

What Can We Do About Terrorism?

by Dr. Robert M. Bowman, Lt. Col., USAF, ret.

A few years ago, terrorists destroyed two U.S. embassies. President Clinton retaliated against suspected facilities of Osama bin Laden. In his television address, the President told the American people that we were the targets of terrorism because we stood for democracy, freedom, and human rights in the world.

On that occasion, I wrote: "Tell people the truth, Mr. President ... about terrorism, not about poor Monica. If your lies about terrorism go unchallenged, then the terror war you have unleashed will likely continue until it destroys us.

"The threat of nuclear terrorism is closing in upon us. Chemical terrorism is at hand, and biological terrorism is a future danger. None of our thousands of nuclear weapons can protect us from these threats. These idols of plutonium, titanium, and steel are impotent. Our worship of them for over five decades has not brought us security, only greater danger. No 'Star Wars' system ... no matter how technically advanced, no matter how many trillions of dollars was poured into it ... can protect us from even a single terrorist bomb. Not one weapon in our vast arsenal can shield us from a nuclear weapon delivered in a sailboat or a Piper Cub or a suitcase or a Ryder rental truck. Not a penny of the 273 billion dollars a year we spend on so-called defense can actually defend us against a terrorist bomb. Nothing in our enormous military establishment can actually give us one whit of security. That is a military fact.

"Mr. President, you did not tell the American people the truth about why we are the targets of terrorism. You said that we are the target because we stand for democracy, freedom, and human rights in the world. Baloney! We are the target of terrorists because we stand for dictatorship, bondage, and human exploitation in the world. We are the target of terrorists because we are hated. And we are hated because our government has done hateful things.

"In how many countries have we deposed popularly elected leaders and replaced them with puppet military dictators who were willing to sell out their own people to American multinational corporations?

"We did it in Iran when we deposed Mossadegh because he wanted to nationalize the oil industry. We replaced him with the Shah, and trained, armed, and paid his hated Savak national guard, which enslaved and brutalized the people of Iran. All to protect the financial interests of our oil companies. Is it any wonder there are people in Iran who hate us?

"We did it in Chile when we deposed Allende, democratically elected by the people to introduce socialism. We replaced him with the brutal right-wing military dictator, General Pinochet. Chile has still not recovered.

"We did it in Vietnam when we thwarted democratic elections in the South which would have united the country under Ho Chi Minh. We replaced him with a series of ineffectual puppet crooks who invited us to come in and slaughter their people — and we did. (I flew 101 combat missions in that war which you properly opposed.)

"We did it in Iraq, where we killed a quarter of a million civilians in a failed attempt to topple Saddam Hussein, and where we have killed a million since then with our sanctions. About half of these innocent victims have been children under the age of five.

"And, of course, how many times have we done it in Nicaragua and all the other banana republics of Latin America? Time after time we have ousted popular leaders who wanted the riches of the land to be shared by the people who worked it. We replaced them with murderous tyrants who would sell out and control their own people so that the wealth of the land could be taken out by Domino Sugar, the United Fruit Company, Folgers, and Chiquita Banana.

"In country after country, our government has thwarted democracy, stifled freedom, and trampled human rights. *That's* why we are hated around the world. And *that's* why we are the target of terrorists.

"People in Canada enjoy better democracy, more freedom, and greater human rights than we do. So do the people of Norway and Sweden. Have you heard of Canadian embassies being bombed? Or Norwegian embassies? Or Swedish embassies. No.

"We are not hated because we practice democracy, freedom, and human rights. We are hated because our government denies these things to people in third world countries whose resources are coveted by our multinational corporations. And that hatred we have sown has come back to haunt us in the form of terrorism — and in the future, nuclear terrorism.

"Once the truth about why the threat exists is understood, the solution becomes obvious. We must change our government's ways.

"Instead of sending our sons and daughters around the world to kill Arabs so the oil companies can sell the oil under their sand, we must send them to rebuild their infrastructure, supply clean water, and feed starving children.

