

## **Excessive U.S. Military Action Overseas Breeds Anti-U.S. Terrorism**

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As the cataclysmic events of September 11 have receded farther into the past, U.S. policymakers and the public should have been able to think more clearly about the causes of those events. But that has not happened.

Just after the attacks, the initial wave of nationalistic feeling was understandable (similar sentiments held the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941). And the Bush administration's military action against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan was equally understandable and justified, if not completely successful. After civilians were slaughtered so heinously on U.S. soil, the American people—recognizing the right to self-defense--would have been willing to incur a significant number of military casualties in Afghanistan to roundup and kill or capture al Qaeda fighters. Yet on two separate occasions, despite its bellicose rhetoric, the Bush administration—fearing casualties, much as the Clinton administration had—allowed al Qaeda fighters to get away by timidly relying on Northern Alliance and Pakistani allies to pursue them rather than putting enough U.S. boots on the ground. What was needed then and what will be needed in the future is a robust, narrowly focused military response against terrorist groups that focus their attacks on U.S. targets. Unfortunately, a wider, less effective U.S. policy of military and covert action is being pursued by the Bush administration and supported by the American people. In fact, that indiscriminate U.S. military interventionism is a major cause of terrorism against the United States in the first place. For example, unnecessary U.S. military interventions in Georgia, the Philippines and Iraq

will most likely cause more additional terrorist attacks on U.S. targets than they will prevent.

### **The United States is Attacked Disproportionately by Terrorists**

According to the U.S. Department of State's *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*, the United States was the target of 63 percent of the world's international terrorist attacks.<sup>1</sup> In other words, one nation is the target for almost two-thirds of the world's cross-border terrorism. That surprising statistic is made even more astounding when we recall that the United States is half a world away from the centers of conflict, has no ethnic or civil war on its territory, and has no hostile neighbors trying to foment terrorism within its borders.

### **The United States Is Attacked for What It Does, Not What It Is**

Despite much evidence to the contrary, the American foreign policy community-- and to a lesser extent, the American public—avoids (like the plague) accepting any notion that U.S. actions overseas could result in blowback. One hysterical response to the argument that profligate U.S. military interventions overseas lead to increased anti-U.S. terrorism is to accuse any proponent of it of “blaming the victim.” The argument that imprudent actions of the U.S. government overseas may be unnecessarily endangering its own citizens (both abroad and at home) does not imply that al Qaeda or any other terrorist group is justified in purposefully targeting innocent civilians for a political purpose (this author's definition of terrorism). A metaphor best illustrates the

problem: If the owner of a new luxury sports car haughtily parks his or her new car overnight in the most crime-ridden part of town and has it stolen, are we absolving the criminal of blame for stealing it? No, the criminal has done something illegal and immoral and should be punished for the theft. But the owner of the car probably would have been wise to park his car safely at home in his own garage.

All this suggests that the American foreign policy community and public should be a little more introspective about the causes of anti-U.S. terrorism rather than merely adopting the Bush administration's good-versus-"evil doers" dichotomy. The perceptions of U.S. foreign policy by other nations and groups is often very different than those of Americans.

Another response to the U.S. intervention/retaliatory terrorism link is that the United States would be attacked no matter what its foreign policy entailed. That argument makes the stunning assumption that U.S. actions overseas have no consequences and again seems to assume the whoever attacks the United States must be so evil that we need not examine their motives. But even generals (at least the smart ones) try to empathize with their adversaries.

Another way to express this view is to declare that we in the United States are attacked for "who we are" rather than "what we do." Some analysts assert that we are attacked because we are rich, because we are free (President Bush took this line), or because our culture is reviled. Let's examine those lines of argument in turn.

Although the United States is still the richest great power in the world (only Luxembourg is richer on the basis of per capita GDP), talk of that fact in the international media has subsided. Since World War II, prosperity has emerged or reemerged and

spread in Europe, East Asia, and even Latin America. In addition, other nations have per capita incomes higher than the United States. Since most of the world's people and their leaders are not economists, they fail to adjust those high nominal incomes for the high cost of living in those more regulated economies (a purchasing power parity adjustment). That is, the extent of U.S. prosperity compared to other nations is hidden behind misleading income statistics. Finally, the European Union—made up of rich capitalist nations--has a greater GDP than the United States and yet the nations of that grouping are not attacked disproportionately by terrorists.

