

## Why They Hate Us by Dan Jacoby

As we mourn the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we debate whether we should be in Iraq, how we can make our country more secure without trampling on the U.S. Constitution, and other difficult issues. But outside of George W. Bush, who has offered only a simplistic, foolish, insipid viewpoint, there is very little discussion of why Al Qaeda attacked us in the first place. This is a vital question, for if we don't understand the root cause of terrorism, we cannot hope to stop it.

It would be comforting to say that they hate us because of our freedom, as George W. Bush keeps insisting. It gives us a feeling of superiority, has a tinge of bravado, and wraps the question up in a neat little package. Ultimately, however, this claim has nothing to do with the truth.

Saying the terrorists hate us because of our freedom leads to the next conclusion, which is that they want us to have a totalitarian regime. An obvious, if unpalatable, solution would therefore be to create that totalitarian regime here in the United States. Were we to do this, however, Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations would still target us for attacks. We could set George W. Bush or Bill Clinton up as "President for Life," and we would still be removing our shoes at the airport. Since giving up our freedom here would not stop the terrorists, it is clear that they do not hate us for our freedom.

The real cause of their hatred is far deeper, but only slightly more complex. The basics can be explained by a simple overview of our activities in Afghanistan since the late 70s.

In 1978, a plan was hatched in the Carter administration to train and arm an Afghan militia (the "Mujahedeen") as bait to draw the Soviet Union into that country. It worked. Not only did the Soviet Union invade Afghanistan in 1979, but they got bogged down and were forced, after ten years, to retreat.

Once the Soviet army was forced out of Afghanistan in 1989, and the Soviet Union fell apart, the United States had no more interest in helping the ravaged country whose war we helped to start. At first, we completely turned our backs on that country as it deteriorated into a bloody civil war. By 1995, we were helping a new group that seemed to be able to bring unity and peace; that group was the Taliban.

Of course, while the Taliban did restore "law and order" to Afghanistan, it wasn't exactly the kind of law and order we wanted. Instead, they implemented a new regime of extremist Islamic intolerance, and aligned themselves with one of the top people we supplied for the Mujahedeen, Osama bin Laden.

What happened? We unleashed a Pandora's box of troubles by meddling in places where we didn't belong, and put our faith in people and groups who were untrustworthy. It wasn't the first time. We helped put the Shah of Iran in power, as well as Ferdinand Marcos, Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein, and many others. Each of these tyrants proved the old adage, "with friends like these, who needs enemies?"

In addition, Western powers have colonized countries all around the world, instituting measures in the conquered countries that were, to say the least, extremely harsh on the natives. The blowback from colonization, in India, Pakistan, South Africa, Rwanda, and many other countries has plagued many, many peoples.

In the Muslim world, colonization had a specific reason – petroleum. The tremendous sources of oil available throughout the Middle East are a strategic resource over which western powers have fought for over a century. It took the old hatred dating back a thousand years from the days of the Crusades to a new level. Since the end of World War II, the United States has emerged as the largest, strongest Western power, and the hatred of the West held throughout the Muslim world has similarly been concentrated.

Our continued support of Israel doesn't make things any easier, but it is, by itself, of little extra consequence. Our arrogance in dealing with Palestinian causes and the countries surrounding Israel is more detrimental to our standing in the area.

Now we have a President who has pushed that hatred to a new high. Following the attack of 9/11, he invaded Afghanistan and removed the Taliban regime from power, and most of the world – including much of the Arab world – cheered. But instead of stabilizing and rebuilding Afghanistan and catching or killing Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush chose to do something no American president had ever done – he invaded a Muslim country for no reason.

The first time we dropped bombs on Baghdad, we put together a true coalition that included Saudi Arabia, and we did it for the explicit purpose of forcing Iraqi occupants out of Kuwait. This time, the stated purposes of our invasion of Iraq were to catch an ally of Osama bin Laden and to stop Saddam Hussein's buildup of "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD).

The first problem is, Saddam Hussein was never an ally of Osama bin Laden. The second problem is that he had no WMD. The result is hundreds of billions of dollars wasted, almost 3,000 American lives lost and over 10,000 Americans wounded, a multiplication of terrorist attacks on U.S. and allied targets, and nearly universal contempt for the United States.

George W. Bush, through his lies, his rampage through Iraq, his creation of torture chambers, his dismantling of civil rights at home, and his constant refusal to admit any wrongdoing, has destroyed our standing in the world and put America at continued risk of terrorist attack.

At this point, the only way we can extricate ourselves from Iraq, take real measures to protect America, and begin to repair the damage done (and repairs will take years, if not decades) is to repudiate George W. Bush's actions and the lies that continue to bulwark them. Since the Republicans who control Congress were instrumental in implementing George W. Bush's lies, they also bear primary responsibility for our current mess. In order to fix things, Americans must turn out in record numbers to replace our current Republican-controlled Congress with Democrats.

The problem is that the Democratic leadership has yet to formulate a comprehensive response or a plan of action to undo the damage created by George W. Bush and his Republican allies. As a result, Americans are wary of handing over power. Democratic leaders, including Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer, Harry Reid, Dick Durbin, Howard Dean, and others, must get together with top strategists. And they must do so immediately after Congress adjourns at the end of the month. America must know that they can trust Democrats to clean up the mess created by George W. Bush; only that way can we turn things around.

Maybe then, we'll make friends instead of enemies. Only then will we be secure.