

Washington has a “Love Affair” with Terror

Does the US have the moral right to condemn terrorism when its own hands are so bloody

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Many questions remain unasked as the U.S. continues its war on terrorism. One is whether Washington possesses the moral right to condemn terrorism when its own hands are so bloody.

Let's examine our use of terror directed against civilians to achieve political or military goals, beginning with the atomic devastation of Japan. “Little Boy,” exploded over Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, killed 130,000 people immediately (including a dozen U.S. POWs) and 200,000 within five years, all but some 20,000 of them civilians. Twenty-five square miles of civilization were gutted.

“Fat Man,” detonated over Nagasaki three days later, took another 70,000 lives immediately, and nearly double that over five years. All but 150 were civilians.

That's the equivalent of 50 World Trade Centers of people vaporized.

When the Korean War erupted in 1950, the U.S. worked on perfecting this criminal way of waging war, the targeting of a country's civilian population. Gen. Douglas MacArthur ordered that every “installation, factory, city and village” be destroyed in much of the north. Gen. Curtis LeMay reported that “over a period of three years or so ... we burned down every town in North Korea and South Korea, too.”

Three million civilians died in that conflict, a large majority from American bombing. That's the equivalent of another 750 World Trade Centers full of the dead.

We employed the same murderous tactic — widespread, sustained assaults on the civilian population — in the Vietnam War and its extensions in Cambodia and Laos. U.S. forces dropped 8 million tons of bombs — four times the entire Allied total of World War II. Eighty percent were dropped on areas rather than individual targets. The region was immolated with 373,000 tons of napalm, dwarfing the 14,000 tons employed in World War II.

We subjected the people of Indochina to 15 million tons of munitions with the combined explosive power of 600 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs. The result was a decade-long crime against humanity that killed 2 million to 3 million civilians.

In the same part of the world, we supported Indonesian generals who presided over the

slaughter of a million of their people after a failed October 1965 coup attempt. The killings of alleged communists and their families raged for months. The country's rivers became clogged with bodies.

Washington, however, was euphoric. Time magazine described the generals' ascension as "the West's best news for years in Asia," while the Johnson administration, according to The New York Times, expressed "delight."

A decade later, we supported Indonesia's invasion of East Timor. The attack began less than 24 hours after then-President Ford concluded a visit to Jakarta. For years thereafter we blocked international efforts to halt the bloodbath. Some 200,000 Timorese, one-third of the population, died before Indonesia withdrew in 1999. This was genocide.

Washington's most recent savageries, which are continuing, are the suffocating sanctions imposed on Iraq. By 1998, malnutrition and disease from lack of medicines and clean water had killed 500,000 children under the age of 5, according to UNICEF. The total deaths attributable to the sanctions may exceed 1 million. Chalk up 250 World Trade Centers dead from U.S. sanctions.

Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark reported this year that the number of deaths of children — now running at 6,700 a month — continues to escalate. That's a World Trade Center full of Iraqi children dead every month from sanctions.

Our government has known of these deadly conditions from the beginning. A Jan. 22, 1991 report from the Defense Intelligence Agency, "Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities," states: "With no domestic sources of both water treatment replacement parts and some essential chemicals, Iraq will continue attempts to circumvent United Nations sanctions to import these vital commodities. Failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. This could lead to increased incidences, if not epidemics, of disease."

A DIA document dated one month later, "Disease Outbreaks in Iraq," reports: "Conditions are favorable for communicable disease outbreaks, particularly in major urban areas affected by coalition bombing."

We have repeatedly allied ourselves with dictators willing to massacre their own people. In Argentina, some 30,000 suspected "subversives" were "disappeared" — abducted and murdered — during the military government's "dirty war" from 1976 to 1983. By 1977 a junior official in the U.S. embassy, "Tex" Harris, concluded that this was "a massive, coherent, military effort to exterminate Argentine citizens."

In Guatemala, another American ally with a fondness for death squads, the toll was much higher. The Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission has estimated that 200,000 people were killed in more than 30 years of brutal repression, 93 percent of them by government forces.

That's the equivalent of another 50 World Trade Centers.

In these and many other countries — Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, El Salvador, Iran, Zaire, the Philippines, Greece — our record of support for savage military dictatorships is unconscionable, and seemingly endless.

Now, I do not make the obscene suggestion that “we had it coming,” or that U.S. foreign policy justifies the Sept. 11 attacks. There is no justification for those atrocities. But when Washington condemns terrorism by others, where, precisely, does it locate the moral ground on which it purports to stand?

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