During the Cold War, Marxist terrorist groups probably attacked U.S. targets, in part, because they represented the capitalist economic system—although those groups were also retaliating for U.S. military interventions to contain communism. At any rate, many of those Marxist groups—funded, supplied, and trained by the Soviet Union—have withered on the vine after the demise of their chief benefactor. The Islamic world is not averse to markets and the sanctity of private property is mentioned in the Koran. Today, few terrorist groups attack the United States solely because it is a rich capitalist nation.

American liberties are the envy of the world. During the last election in Iran—the most active state sponsor of terrorism--even conservative clerics, who despise the United States, admitted that the U.S. constitutional system was a model for the world. As long as the United States does not attempt to democratize countries at gunpoint—as it did in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Haiti—it defies logic to assume that American freedoms would infuriate groups or nations to launch or sponsor dangerous (sometimes even suicidal) terrorist attacks against U.S. targets. Furthermore, since World War II, as with prosperity, democracy has been expanding all over the world. Although the United

States is one of the most free nations on the planet, other nations enjoy such freedoms too.

U.S. culture—most prominently in the form of films and television shows—has worldwide appeal (for example, the most popular show ever broadcast across the Arab world is “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”), but some in more conservative societies fail to appreciate it. But if Osama bin Laden is any indication, even fundamentalist Islamic terrorists do not seem to be attacking the United States because they are infuriated by its “decadent” culture. According to Peter Bergen, a journalist who interviewed bin Laden and wrote the book *Holy War, Inc.*:

In all the tens of thousands of words that bin Laden has uttered on the public record there are some significant omissions: he does not rail against the pernicious effects of Hollywood movies, or against Madonna’s midriff, or against the pornography protected by the U.S. Constitution. Nor does he inveigh against the drug and alcohol culture of the West, or its tolerance for homosexuals. He leaves that kind of material to the Christian fundamentalist Jerry Falwell, who opined that the September 11 attacks were God’s vengeance on Americans for condoning feminism and homosexuality.

If we may judge his silence, bin Laden cares little about such cultural issues.

What he condemns the United States for is simple: its policies in the Middle East.

Those are, to recap briefly: the continued U.S. military presence in Arabia; U.S.

support for Israel; its continued bombing of Iraq; and its support for regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia that bin Laden regards as apostates from Islam.

Bin Laden is at war with the United States, but his is a political war, justified by his own understanding of Islam, directed at the symbols and institutions of American *political* power.<sup>2</sup>

The above intuitive analysis--suggesting that American wealth, freedoms, and culture are not the root cause of anti-U.S. terrorism--seem to be confirmed by polling data. Two recent Zogby polls of Arab and Islamic countries, respectively, show that people in those nations like American technological capabilities, its political system, and its culture but have an unfavorable view of America because of its policies in the Middle East. In a poll of Arab nations, a majority of respondents in Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia—a list of countries from which most of the September 11 hijackers originated—had a positive opinion of “American freedom and democracy”, technological capabilities and culture, but less than 10 percent in each of the countries had a favorable of view of U.S. policy toward Arabs. According to Zogby, the results did not reflect an anti-Western tilt because France, Canada, Japan and Germany all received favorable responses from respondents.<sup>3</sup> (Al Qaeda has only recently started targeting some of those nations because they are allies of the United States in the war on terrorism—bin Laden’s main target has always been the United States.) A Zogby poll of Islamic countries found that majorities of respondents in the nations polled liked American products and culture—especially movies and television (for example, seventy-five percent of Iranians

liked U.S. films and TV)—but more than 70 percent in every country polled disapproved of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Granted, these polls are of the general populations of those nations rather than of the much smaller fundamentalist Islamic communities there, but they dramatically show the universe of opinion in those societies from which Islamic radicals emerge.

And these sentiments are not unique to the Arab and Islamic worlds. In a poll of opinion leaders around the world (media, political and business elite in two dozen nations on five continents), respondents said the America was admired as the land of opportunity and democratic ideals, but a majority polled outside the United States indicated that “U.S. policies and actions in the world” were responsible for the terrorist attacks on September 11. In contrast, not surprisingly, only a few of the American elite polled saw such a relationship.<sup>5</sup> Such divergent results between foreign and American elite indicate how out-of-touch Americans are with the perceptions people of other nations have of U.S. foreign policy.

