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U.S. Foreign Policy Caused the Taliban Problem

by Jacob G. Hornberger,
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U.S. officials are now concerned not only with a Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan but also a Taliban takeover in Pakistan. These problems, however, were caused by the U.S. Empire itself.

While most Americans now view President Bush's Iraq War as a "bad war," the common perception is that Bush's invasion of Afghanistan was a "good war" (despite the fact that he went to war without the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war). The notion is that the U.S. government was justified in invading Afghanistan and ousting the Taliban regime from power because the Taliban and al-Qaeda conspired to commit the 9/11 attacks.

There's just one big problem with that belief: it's unfounded.

The reason that Bush ousted the Taliban from office was that the Taliban regime refused to comply with his unconditional demand to deliver Osama bin Laden to U.S. officials after the 9/11 attacks.

The Taliban responded to Bush's demand by asking him to furnish evidence of bin Laden's complicity in the 9/11 attacks. Upon receipt of such evidence, they offered to turn him over to an independent tribunal instead of the United States.

Bush never explained why the Taliban's conditions were unreasonable. After all, as federal judges in the Jose Padilla case, the Zacarias Moussaoui case, and many others have confirmed, terrorism is a federal criminal offense. Thus, while it's not unusual for one nation to seek the extradition of a foreigner to stand trial for a criminal offense, it's just as reasonable for the nation receiving the request to be provided evidence that the person has, in fact, committed the crime.

Venezuela is currently seeking the extradition from the United States of a man named Luis Posada Carriles, who is accused of bombing a Cuban airliner over Venezuelan skies, a terrorist act that succeeded in killing everyone on board.

Venezuela and the United States have an extradition agreement. Nonetheless, the U.S. government is refusing to extradite Posada to Venezuela. The reason? It says that it fears that Venezuelan authorities will torture Posada. (Another reason might be that Posada was a CIA operative.)

But if fear of torture is a valid reason for refusing an extradition request from Venezuela, then why wouldn't the same reason apply with respect to the Taliban's refusal to extradite bin Laden to the United States? I think everyone would agree that if bin Laden had been turned over to the CIA or the Pentagon, he would have been brutally tortured, perhaps even executed, without ever being brought to trial before a fair and independent judicial tribunal.

What about the Taliban's request that Bush provide evidence of bin Laden's complicity in the 9/11 attacks? That request is precisely what is done in extradition proceedings. When one nation seeks the extradition of a foreigner, the rules of extradition require it to provide evidence to support the request.

What was remarkable about the Taliban offer was that there wasn't even an extradition agreement between Afghanistan and the United States. The Taliban was offering to deliver bin Laden to an independent tribunal even though international law did not require it, so long as U.S. officials provided the same type of evidence that is ordinarily required in an extradition proceeding.

Yet Bush refused to consider either the Taliban's offer or its request for evidence. His position was effectively this: "We are the world's sole remaining empire. We have the most powerful military on the planet. We have the capability of smashing you and removing your regime from power. You will comply with our demand, unconditionally and immediately."

But the Taliban refused to comply with Bush's unconditional demand. Consequently, when the United States invaded Afghanistan, it not only went after bin Laden, it also took sides in Afghanistan's civil war, taking the side of the Northern Alliance. Ousting the Taliban from power in a classic regime-change operation, U.S. officials installed Hamid Karzai into office, who has been a loyal, friendly, and compliant member of the empire ever since, but one whose regime is now under constant attack by those who were ousted from power by the U.S. Empire.

While Bush and other U.S. officials promised to disclose evidence that the Taliban regime had conspired with al-Qaeda to commit the 9/11 attacks, that promise was never fulfilled and it was ultimately forgotten. The likely reason for that is that they never had such evidence. After all, if they had evidence of such complicity, they would never have wasted time demanding that the Taliban turn bin Laden over. They would have simply declared war against Afghanistan for having attacked the United States.

What would have been the ideal way of handling bin Laden? The same way that the United States handled Ramzi Yousef, one of the terrorists who committed the 1993 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Treating that attack as a criminal offense, U.S. officials simply waited Yousef out, relied on good police work, and finally were able to effect his arrest in Pakistan. He is now residing in a U.S. federal penitentiary. No bombs, no missiles, no destruction, no killing of Pakistani wedding parties, and no needless production of new enemies for the United States.

Instead, treating the capture of bin Laden as a military problem, U.S. officials invaded the country, killed and maimed countless innocent people, wreaked untold destruction on Afghanistan, effected regime change, created new enemies for the United States ... and failed to capture bin Laden.

But even given the military invasion of Afghanistan, the aim of that invasion could have been limited to going after bin Laden rather than being used as an opportunity to effect regime change at the same time.

Indeed, that's precisely what happened after Pancho Villa killed several Americans in a raid on Columbus, New Mexico, during the Mexican Revolution. After the raid, U.S. officials sent an expeditionary force into Mexico to capture him and bring him back to justice. While the expedition was unsuccessful, what was noteworthy about it was that the expedition force limited itself to trying to capture Villa, not taking sides in Mexico's civil war.

We would be remiss if we failed to keep in mind the role that U.S. foreign policy played in bringing into existence and supporting the Taliban. In a [November 5, 2001, article](#), Congressman Ron Paul pointed out:

We should recognize that American tax dollars helped to create the very Taliban government that now wants to destroy us. In the late 1970s and early 80s, the CIA was very involved in the training and funding of various fundamentalist Islamic groups in Afghanistan, some of which later became today's brutal Taliban government. In fact, the U.S. government admits to giving the groups at least *6 billion* dollars in military aid and weaponry, a staggering sum that would be even larger in today's dollars.

Bin Laden himself received training and weapons from the CIA....

Incredibly, in May the U.S. announced that we would reward the Taliban with an additional \$43 million in aid for its actions in banning the cultivation of poppy used to produce heroin and opium. Taliban rulers had agreed to assist us in our senseless drug war by declaring opium growing "against the will of God."...

Once the Taliban regime refused to comply with Bush's unconditional order to turn over bin Laden, the U.S. Empire did what it had done and tried to do in so many other countries — Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Cuba, Indonesia, Iraq, and others — bring about regime change by ousting a recalcitrant regime that refused to comply with the unconditional orders of the U.S. Empire — a regime that the U.S. Empire itself had helped to create — and replacing it with a submissive pro-empire regime. In the process, the empire succeeded in embroiling the United State into one more foreign conflict, one that has now spread to nuclear-armed Pakistan.

It's just another "success story" in the life of the U.S. Empire and its interventionist foreign policy.