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Will Anti-Americanism Live On?

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America -- indeed, much of the world -- is jubilant after the killing of Osama Bin Laden.

American leaders also know that the killing has made Americans safer, but not safe. As President Obama remarked yesterday, "We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad."

But neither triumph nor vigilance addresses the real hard question: Has the assassination altered the fundamental *equation* of terror? Does it address the root causes of anti-Americanism? Bin Laden is gone, but will "they" stop hating "us"?

The fact is that anti-American fervor has risen across the globe, from a resurgent Latin America tired of being the backyard of the U.S., to a Middle East fed up with double standards, to an Africa and Eastern Asia increasingly under the ambit of China.

In the 24 years between 1980 and 2003, 350 suicide attacks took place worldwide, of which about 15 percent were against the U.S. But in the six years between 2004 and 2009, more than 1,800 such attacks took place, of which 92 percent were against America. That's [the terrifying extent of anti-Americanism out there](#).

Of course, not all anti-American feelings breed fanatics. In Bangladesh, where I'm located right now, American projects and motives are interpreted widely with suspicion, whether it's a hearts-and-minds program or security cooperation.

Some of the suspicion is based on conspiracy theory; most of it doesn't translate into anything vicious.

Then again, Bangladesh was never a significant front in America's numerous covert and proxy wars. The U.S. supported Bangladesh's dictators, but didn't threaten military intervention. So, rife as it is, the anti-Americanism here has remained mild.

But in other places, American intervention has left deep wounds, still festering.

To this fact, most Americans display a curious amnesia. They neither see the trail of blood left by U.S. foreign policy, nor accept that such performance over time would generate consequences.

President Obama broke the imperial amnesia slightly in his 2009 Cairo Speech, and acknowledged that America had indeed played a negative role in parts of the Middle East.

But U.S. leaders refuse to believe that terrorism against America has anything to do with that negative past. Accordingly, President Obama said yesterday: "The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens."

Of course, the U.S. did not ask for 9/11. But the remark paraphrases the same ahistorical refrain sung by previous U.S. leaders: the terrorists hate us for who we *are*, not what we *do*. As George W. Bush put it in 2004, "The terrorists who attacked our country on September the 11th were not protesting our policies; they were protesting our existence."

This logic is convenient: it makes the issue non-negotiable. You can't change your identity; so if someone attacks you for who you are, you survive only by destroying them.

The problem is, this logic is not supported by evidence. In fact, the best longitudinal studies of terrorism flatly contradict this popular refrain.

After the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the [Department of Defense](#) undertook a thorough look at transnational terrorism. It observed: "Historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States."

Another study by the [Cato Institute](#) looked at the significant international terrorist attacks against the US since 1915, and concluded that all of them "can be explained as retaliation for U.S. intervention abroad."

More recently, [Robert Pape and James Feldman](#) analyzed every event of suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2009 -- 2,200 events in all -- and concluded that foreign intervention and occupation was the leading causal factor behind suicide terrorism.

Identity, then, is just smoke-and-mirrors; terrorists hate the U.S. for what the U.S. does. America holds the record, by far, for the highest number of foreign interventions in history. Is it plausible that this record would breed no violent backlash?

U.S. leaders need to acquire the courage to ask this question, face the facts, and then reform their traditionally interventionist culture.

That courage is in scant supply. A critical stance on U.S. foreign policy tends to generate howls of patriotic vitriol. In the postwar era, only President Eisenhower displayed the

courage of critical introspection, when, in his remarkably reflective farewell speech, he identified the military industrial complex as the gravest threat to American democracy.

When the dust settles from the jubilation, Americans need to take cue from Eisenhower, look inward, and ask the hard questions. Otherwise, despite Bin Laden's removal, safety from international terrorism will continue to elude them.

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