Even stronger than polling results are empirical data showing the link between a U.S. interventionist foreign policy and retaliatory terrorism against the United States.

### **Evidence Showing the Link Between U.S. Interventions Overseas and Terrorism**

In a study called, “Does U.S. Intervention Overseas Breed Terrorism? The Historical Record,” the author cataloged more than 60 incidents of terrorism against the United States in retaliation for an activist global U.S. foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Only a few examples from that historical record will suffice here.

During the 1980's, during the Reagan administration, the United States was heavily involved in "peacekeeping" activities in the Lebanese civil war. Originally, the United States intended to play a neutral role among the various factions, but then began supporting the Christians against the Moslems by training the Lebanese National Army, ordering U.S. Marine patrols with the Christian forces, and shelling Muslim forces (such mission creep is common in peacekeeping operations and also resulted in a retaliatory attack against U.S. forces in Somalia). In response, Hezbollah, a radical Shiite Islamic group, kidnapped and killed Americans and blew up U.S. diplomatic facilities and the Marine barracks in Lebanon (killing 290 people and wounding 200 more). After the United States withdrew its forces from Lebanon, Hezbollah's attacks against U.S. targets attenuated.

When the Reagan administration took office in 1981, Moammar Qaddafi, the leader of Libya, was sponsoring terrorist attacks against Western European nations. Reagan, believing Qaddafi did the bidding of the Soviet Union, looked for ways to get rid of him or, failing that, to isolate him. In August of 1981, during war games in the Mediterranean Sea, the U.S. attempted to provoke Qaddafi by sending U.S. forces into claimed Libyan territorial waters and airspace. U.S. jets entered the Gulf of Sidra and shot down two Libyan aircraft that intercepted them. In late March 1986, a large U.S. naval armada sailed into the Gulf of Sidra and was predictably attacked with missiles by Qaddafi. U.S. forces destroyed the missile site and three naval craft. The latter action caused Qaddafi to retaliate on April 5, 1986 by bombing the La Belle nightclub in Berlin, which was frequented by Americans. The bombing, in turn, led to American air strikes on April 15, 1986 on Tripoli and Benghazi that were apparently designed to kill Qaddafi.



Contrary to conventional wisdom, this 1986 U.S. air raid did not deter Qaddafi from terrorist attacks. Beginning in April 1986, State Department analysts linked Libyan agents to an average of one attack per month against U.S. targets. The author has documented at least eight such attacks, including the disastrous Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland that killed 200 Americans in December 1988. In fact, U.S. military action had a counterproductive effect: before U.S. military provocations against Qaddafi, he was sponsoring attacks against Western European nations, but afterwards he went underground and began secretly attacking U.S. targets. As President George H.W. Bush adopted a less confrontational policy toward Libya than Reagan, Qaddafi's sponsored attacks against U.S. targets diminished as the 1980's ended.

According to the U.S. State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, since the end of the Cold War, by far the most incidents (565) of international terrorism occurred in 1991.<sup>7</sup> Not coincidentally, that was the year of the Gulf War. And a substantial number of the terrorist attacks that year (120) occurred from mid-January to late February during which the war was fought (compared to only 17 during the same period the year before).<sup>8</sup> Analysts of terrorism have noted that those incidents were "freelance" operations in solidarity with Iraq, but not sponsored by it.

The U.S. government should expect the same spike in terrorism after a second war with Iraq, which would be the second attack against an Islamic nation in a short period of time. According to Mike Boettcher of CNN, intelligence sources say that Hezbollah is directing activities of terrorists in South America and is planning to strike U.S. and Israeli targets in the Western Hemisphere if the United States launches a war against Iraq or if Israel is drawn into the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in an audiotape recently

released, Osama bin Laden threatened more terrorist attacks if the United States went to war against Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

If the statements of terrorists like bin Laden, polling data from Arab and Islamic countries, and empirical data are unconvincing to the foreign policy establishment about the close relationship between U.S. interventionism and retaliatory terrorism, then perhaps direct admissions of the link by U.S. officials should be.

