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Let's Get Our Own Foreign Policy House in Order Before Criticizing Others

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By Ivan Eland



On March 31, 2010, the New York Times wrote an editorial that briefly expressed horror in response to the Moscow subway terror bombings, then warned that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin might yet again use terrorist attacks to further consolidate his power, and finally lectured Russia that the only way to defeat such extremism was to deal with the underlying causes. Such a sermonizing editorial by any Russian publication after the 9/11 attacks would have engendered outrage in America. Yet the same conclusions and advice that the Times gave to Russia in the wake of its tragedy could equally be applied to post-9/11 U.S. policy.

In the wake of the Moscow subway attacks, the Times opined,

"We are concerned . . . that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will use Monday's horror as another excuse to further consolidate his authoritarian control of the country."

"After extremists from Chechnya executed a series of bloody attacks in 2004, then-President Putin pushed through 'reforms' supposedly intended to improve Russians' security. Their effect was to hand the Kremlin, Mr. Putin, and the state security services, from which he came, far too much power to silence a free press and undercut nearly all political challengers."

Yet similarly, in the aftermath of 9/11, the George W. Bush administration moved swiftly to expand American executive power past the already potent capabilities of the imperial presidency into the realm of a "presidency on steroids." For example, Bush claimed that during wartime, the president could disregard congressionally passed laws, especially statutes requiring court-approved warrants for surveillance of Americans. Such rule by executive fiat is usually what petty dictators do. Bush also unconstitutionally detained terrorism suspects, including U.S. citizens, indefinitely without trial and then approved torture, which was prohibited by U.S. and international law, on them. So politicians in the United States can also use terrorist attacks to grab more power in the name of enhancing security.

Even more blindly, the Times condescendingly preached to Putin that,

"If Russia is to have any hope of defeating extremism, Mr. Putin is going to have to focus less on promoting his own power and more on the root causes of the conflicts in the Caucasus. He can start by heeding his protégé, Dmitri Medvedev, the current president who has urged that the Kremlin address the underlying inequities that feed militancy, including poverty, joblessness, and official corruption. Brute force alone will not work this time either."

And this from the flagship newspaper in a country that for many years has refused to examine the root causes of the 9/11 attacks and, in fact, has allowed its politicians to do more of the same. Had the American media and members of Congress actually examined Osama bin Laden's writings to attempt to honestly determine his motives for attacking the United States, the unnecessary long-term occupation of Afghanistan and the feckless invasion and occupation of Iraq might have been prevented before they made the problem of blowback anti-U.S. terrorism worse. Bin Laden has been clear that he attacks the United States because of its intervention in and military occupation of Islamic lands.

Although it is easy to pick on the Times, the newspaper's view merely reflects the lack of introspection by the U.S. political elite and American society about the ill effects of a U.S. foreign policy of overseas interventionism and hostile foreign reactions to it. But then the pot should not call the kettle black, but rather try to clean up its own act first.

Ivan Eland is Senior Fellow and Director of the [Center on Peace & Liberty](#) at The Independent Institute. Dr. Eland is a graduate of Iowa State University and received an M.B.A. in applied economics and Ph.D. in national security policy from George Washington University. He has been Director of Defense Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, and he spent 15 years working for

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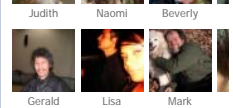
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