past half century -- all the violence, the bombings, the depleted uranium, the cluster bombs, the assassinations, the promotion of torture, the overthrow of governments, and more. The terrorists -- whatever else they might be -- are also rational human beings; which is to say that in their own minds they have a rational justification for their actions. Most terrorists are people deeply concerned by what they see as social, political or religious injustice and hypocrisy, and the immediate grounds for their terrorism is often retaliation for an action of the United States.

Most Americans find it difficult in the extreme to accept the proposition that terrorist acts against the United States can be viewed as revenge for Washington's policies abroad. They believe that the US is targeted because of its freedom, its democracy, its modernity, its wealth, or just being part of the West.

But government officials know better. A Department of Defense study in 1997 concluded that: "Historical data show a strong correlation between US involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States." Former president Jimmy Carter, some years after he left the White House, was unambiguous in his concordance with such a sentiment: "We sent Marines into Lebanon and you only have to go to Lebanon, to Syria or to Jordan to witness first-hand the intense hatred among many people for the United States because we bombed and shelled and unmercifully killed totally innocent villagers -- women and children and farmers and housewives -- in those villages around Beirut. . . . As a result of that . . . we became kind of a Satan in the minds of those who are deeply resentful."

The terrorists responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 sent a letter to the *New York Times* which stated, in part: "We declare our responsibility for the explosion on the mentioned building. This action was done in response for the American political, economical, and military support to Israel the state of terrorism and to the rest of the dictator countries in the region."

For more than four months the most powerful nation in history rained down a daily storm of missiles upon one of the poorest and most backward people in the world. Eventually, this question pressed itself onto the world's stage: Who killed more innocent, defenseless people? The terrorists in the United States on September 11 with their flying bombs? Or the Americans in Afghanistan with their AGM-86D cruise missiles, their AGM-130 missiles, their 15,000 pound "daisy cutter" bombs, their depleted uranium, and their cluster bombs? By year's end, the count of the terrorists' victims in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania stood at about 3,000. The total count of civilian dead in Afghanistan was essentially ignored by American officials and just about everyone else, but a painstaking compilation of numerous individual reports from the domestic and international media, aid

agencies, and the United Nations, by an American professor -- hunting down the many separate incidents of 100-plus counts of the dead, the scores of dead, the dozens, and the smaller numbers -- arrived at considerably more than 3,500 through early December, and still counting.

The American scorched-earth bombing of Afghanistan may well turn out to be a political train wreck. Can it be doubted that thousands throughout the Muslim world were emotionally and spiritually recruited to the cause of the next Osama bin Laden by the awful ruination and perceived injustice? That is to say, the next generation of terrorists. Indeed, in December, while the American bombs were still falling on Afghanistan, a man -- British citizen Richard Reid, who was a convert to Islam -- tried to blow up an American Airlines plane en route to the United States with explosives hidden in his shoes. At the London mosque that Reid had attended, the cleric in charge warned that extremists were enlisting other young men like Reid and that agents aligned with radical Muslim figures had stepped up recruiting efforts since September 11. The cleric said that he knew of "hundreds of Richard Reids" recruited in Britain. Reid, described in the press as a "drifter," reportedly traveled to Israel, Egypt, the Netherlands, and Belgium before arriving in Paris and boarding the American Airlines plane. This raises the question of who was financing him. The freezing of numerous bank accounts of alleged terrorist groups throughout the world by the United States may have rather limited effect.

Americans do not feel any more secure in their places of work, in their places of leisure, or in their travels than they did a day before their government's bombings began.

Has the power elite learned anything? Here's James Woolsey, former Director of the CIA, speaking in December in Washington, advocating an invasion of Iraq and unconcerned about the response of the Arab world: The silence of the Arab public in the wake of America's victories in Afghanistan, he said, proves that "only fear will re-establish respect for the U.S." What, then, can the United States do to end terrorism directed against it? The answer lies in removing the anti-American motivations of the terrorists. To achieve this, American foreign policy will have to undergo a metamorphosis.

If I were the president, I could stop terrorist attacks against the United States in a few days. Permanently. I would first apologize to all the widows and orphans, the tortured and impoverished, and all the many millions of other victims of American imperialism. Then I would announce, in all sincerity, to every corner of the world, that America's global interventions have come to an end, and inform Israel that it is no longer the 51st state of the USA but now -- oddly enough -- a foreign country. I would then reduce the military budget by at least 90% and use the savings to pay reparations to the victims. There would be more than enough money. One year's military budget of 330 billion dollars is equal to more than \$18,000 an hour for every hour since Jesus Christ was born. That's what I'd do on my first three days in the White House. On the fourth day, I'd be assassinated.

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