### **U.S. Government Admits the Link Between U.S. Interventionism and Terrorism**

In 1997, before al Qaeda's attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa, the U.S.S. Cole, and the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the Defense Science Board--a panel of experts that advises the Secretary of Defense--noted the link between an activist American foreign policy terrorism against the United States:

As part of its global position, the United States is called upon frequently to respond to international causes and deploy forces around the world. America's position in the world invites attack simply because of its presence. *Historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States.*<sup>11</sup>

Even U.S. officials at the highest levels have admitted this link. In a 1998 radio address justifying cruise missile strikes on Afghanistan and Sudan in response to al

Qaeda's attacks on the embassies in Africa, President Bill Clinton acknowledged as much, but a positive spin on it:

Americans are targets of terrorism in part because we have unique leadership responsibilities in the world, because we act to advance peace and democracy, and because we stand united against terrorism.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, the Bush administration, in its July 2002 *National Strategy for Homeland Security* noted the relationship between the American "strategy of global presence and engagement" and retaliatory terrorism, but then advocated homeland security measures to make continuation of the global engagement strategy safer.

For more than six decades, America has sought to protect its own sovereignty and independence through a strategy of global presence and engagement. In doing so, America has helped many other countries and peoples advance along the path of democracy, open markets, individual liberty, and peace with their neighbors. Yet there are those who oppose America's role in the world, and who are willing to use violence against us and our friends. Our great power leaves these enemies with few conventional options for doing us harm. One such option is to take advantage of our freedom and openness by secretly inserting terrorists into our country to attack our homeland. Homeland security seeks to deny this avenue of attack to our enemies and thus to provide a secure foundation for America's ongoing global engagement.<sup>13</sup>

The implications of this statement are astounding: what is euphemistically called a policy of “global presence and engagement” has become an end in itself. Even more shocking, because U.S. government officials readily admit that there will be lapses in intelligence to warn of terrorist attacks and failures in homeland security to foil them, the American people are being asked to “duck and cover” at home so that the U.S. foreign policy community can flex the muscles of a superpower abroad. And the U.S. homeland is very vulnerable to attack and is the superpower’s Achilles’ heel. In one of the largest free societies in the world, protecting 7,500 miles of land border (plus thousands of miles of coast), 500 of the highest skyscrapers, more than 300 major commercial stadiums, 4,000 municipal water treatment plants, almost 6 million airline flights per year, more than 100 nuclear reactors, more than 3,000 shopping malls, more than a half a million bridges, and almost 100,000 schools is a daunting task on which the U.S. government can make only marginal progress. So even if the United States can best promote democracy, free markets, individual liberty and regional peace overseas at gunpoint (a dubious proposition for a republic), should U.S. citizens and territory be endangered to do so? The trade off becomes even worse if terrorists somehow acquire weapons of mass destruction.

### **An Interventionist U.S. Foreign Policy Is Now Out-of-Date and Dangerous**

During the Cold War, the United States kept a significant military presence overseas and undertook interventions worldwide, either indirectly or through surrogates, to contain a rival Soviet superpower. The advantages of this policy were then more

pronounced--stopping Soviet inroads, particularly in Western Europe, which is a center of technology and economic power that, in Soviet hands, could have been turned against the United States. And the disadvantages were manageable--despite the large arsenals of nuclear weapons pointed at each other, the superpowers never threatened each other's core interests and jockeyed for advantage only on the periphery.

Yet the Cold War ended and U.S. foreign policy remained on autopilot, with the United States intervening to stabilize even remote non-strategic backwaters, such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Haiti. But after the demise of the Soviet superpower rival, the advantages of undertaking such interventions overseas declined precipitously and the dangers—as demonstrated by the attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa, the U.S.S. Cole and the World Trade Center and Pentagon—have increased exponentially. If a terrorist group with ill-will toward the United States—for example, al Qaeda—gets a weapon of mass destruction, the dangers of U.S. foreign policy could become catastrophic.

Thus, the out-dated, but still extant, American policy of interventionism may be a foreign policy, but it is not a national security policy. Analysts from across the political spectrum would probably agree that the first responsibility of any government is to provide security for its people and territory. Yet American policy—which the U.S. foreign policy establishment has a vested interest in continuing—does just the opposite. It is not just that the United States spends too much time and effort defending and “stabilizing” other nations and not enough on defending its own borders. The situation is worse than that. Providing security and stability around the world makes the United States a lightning rod for terrorism—perhaps even cataclysmic terrorism with weapons of mass destruction. Richard Betts of the Council on Foreign Relations best summarized the

consequences of being the world's policeman and armed social worker, "American activism to guarantee international stability is, paradoxically, the prime source of American vulnerability." He added, "Today, as the only nation acting to police areas outside its own region, the United States makes itself a target for states or groups whose aspirations are frustrated by U.S. power."<sup>14</sup>

