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Paris, Iraq, and Abu Ghraib

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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Consider the following lead paragraph from a front-page article in yesterday's *New York Times* entitled "From Amateur to Ruthless Jihadist in France":

In the year after the United States' invasion of Iraq, a 22-year-old pizza delivery man here couldn't take it anymore. Sickened by images of American soldiers humiliating Muslims at the Abu Ghraib prison, he made plans to go fight United States forces. He studied a virtual AK-47 on a website. Then he took lessons from a man, using a hand-drawn picture of a gun.

The sentence was referring to Cherif Kouachi, one of the people who committed the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris.

Do you see anything about hating France or the United States because of its freedom and values in that sentence?

Or do you see the inevitable outcome of empire and interventionism?

The only thing that surprises me about the Paris attacks is that people are surprised about them. I just don't get it. How can anyone be surprised over this sort of thing, after decades of death, destruction, torture, maiming, humiliation, and partnerships with dictatorial regimes on the part of the United States, France, and other members of "coalitions of the willing" put together by the U.S. government as part of its imperialist and interventionist campaign in the Middle East and Afghanistan?

Let's not ignore the obvious — they didn't attack Switzerland, whose mind-your-own-business, anti-imperialist, anti-interventionist foreign policy mirrors the type of foreign policy that the United States had for the first 100 years of our nation's history.

Prior to the 9/11 attacks, The Future of Freedom Foundation was publishing articles warning about the likelihood of a major terrorist attack on American soil. We weren't the only ones. Most notable was Chalmers Johnson in his book *Blowback: the Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, which was published prior to the 9/11 attacks.

We weren't Nostradamuses or rocket scientists. We were just pointing out the obvious: that if the U.S. government continued maintaining military forces in the Middle East, continued killing countless people, especially children, with the sanctions against Iraq, and continued foreign aid to the Israeli government, there would be some people who would become so angry and full of rage that they would retaliate with terrorist attacks.

Isn't that just logical?

And we had evidence to support what we were saying. There was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 — eight full years before the 9/11 attacks. One of the terrorists in that attack specifically had told the federal judge who was sentencing him that he had committed the attack out of anger and rage resulting from U.S. foreign policy, including the killing of Iraqi children from the sanctions. There were also the terrorist attacks on the USS Cole and the U.S. Embassies in East Africa motivated by the same things.

But the attitude of U.S. officials was: We are the U.S. national-security state and the world's sole remaining empire. We have the authority and the power to go wherever we want, including the Middle East, and to bend any recalcitrant regime to our will, even replacing it in a regime-change operation that entails killing and destroying whoever and whatever stand in our way.

After all, don't forget that the Cold War was over. If the Cold War-era national-security state was to continue in existence, it would need something to do. What better way to ensure longevity and the continuation of ever-increasing revenues than going into the Middle East and stirring up hornets' nests that would end up producing a perpetual war on terrorism, one that will be much more lucrative and long-lasting than even the 45-year-long war on communism?

After the 9/11 attacks, we heard the same nonsense coming out of the mouths of U.S. officials that we hear coming out of the mouths of French officials. That the terrorists just hate us for our freedom and values. And how the government now needs to clamp down, reluctantly of course, to defend ourselves from the terrorists.

After the 9/11 attacks, here at FFF we continued to maintain that doubling down with more imperialism and more interventionism in response to those attacks would be the worst thing that could happen to the United States. The U.S. government would effectively become a perpetual terrorist-producing machine. That's precisely what the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the death and destruction within those two nations have done. Every time they killed, maimed, abused, or humiliated one person, ten more people were motivated to join the ranks of the terrorists.

The root of all this? Empire and intervention. If it hadn't been for empire and intervention, there would be a lot of dead people who would still be alive today, including U.S. soldiers, countless people in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East and Afghanistan, and the people at Charlie Hebdo.

One of the worst parts of all this was that every single person killed, tortured, abused, or maimed in Iraq, including every U.S. prisoner at Abu Ghraib, had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks or with any other attack on the United States. In the Iraq War, which got Cherif Kouachi so angry, the U.S. government was the aggressor and Iraq was the defending nation.

Yesterday, at my church parishioners were asked to pray for an end to terrorism. That's like praying that thunder will no longer follow lightning. Or like praying that people who jump off a 50-story building won't die.

Terrorism — at least anti-American terrorism — comes with empire and intervention just as thunder follows lightning and death follows jumping off a 50-story building.

If American Christians want to stop terrorism, the more appropriate prayer is: We pray that our government bring all its troops home and discharge them, dismantle its Cold War-era national-security state apparatus that has been grafted onto our governmental structure, and end its foreign policy of interventionism.

That's the only way to end anti-American terrorism and restore a sense of peace, prosperity, and harmony to society. Otherwise, be prepared for more of the same, including right here in the United States.