

Op-Ed

Submitted by the
Libertarian Party

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IF WE HATE TERRORISTS, WHY DO WE KEEP ARMING THEM?

BY DAVID BERGLAND (762 WORDS)

Here's one question worth asking before we launch a bloody, decades-long war against terrorists: Why doesn't the U.S. government simply stop arming and training terrorists and the dictators who support them?

From the African embassy bombings to the Persian Gulf War to Somalia, why do we keep furnishing the guns, money, and advanced military training that terrorists and foreign soldiers use to kill Americans?

Since the American missile attacks against alleged terrorist bases in Afghanistan and Sudan on August 7, Islamic terrorists around the world have only stepped up their threats against the United States — even putting “bounties” on the heads of innocent Americans.

As a result, concrete anti-bomb barriers now circle the Washington Monument, black-clad SWAT teams with automatic weapons roam the grounds of the Pentagon, and politicians warn that America must fight a “new war” against terrorists.

Lost in all the anti-terrorist frenzy is the fact that most of our nation's military encounters over the past decade — whether anti-terrorist strikes, conventional warfare, or peace-keeping missions — have been against enemies the American government armed or trained.

For example, to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, the U.S. supplied Islamic rebels in that country with over \$2 billion in covert military assistance, and Afghan rebels were trained by the CIA.

The result: The “floating army of Islamic fundamentalist fighters who received weapons and training in Afghanistan [are] now mounting terrorists attacks on U.S.-backed governments in Algeria, Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia,” reported the New York-based World Policy Institute. “Two of the men convicted in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center had received weapons and explosives training from CIA-backed rebels in Afghanistan prior to their attack in New York City.”

These same Islamic fundamentalists also reportedly provided support for the terrorists who bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

But the problem goes beyond terrorism.

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The last four times the United States has sent troops into conflict in substantial numbers — in Panama, Iraq, Somalia, and Haiti — they faced forces on the other side that had received U.S. weapons, training, or military technology in the period leading up to the outbreak of hostilities, according to a 1995 study by the institute. For example:

■ **Panama:** Before the 1989 invasion to oust strongman Manuel Noriega, the United States had provided the Central American nation with \$33.5 million worth of U.S. weapons, and spent \$8.2 million to train Panamanian military personnel at the Pentagon's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Even Noriega himself was a graduate of IMET.

■ **Iraq:** In the years leading up to the Gulf War in 1991, the Reagan and Bush administrations supplied critical military technologies that were put directly to use in the construction of the Iraqi war machine, the Institute says.

■ **Somalia:** Before sending the ill-fated peace-keeping mission to Somalia in 1991, the U.S. government furnished more than \$1 billion in aid to that nation's oppressive government — including \$154 million in weapons. When American troops arrived to quell the civil war, they were confronted by American-supplied M-16 rifles, machine guns, mortars, howitzers, armored personnel carriers, land mines, and anti-tank missiles.

■ **Haiti:** Prior to U.S. troops being dispatched to the impoverished Caribbean nation in 1994, the American government had delivered over \$8 million in weapons and training to a series of authoritarian regimes.

In all, between the end of World War II and the early 1990s, the U.S. government gave away more than \$950 billion (in constant 1989 dollars) in foreign or military aid to more than 100 nations, according to the Cato Institute.

Given that 101 armed conflicts occurred around the world between 1989 and 1996, it's inevitable that our government was somehow involved — whether by furnishing money, arms, or military personnel — in dozens of those skirmishes and wars. And every time we got involved in another nation's war, it's inevitable that we made more enemies who became more determined to strike back at us.

That's why the Libertarian Party supports a non-interventionist foreign policy, which would keep America safer by reducing the number of nations and terrorist organizations that have reason to hate our country. The best way to defend America is by defending America — not by intervening in the affairs of foreign nations. And the best way to live free from the threat of terrorists is by not getting into a protracted, unwinnable war with terrorists in the first place.

The sooner we learn that, the sooner Americans can stop worrying about becoming the next target of bloodthirsty, fanatical terrorists. In a non-interventionist nation, we could take down the anti-bomb barriers around the Washington Monument, retire the anti-terrorist SWAT teams, and live in peace.

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NOTE: A photograph of Mr. Bergland, an electronic version of this essay, and exclusive regional reprint rights are available. Call Press Secretary George Getz at (202) 333-0008 Ext. 222 for more information.