Yet even after the horrific wake-up call on September 11, U.S. policymakers learned the wrong lesson. Instead of shrinking the U.S. defense perimeter in a post-Cold War world largely devoid of threats from other great powers, the Bush administration is expanding it even past the overextended boundaries of the first Bush and Clinton administrations. Despite the end of the Cold War, the first Bush administration kept all of the Cold War alliances intact. The Clinton administration expanded the NATO alliance, became involved in southeastern Europe--a region not regarded as strategic during the Cold War--and enhanced the U.S.-Japanese alliance forged during the Cold War. Initially, the second Bush administration made noises about pursuing "a more humble foreign policy" and getting U.S. forces out of the Balkans, but that policy took a 180 degree turn in the wake of the September 11 attacks. George W. Bush used the war on terrorism to establish "temporary" U.S. military bases in Central Asian states formerly in the Soviet Union (more than 50 years ago, the U.S. government also promised that the U.S. military presence in Europe would only be temporary); to renew its tattered security relationship with the Philippines by helping the Philippine government hunt for a small, ragtag criminal group with only tangential links to al Qaeda; and to insert U.S. special forces into Georgia—under the ostensible mission of battling al Qaeda foot soldiers assisting the Chechens—to keep the Russians from intervening in their old sphere of

influence. Also, the Bush administration has tightened the informal U.S. defense commitment to Taiwan and will undertake an ambitious further expansion of NATO throughout Eastern Europe.

Finally, the Bush administration has expanded its ongoing war on al Qaeda to other terrorist groups that do not focus their attacks on the United States and the “axis of evil” (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea) and states trying to obtain weapons of mass destruction. The administration has imposed financial sanctions and is conducting covert operations against terrorist groups that do not focus their efforts on U.S. targets—for example, Hezbollah and Hamas. Partially in response to such U.S. efforts, Hezbollah is now apparently plotting attacks on U.S. targets in the western hemisphere after any U.S. invasion of Iraq. Even though the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has not been able to link Iraq with the attacks on September 11, the administration is spoiling for a fight with Saddam Hussein because of fears that the threat he poses will grow in the future. The administration’s fear seems to be that he would use weapons of mass destruction against America or give them to terrorists, who would in turn attack the United States. But Saddam was deterred from using biological and chemical weapons during the Gulf War by the possibility of U.S. or Israeli nuclear retaliation, and he has not given such weapons to the Palestinian terrorist groups he supports (and which do not focus their attacks on U.S. targets).

The preventative U.S. Iraq policy fits into the administration’s new National Security Strategy of primacy and prevention (not preemption, as advertised). That strategy aims to maintain bonecrushing military superiority to dissuade up-and-coming powers (for example, China) from challenging the United States. The strategy also plans

to prevent any incipient threats from forming (for example, an Iraqi nuclear capability). The document actually says that “our best defense is a good offense.” Even though the United States has a lot of resources, the strategy is flawed because it is too ambitious (according to the Pentagon, posing a threat to the United States or its allies, 12 countries have nuclear programs, 13 have biological weapons, 16 have chemical weapons and 28 have ballistic missiles<sup>15</sup>), will eventually cause a potentially fatal overextension (the United States accounts for 37 percent of the world’s defense expenditures, but only 31 percent of its GDP<sup>16</sup>), and, most importantly, will undermine U.S. security rather than enhance it by causing a rash of potentially catastrophic (in the number of casualties, physical damage, and erosion of civil liberties) terrorist acts on the U.S. homeland.

### **The Best Defense Is to Give No Unnecessary Offense**

When attacked, the United States must take robust military action to crush the opponent that has perpetrated the act, but not against every group or nation on the planet that opposes U.S. policy or is deemed an “evil doer.” Flailing around like Don Quixote, the Bush administration, by attacking other terrorist groups that do not focus their attacks on the United States (such as Hezbollah or Hamas) and unrelated rogue nations with weapons of mass destruction (particularly a state in which Islam is the principle religion), is merely making unnecessary enemies and falling into Osama bin Laden’s trap. A standard tactic for terrorist and guerrilla groups is to attack a stronger party and hope for an overreaction to act as a recruiting poster for their cause. An attack on Iraq (coming after an attack on the Islamic nation of Afghanistan) will merely throw kerosene on the



flames of hatred toward the United States in the Islamic world. More fundamentalist Muslims will flock to bin Laden's cause and take up terrorism against the United States.