"Instead of continuing to kill thousands of Iraqi children every day with our sanctions, we must help them rebuild their electric powerplants, their water treatment facilities, their hospitals — all the things we destroyed in our war against them and prevented them from rebuilding with our sanctions.

"Instead of seeking to be king of the hill, we must become a responsible member of the family of nations. Instead of stationing hundreds of thousands of troops around the world to protect the financial interests of our multinational corporations, we must bring them home and expand the Peace Corps.

"Instead of training terrorists and death squads in the techniques of torture and assassination, we must close the School of the Americas (no matter what name they use). Instead of supporting military dictatorships, we must support true democracy — the right of the people to choose their own leaders. Instead of supporting insurrection, destabilization, assassination, and terror around the world, we must abolish the CIA and give the money to relief agencies.

"In short, we do good instead of evil. We become the good guys, once again. The threat of terrorism would vanish. That is the truth, Mr. President. That is what the American people need to hear. We are good people. We only need to be told the truth and given the vision. You can do it, Mr. President. Stop the killing. Stop the justifying. Stop the retaliating. Put people first. Tell them the truth."

Needless to say, he didn't ... and neither has George W. Bush. Well, the seeds our policies have planted have borne their bitter fruit. The World Trade Center is gone. The Pentagon is

damaged. And thousands of Americans have died. Almost every TV pundit is crying for massive military retaliation against whoever might have done it (assumedly the same Osama bin Laden) and against whoever harbors or aids the terrorists (most notably the Taliban government of Afghanistan). Steve Dunleavy of the New York Post screams "Kill the bastards! Train assassins, hire mercenaries, put a couple of million bucks up for bounty hunters to get them dead or alive, preferably dead. As for cities or countries that host these worms, bomb them into basketball courts." It's tempting to agree, but retaliation hasn't rid us of the problem in the past, and won't this time.

By far the world's best anti-terrorist apparatus is Israel's. Measured in military terms, it has been phenomenally successful. Yet Israel is still the primary target of terrorists and suffers more attacks than all other nations combined. If retaliation worked, Israelis would be the world's most secure people.

Only one thing has ever ended a terrorist campaign -- denying the terrorist organization the support of the larger community it represents. And the only way to do that is to listen to and alleviate the legitimate grievances of the people. If indeed Osama bin Laden was behind the four hijackings and subsequent carnage, that means addressing the concerns of the Arabs and Muslims in general and of the Palestinians in particular. It does NOT mean abandoning Israel. But it may very well mean withdrawing all financial and military support until they abandon the settlements in occupied territory and comply with their duty to return to 1967 borders. It may also mean allowing Arab countries to have leaders of their own choosing, not hand-picked, CIA-installed dictators willing to cooperate with Western oil companies.

Chester Gillings has said it very well: "How do we fight back against bin Laden? The first thing we must ask ourselves is what is it we hope to achieve -- security or revenge? The two are mutually exclusive; seek revenge and we WILL reduce our security. If it is security we seek, then we must begin to answer the tough questions -- what are the grievances of the Palestinians and the Arab world against the United States, and what is our real culpability for those grievances? Where we find legitimate culpability, we must be prepared to cure the grievance wherever possible. Where we cannot find culpability or a cure, we must communicate honestly our positions directly to the Arab people. In short, our best course of action is to remove ourselves as a combatant in the disputes of the region."

To kill bin Laden now would be to make him an eternal martyr. Thousands would rise up to take his place. In another year, we would face another round of terrorism, probably much worse even than this one.

The vast majority of Arabs and Muslims are good, peaceful people. But enough of them, in their desperation and anger and fear, have turned first to Arafat and now to bin Laden to relieve their misery. Remove the desperation, give them some hope, and support for terrorism will evaporate. At that point bin Laden will be forced to abandon terrorism (as has Arafat) or be treated like a common criminal. Either way, he and his money cease to be a threat. We CAN have security ... or we can have revenge. We cannot have both.

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