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Fight Terrorism Through Nonintervention, Not War!

By James C. Wilson
November 27, 2015

In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and Kenya, CNN Senior White House Correspondent Jim Acosta asked Barack Obama, “Why can’t we take out these bastards?” Acosta echoes many Americans who are hungry for revenge, and favor further military intervention in the Middle East.

Ironically, those wishing to exact revenge with an invasion of Iraq and Syria have a few questions to answer themselves: How many American lives are you willing to sacrifice to exact your revenge? How many foreign civilians are you willing to kill? And how much money forcibly taken from American taxpayers are you willing to put towards this cause? The last American military adventure in Iraq cost \$1.7 trillion according to Watson Institute of International Studies at Brown University, not counting the future cost associated with veterans’ health care, as well as lost economic opportunity. The true financial cost of the last Iraqi misadventure is closer to \$6 trillion. A larger invasion would involve even more economic cost, not to mention a higher death toll.

Speaking of which, the Obama administration’s drone bombing program is not winning the US friends abroad. Those nostalgic for World War II should remember that the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo and the resulting civilian deaths are among the US’s ugliest moments, as are the nuclear attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Let’s not try and relive them. In addition to the civilian deaths, there is the prospect of maintaining an on-the-ground US troop presence for an

indefinite amount of time until the occupied area is secured. The previous US occupation of Iraq lasted a decade and failed to prevent the rise of a new regime worse than the one it overthrew. Government-created power vacuums in volatile regions are likely to be filled with newly radicalized coercive regimes. Of the only to prevent the vacuum is endless occupation. And as we've learned, any prolonged occupation runs the risk of being discontinued when the population and the political class tire of it and install new leadership less dedicated to the cause.

Allowing terrorist attacks to instigate a major war would be giving the terrorists what they want. The same can be said for refusing to accept those seeking refuge from the very terrorist group claiming credit for the attacks. ISIS would love nothing more than to see their victims unable to find safe-harbor abroad. Sadly, so-called libertarian Rand Paul lost much of his remaining credibility by being on the wrong side of this issue. Closing our borders to those in need and turning the US into a police state only rewards terrorism. One cannot help but be reminded of Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, who the US turned away during the 1930s. If anything we should be giving people victimized by autocratic regimes freedom to vote with their feet by moving away and experiencing a freer society.

Global terrorist networks are not like governments that can be overthrown by killing a head-of-state or taking a capital city. They lack the finite boundaries of states; thus, the only way to fight them is to undermine the ideology that drives them. The best way to do this is to expose more people to better opportunities and examples, and by no longer creating enemies abroad through violent foreign intervention. Military intervention only invites and encourages terrorist attacks by making the anger that drives them stronger.