In particular, as a result of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the fundamentalist party in Pakistan, running an anti-American campaign, recently won two out of four provinces in the last election. Because the U.S. war in Afghanistan was a necessary one, nothing much cannot be done about unfavorable development. But the United States can avoid making it worse by invading Iraq. If the newly strengthened fundamentalists could get control of a Pakistani government that already has nuclear weapons—which Iraq probably does not—that would indeed be a dangerous development. Pakistan, despite its help in the U.S. war in Afghanistan, may be a much more dangerous nation than Iraq.

In general, the United States should aggressively fight al Qaeda while keeping collateral damage to a minimum. The United States should work with cooperative governments to assist them in gathering intelligence on al Qaeda and arresting or eradicating such terrorist cells in their countries. If some countries fail to cooperate, military action should be very focused and undertaken only as a last resort. The fight against al Qaeda should be deep and narrow. Widening the war to unrelated terrorist groups that do not focus their attacks on the United States and their sponsoring nations or “rogue” states seeking or possessing weapons of mass destruction merely dilutes the effort against al Qaeda. Although the United States should cooperate in the intelligence and law enforcement realms with nations combating such unrelated terrorist groups, taking military or covert action (which the United States is already doing) against them only makes new enemies that could begin striking U.S. targets. U.S. military and covert

action should be reserved only for terrorist groups that focus their attacks on the United States, with a priority being placed on crushing al Qaeda.

Although the United States has enough military forces to fight al Qaeda and Iraq simultaneously, critical special operations forces would be spread too thin. In addition, the attention of the Bush administration, which admirably likes to focus on one policy issue at a time, would be focused on the wrong enemy at a time when further al Qaeda attacks may be imminent. Finally, attacking Iraq would damage valuable cooperation with the United States in intelligence and law enforcement by other Arab and Islamic nations. That cooperation is so vital in the hunt for al Qaeda members because the United States is deficient in human intelligence in those parts of the world.

After September 11, attacking Iraq is like Franklin Roosevelt deciding, subsequent to the Japanese strike on Pearl Harbor, to attack the French presence in East Asia and leave the Japanese threat until later. The United States must eradicate the enemy at the gates and not get sidetracked on unrelated issues that will only exacerbate and inflame the existing terrorist threat.

For the longer term—that is, after al Qaeda is eradicated—U.S. policymakers and the American public must do some soul searching about whether the grandiose role of world domination baldly stated in the new U.S. security strategy is viable and makes the nation and its people safer. The extended U.S. defense perimeter—which had some utility against a nation-state competitor, such as the Soviet Union—was easily penetrated by nimble terrorists, whose attack on September 11 knew no front lines. The military’s strategy against conventional powers—“the best defense is a good offense”—does not work against terrorists. The Bush administration should learn from Israel’s overreaction

to Palestinian suicide bombers that an offensive strategy will likely fail by fueling the terrorist movement instead of stamping it out. Thus, the Bush administration should run a narrow war against only al Qaeda and, in the future, use military action overseas only as a last resort when U.S. vital interests--also construed narrowly--are at stake.

### **Is a Policy of Military Restraint One of Appeasement or Isolationism?**

By taking a lower military profile overseas is a superpower knuckling under to the terrorists and rogue states of the world? Hardly. By crushing al Qaeda, no one can say that the United States does not rigorously defend itself against attackers. In fact, by excessively responding to the September 11 attacks, the United States is playing into the hands of the terrorists. But unnecessary aggravation of the terrorist threat aside, the United States should take a more restrained approach to security for its other reasons—as noted before, America is overextended and may eventually go the way of the Soviet Union and the British Empire and lose its superpower status. With two great oceans as moats and two weak and friendly neighbors, the United States is virtually immune from a conventional invasion. It can afford to construe its interests in the world narrowly. Instead of providing security for the world while its rich allies funnel money into economies that could eventually overtake that of the United States (in the 1800s, the United States let the British navy provide security while the U.S. economy eventually surpassed that of the mother country), the United States can be the second line of defense and allow those allies to take the lead in providing security for their respective regions.

This is the best way to ensure that the United States will have the continued economic success needed to be a superpower well into the future.

