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End America's Role as a Military Empire

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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During our panel discussion at the recent FreedomFest conference in Las Vegas, which was entitled “The War on Terrorism Is a War on Freedom,” an attendee pointed out that there were lots of instances of terrorism around the world and asked, “If terrorism is motivated by anger and rage arising out of U.S. foreign policy, how do you explain terrorism in Spain or other parts of the world in which the U.S. government has played no role?”

Libertarians have never suggested that U.S. foreign policy is responsible for all terrorism in the world. What we have said is that the U.S. government's actions in foreign affairs have incited so much anger and rage that they have motivated some people to retaliate with terrorist strikes against the United States. That certainly does not preclude the possibility that people in other parts of the world are similarly motivated to commit terrorist attacks against other regimes.

Consider, for example, the Basque separatists in Spain. They have their own grievances against the Spanish government. Those grievances have driven them to commit acts of terrorism against the Spanish government and Spanish people. Those acts of terrorism have nothing to do with anything the U.S. government has done. It would be irrational for the Basque separatists to commit terrorist attacks against the United States or the American people for matters arising out of the Basque dispute with the Spanish government.

But the fact that the Basque separatists have their own reasons for committing acts of terrorism in Spain does not preclude the possibility that there are going to be people who get angry when the U.S. Empire goes abroad and wrongfully kills and injures people, tortures and abuses people, humiliates people, supports brutal dictatorships who torture, abuse, rape, and kill dissidents, or provides foreign aid to other regimes. In that case, the survivors, as well as friends and relatives of the victims, are likely to become angry at the U.S. government that has done these things.

Does that mean that every person who becomes angry is going to retaliate with a terrorist attack? Of course not. Most people aren't going to go down that road. But there usually will be a certain percentage of people whose anger and rage will motivate them in that direction.

Consider, for example, the federal attack on Waco, which killed dozens of people, including innocent children. Many Americans, especially libertarians, were horribly angry over the massacre. But we channeled that anger into articles, speeches, and films that raised people's consciousness and conscience to such a point that today most people recognize what a horrible thing the feds did at Waco. The result? There have been no more Waco-type massacres since then.

There was one person, Timothy McVeigh, who could not control his anger. His rage motivated him to retaliate with a terrorist strike on the federal building in Oklahoma City.

Notice something important: No more Waco massacres since then — and no more terrorist strikes on U.S. federal buildings. But if the government commits another massacre, there is a good possibility that another Timothy McVeigh will surface and retaliate in the same way that McVeigh retaliated.

What all too many Americans are unable to do is to put themselves into the places of foreigners who have experienced the heavy, oppressive hand of the U.S. Empire. As bad as Waco was, what the U.S. government has done to people in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world is a thousands times worse.

Consider, as just one example, the fact that the U.S. government killed hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq with its 11 years of brutal sanctions. If the killing of a few children at Waco would engender anger and rage here at home, why wouldn't we expect that the killing of hundreds of thousands of children would have the same effect among people over there?

Consider the 9/11 attacks. Didn't lots of Americans get angry? Why wouldn't we expect foreigners to have the same reaction when that sort of thing happens to them? Isn't human nature human nature?

Consider when U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright declared that the deaths of half-a-million Iraqi children from the sanctions were "worth it." Why wouldn't we expect that sort of thing to make people angry? Wouldn't Americans become angry if, say, the ambassador from Iran were to declare that the deaths on 9/11 were "worth it"?

In order to get our nation back on the right road, it's necessary for Americans to be willing to acknowledge and confront the wrongdoing of their own government, not only here at home but also abroad.

It's also necessary to end America's role as an international military empire by bringing all the troops home from everywhere and discharging them, abandoning all U.S. military bases on foreign soil, and ending all foreign aid not only to dictatorships but to every other foreign regime. Restoring a limited-government constitutional republic to our land is an essential precondition for getting our nation on the road to freedom, peace, prosperity, harmony.