

WE HAVE FOUND THE TERRORIST . . . THE TERRORIST IS U.S.

GUEST EDITORIAL/COLUMN

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Campaign rhetoric has left a disturbing silence around two central issues regarding terrorism, Iraq, and the future of our country. The first is the issue of corporate greed, abuse of power, and its role in the unsettling elements of our Iraq involvement. That's a story for another time.

But the second issue, our own role in the 9/11 bombings and terrorism in general, is crucial for us to address now. We've comfortably defined ourselves as "victims" in 9/11. Someone else did something bad to us. But things like 9/11 don't happen in a vacuum. People give their lives in suicide-bombing from desperation, not for fun. It's essential we ask what *our* role was in the underlying injustice and problems leading to that desperation.

Since 2001, our public officials have incessantly used the word terrorism, pointing to small or non-existent actions of others. What is the whole picture? A couple of thousand people in America were killed on 9/11 (most of them *foreign* nationals, actually, working in the WTC). But over the previous ten years, 100,000 children died in unarmed Iraq of radiation poisoning from American use of "depleted" uranium bullets in the Gulf War. There was an antidote, but the U.S. (that's us) refused to allow its sale to Iraq. Which was the larger crime?

I think we would consider it an act of terrorism if we were an unarmed country and someone, year after year, flew planes over us, blew up our cities' water treatment plants causing disease epidemics, and refused to allow us to import chlorine to treat our drinking water. That we also did to Iraq.

Would you consider it an act of terrorism if we were a small country and someone, possessing a huge arsenal of atomic weapons, threatened (and then did) invade us, falsely claiming that WE had Weapons of Mass Destruction? With us having incinerated the civilian population of Dresden, Germany and Tokyo, Japan with fire-bombing in WWII, then dropping atomic bombs on the civilian population of two cities in Japan, and now having invaded Iraq, would threatening to do likewise to other countries (Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Libya for example) be considered an act of terrorism? It would be to me. I also consider it an act of terrorism by our own government when it bombards us incessantly with false claims of "terrorist threats" to keep us in fear and willing to unquestioningly do their bidding.

WE trained Osama bin Laden. And many others. Saddam was a "client" of the U.S. We turned the other eye, and even supplied materials for biological weapons - as long as he was doing our bidding.

Torture, sadistic behavior, murder and rape of uncharged and innocent prisoners is unacceptable behavior and a form of terrorism, period. It doesn't matter if it "isn't as bad as what Saddam has done." When this occurs under our command in Iraq, Afghanistan, in Guantanamo, and to our own children in Florida legally protesting trade agreements that destroy our democratic rights, it cannot be excused as "the aberrant behavior of a few". To not even be outraged by such actions represents a twisting of our minds by the abusive patterns towards others we have accepted and acquiesced in.

In the overall balance, we may be forced to conclude that our own actions - often at a distance, and performed by others - have persistently been acts of terrorism far outweighing the actions of those "terrorists" toward which we point our fingers. We should not accept their behavior, but also not our own. We should be strong enough to admit error and change.

And somewhere in all this, the vital democratic elements of due process, of innocence until proven guilty, of fair and impartial justice through an independent judiciary have similarly vanished. We have no right to condemn a person, a city, or a nation to death based only on one person (our government) 's (frequently proven false) claims. Yet we have. On 9/11, we first felt ourselves what others have felt from our actions. We don't need or want a world filled with the grief and fear that we now have experienced ourselves. There is nothing worth that cost.

Whatever the roots, whatever the rights and wrongs, whoever did what, it is fatal to democracy both in our country and in the world to act unilaterally, to act without due process, to force involuntary submission to our desires. It turns the whole world against us. Of course. But worse, it corrupts our souls, turning us into sick and twisted caricatures of the open and loving beings we were born.

If freedom and democracy are to continue, here or in the world, WE, as well as others, must change our actions. WE must see how *we* have contributed to or caused strife. WE must allow and listen without prejudgment to the voices of others, and seek solutions that meet the true needs of all involved, not just our own profit. We must begin by refusing to accept the excuses and lies concealing and denying our actions in Iraq and in the ills of the world. We must acknowledge before the world what we've done, and make it both safe and necessary for our leaders to choose a better path to a better future. To do so is the difficult strength and the true power of democracy and freedom.