But in an increasingly interdependent world could the policy of military restraint be labeled “isolationist?” As transportation and communication continue to improve, in some respects, the world is becoming more interdependent. The United States should break down barriers to trade, immigration, and cultural and diplomatic exchange. In the military realm, however, the world is becoming less interdependent. Cross-border aggression has been declining for decades—more than 90 percent of the wars around the globe are within countries and thus much less likely to affect U.S. vital interests. One reason for the decline in conflicts between nations may be the advent of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Such weapons make it suicidal to invade another nation. Thus, the United States, with by far the most potent nuclear arsenal on the planet, is even more immune from attack.

The lone exception to this immunity—as demonstrated dramatically on September 11, 2001—are radical terrorist groups whose attacks may be almost impossible even for a superpower to deter, stop, or mitigate (in the case of weapons of mass destruction). So shouldn't the United States take a proactive military approach to fixing failed states, which provide sanctuaries for terrorists? First, failed states are not the cause of terrorism against the United States. Terrorists may use failed states as sanctuaries, but they would not attack America in the first place if the United States did not have an interventionist foreign policy. In fact, U.S. meddling in failed states generates the animosity around the world that leads to terrorism. For example, U.S. interventions in the failed states of Lebanon in the 1980's and Somalia in the early 1990's

caused retaliatory terrorist attacks against U.S. targets and a perception that the United States hates Muslims. Second, it is very difficult for outsiders to come in and fix the economy and society in failed states. The United States has limited funds and an attention span to match. Even after intervening militarily, the United States failed to fix Lebanon, Somalia, and Haiti and is currently failing in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Opponents of a policy of a military restraint like the label “isolationist” because it instantly discredits an otherwise smart policy. Many in the U.S. foreign policy establishment believe that if the United States does not police the world, chaos will ensue. History does not bear this out.

### **Conclusion**

The founders of the republic believed that if the United States stayed out of the affairs of the world’s great powers, they would be more likely to stay out of America. That strategy was largely successful for 170 years by allowing the United States to avoid many costly wars and foreign entanglements and grow into an economic colossus. Beginning in 1947, the Cold War rivalry properly changed America’s traditional foreign policy. Yet the Cold War has been over for more than a decade, but the anomalous interventionist U.S. foreign policy of that 40-year period has become an addiction—and a more acute one after the events of September 11. But careful analysis of a post-September 11 world indicates that the pendulum should swing back toward the founders’ wise policy of military restraint. Far from being out of date in the modern world, the founders’ vision for the restrained foreign policy of a republic is never more relevant.

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- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 2002), pp. 171, 176.
- <sup>2</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), p. 222. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>3</sup> Polling data reported in Karen DeYoung, "Poll Finds Arabs Dislike U.S. Based on Policies It Pursues: American Freedoms, Values Viewed Favorably, Survey Says," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2002, p. A13.
- <sup>4</sup> Polling data reported in Sue Fleming, "Poll: Foreigners Like U.S. Movies, Not Mideast Policy," *Reuters*, April 11, 2002, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Polling data reported in Keith B. Richburg, "Divergent Views of U.S. Role In World: 'Elite' Abroad Tie Sept. 11 to Policies," *Washington Post*, December 21, 2001, p. A34.
- <sup>6</sup> Ivan Eland, "Does U.S. Intervention Overseas Breed Terrorism?: The Historical Record," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 50, December 17, 1998.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, p. 171.
- <sup>8</sup> Eland, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>9</sup> Mike Boettcher, "South America's 'Tri-Border' Back on Terrorism Radar," CNN, November 7, 2002, [cnn.com/world](http://cnn.com/world)
- <sup>10</sup> Bin Laden's words are cited in Dan Eggen and Glenn Kessler, "Signs of Terror Said to Increase: Officials Say Tape, 'Chatter' Indicate Plans for Attacks," *Washington Post*, November 11, 2002, p. A1.
- <sup>11</sup> Defense Science Board, *The Defense Science Board 1997 Summer Study Task Force on DoD Response to Transnational Threats* (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, October 1997), vol. 1, Final Report, p. 15. Emphasis added.
- <sup>12</sup> White House, "Radio Address by the President to the Nation," August 8, 1998.
- <sup>13</sup> White House, *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (Washington: Office of Homeland Security, July 2002), p. 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January-February 1998), p. 28.
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002, p. 5.
- <sup>16</sup> International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2002-2003* (London: IISS, 2002), pp. 243-329.