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They Hate Us Because We Don't Know Why They Hate Us

| [More](#)^[1]

| February 28, 2011

| [Malou Innocent](#)^[2]



In light of [the killing](#)^[3] of four Americans

by Somali pirates earlier this month, it is useful to explore the ways in which Washington has repeatedly tried and failed to bring order to the destitute African state that is Somalia.

In December 2006, neighboring Ethiopia, backed by U.S. aircraft, commandos and logistical support, toppled Somalia's loose network of Islamist Sharia courts, the closest thing to a unified government the country had in 15 years. When Somalia descended into clan-based warfare in the early 1990s, officials in Washington agreed to enforce a March 1993 United Nations resolution that pledged to rehabilitate Somalia's economy and reestablish national and regional institutions. But the humanitarian mission eventually would task U.S. military forces with disarming Somali warlords and conducting house-to-house weapons searches. At the time, State Department official David Shinn spoke of "basically re-creating a country," while then-UN ambassador Madeleine Albright said America's mission "aimed at nothing less than the restoration of an entire country as a proud, functioning and viable member of the community of nations."

No doubt U.S. leaders had the best of intentions. But their noble attempts to rescue Somalia spawned a number of unintended consequences. Over the past two years, as many as 20 Somali-American men have disappeared from the Minneapolis area. Many fear these men were recruited to fight alongside al-Shabab, or "the youth," the militant wing of the Islamist Somali government overthrown in 2006. In describing Shirwa Ahmed, a naturalized American of the Somali diaspora who is believed to be the first U.S. citizen to carry out a terrorist suicide bombing, FBI director Robert Mueller said, "It appears that this individual was radicalized in his hometown in Minnesota."

The phenomenon of Western-born Muslims becoming radicalized has grown in recent years. High-profile examples include al-Shabab aspirants Mohamed Mahmood Alessa and Carlos Eduardo Almonte; Ft. Hood Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan; failed Times Square bomber Faisal Shehzad; Christmas Day plane bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab; alleged Pakistani-American planner of the Mumbai attack David Headley; would-be shoe bomber Richard Reid; North Carolina jihadist Daniel Patrick Boyd; London train bombers Hasib Hussain, Mohammad Sidique Khan, Germain Lindsay and Shehzad Tanweer; so-called American Taliban John Walker Lindh; and, possibly, dozens of young Somali men who have vanished from the American Midwest.

The narrative that most of these men subscribed to in the wake of 9/11 was that America sought to weaken and control the Islamic world. To them, the West was not only fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also threatening to launch a third against Iran. The West bombs remote villages in nuclear-armed Pakistan, may soon expand operations into Somalia and Yemen, and holds untold numbers of Muslims in secret prisons around the world.

Western policies may have fueled the self-fulfilling prophecy that these radicals were fighting against the West's cultural domination and toward the ultimate goal of a global Islamic caliphate.

As a 2006 Government Accountability Office [report](#) ^[4] noted, "U.S. foreign policy is the major root cause behind anti-American sentiments among Muslim populations." A 2004 Pentagon Defense Science Board [report](#) ^[5] observed, "Muslims do not hate our freedom,

but rather, they hate our policies."

At times it takes humor to shed light on such weighty and controversial issues. Writing about the motivation of Islamist radicals, American comedian Bill Maher once opined ^[6], "They hate us because we don't know why they hate us."

For far too long, politicians and pundits have danced around these uncomfortable truths. But it is well past time for American leaders to thoroughly explore the notion that U.S. policies contribute directly to radicalization. Reigning in the West's interventionist foreign policy will not eliminate the number of people and organizations that seek to commit terrorist attacks, but will certainly diminish it..

In this respect, terrorism can no longer be attributed to ignorance and poverty—conditions that exist in foreign conflict zones, but in and of themselves do not generate attacks against the West. Viewing poverty and underdevelopment as an underlying cause of extremism makes the mistake of stereotyping terrorists and their grievances. It also commits the error of ignoring the unintended consequences of past actions and very real dangers right within our borders.

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