

Blindness to Blowback

After a terrorist attack, if anyone dares suggest that the killings represent blowback from U.S. military violence abroad, that person can expect furious denunciations even though the point is almost surely true, a paradox that William Blum confronts in this article from Anti-Empire Report.

By William Blum

What is it that makes young men, reasonably well educated, in good health and nice looking, with long lives ahead of them, use powerful explosives to murder complete strangers because of political beliefs? I'm speaking about American military personnel of course, on the ground, in the air, or directing drones from an office in Nevada.

Do not the survivors of U.S. attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya and elsewhere, and their loved ones, ask such a question? The survivors and loved ones in Boston have their answer America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That's what Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the surviving Boston bomber has said in custody, and there's no reason to doubt that he means it, nor the dozens of others in the past two decades who have carried out terrorist attacks against American targets and expressed anger toward U.S. foreign policy. [See William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, chapters 1 and 2, for cases up to about 2003; later similar cases are numerous; e.g., Glenn Greenwald, "[They Hate US for our Occupations](#)", *Salon*, Oct. 12, 2010.]

Both Tsarnaev brothers had expressed such opinions before the attack as well. [*Huffington Post*, April 20, 2013; *Washington Post*, April 21.] The Marathon bombing took place just days after a deadly U.S. attack in Afghanistan killed 17 civilians, including 12 children, as but one example of countless similar horrors from recent years.

"Oh", an American says, "but those are accidents. What terrorists do is on purpose. It's cold-blooded murder."

But if the American military sends out a bombing mission on Monday which kills multiple innocent civilians, and then the military announces: "Sorry, that was an accident." And then on Tuesday the American military sends out a bombing mission which kills multiple innocent civilians, and then the military announces: "Sorry, that was an accident." And then on Wednesday the American military sends out a bombing mission which kills multiple innocent civilians,

and the military then announces: "Sorry, that was an accident." Thursday Friday
How long before the American military loses the right to say it was an accident?

Terrorism is essentially an act of propaganda, to draw attention to a cause. The 9/11 perpetrators attacked famous symbols of American military and economic power. Traditionally, perpetrators would phone in their message to a local media outlet beforehand, but today, in this highly-surveilled society, with cameras and electronic monitoring at a science-fiction level, that's much more difficult to do without being detected; even finding a public payphone can be near impossible.

From what has been reported, the older brother, Tamerlan, regarded U.S. foreign policy also as being anti-Islam, as do many other Muslims. I think this misreads Washington's intentions. The American Empire is not anti-Islam. It's anti-only those who present serious barriers to the Empire's plan for world domination.

The United States has had close relations with Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar, amongst other Islamic states. And in recent years the U.S. has gone to great lengths to overthrow the leading secular states of the Mideast Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Moreover, it's questionable that Washington is even against terrorism per se, but rather only those terrorists who are not allies of the empire. There has been, for example, a lengthy and infamous history of tolerance, and often outright support, for numerous anti-Castro terrorists, even when their terrorist acts were committed in the United States.

Hundreds of anti-Castro and other Latin American terrorists have been given haven in the U.S. over the years. The United States has also provided support to terrorists in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iran, Libya and Syria, including those with known connections to al-Qaeda, to further foreign policy goals more important than fighting terrorism.

Under one or more of the harsh anti-terrorist laws enacted in the United States in recent years, President Barack Obama could be charged with serious crimes for allowing the United States to fight on the same side as al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Libya and Syria and for funding and supplying these groups. Others in the United States have been imprisoned for a lot less.

As a striking example of how Washington has put its imperialist agenda before anything else, we can consider the case of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an Afghan warlord whose followers first gained attention in the 1980s by throwing acid in the faces of women who refused to wear the veil. This is how these horrible men spent their time when they were not screaming "Death to America."

CIA and State Department officials called Hekmatyar “scary,” “vicious,” “a fascist,” “definite dictatorship material.” [See Tim Weiner, *Blank Check: The Pentagon’s Black Budget* (1990), p.149-50.]

This did not prevent the United States government from showering the man with large amounts of aid to fight against the Soviet-supported government of Afghanistan. [See William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II.*] Hekmatyar is still a prominent warlord in Afghanistan.

A similar example is that of Luis Posada who masterminded the bombing of a Cuban airline in 1976, killing 73 civilians. He has lived a free man in Florida for many years.

USA Today reported a few months ago about a rebel fighter in Syria who told the newspaper in an interview: “The afterlife is the only thing that matters to me, and I can only reach it by waging jihad.” [*USA Today*, Dec. 3, 2012]

Tamerlan Tsarnaev may have chosen to have a shootout with the Boston police as an act of suicide; to die waging jihad, although questions remain about exactly how he died. In any event, I think it’s safe to say that the authorities wanted to capture the brothers alive to be able to question them.

It would be most interesting to be present the moment after a jihadist dies and discovers, with great shock, that there’s no afterlife. Of course, by definition, there would have to be an afterlife for him to discover that there’s no afterlife. On the other hand, a non-believer would likely be thrilled to find out that he was wrong.

Let us hope that the distinguished statesmen, military officers, and corporate leaders who own and rule America find out in this life that to put an end to anti-American terrorism they’re going to have to learn to live without unending war against the world. There’s no other defense against a couple of fanatic young men with backpacks. Just calling them insane or evil doesn’t tell you enough; it may tell you nothing.

But this change in consciousness in the elite is going to be extremely difficult, as difficult as it appears to be for the parents of the two boys to accept their sons’ guilt.

Richard Falk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, stated after the Boston attack: “The American global domination project is bound to generate all kinds of resistance in the post-colonial world. In some respects, the United States has been fortunate not to experience worse blowbacks. We should be asking ourselves at this moment, ‘How many canaries will

have to die before we awaken from our geopolitical fantasy of global domination?’” [See ForeignPolicyJournal.com, April 21, 2013.]

Officials in Canada and Britain as well as US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice have called for Falk to be fired. [*The Telegraph* (London), April 25, 2013; *Politico.com*, April 24]

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/aer/read/116> .]

Gun Madness v. Gun Sanity

As the gun carnage continues across the United States, the Right won't stop peddling its bogus historical claims about the Second Amendment and rallying its gullible supporters to fight even modest safety laws. But victims of gun violence are finally fighting back, write Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

This week, we spent time with Francine and David Wheeler, parents of six-year-old Ben Wheeler, one of the 20 children and six educators shot and killed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

Francine and David moved from New York City to Newtown to raise a family somewhere safe. They could never have imagined that in that quiet place on a Friday morning, just days before Christmas, gunfire would take their younger son's life.

The Wheelers' courage and commitment deeply touched us. Since their son's death, they have managed to cope with memory and hold together their lives, and the life of their surviving son, Nate, with uncommon grace.

Along with other Newtown families, they lobbied the Connecticut state legislature, which now has the toughest gun law in America, and in Washington, they walked the halls of Capitol Hill, urging senators to vote yes for the amendment that would expand the use of background checks for people buying guns.

Although a majority favored the legislation, they fell six votes short of the 60 votes necessary for passage, but the Newtown families, friends and neighbors do

not intend to quit. They are part of a growing nationwide movement committed to changing our gun culture. They call it Sandy Hook Promise.

“America is in desperate need of a new path forward to address our epidemic of gun violence,” they write. And then comes the promise: “THIS TIME THERE WILL BE CHANGE.”

You want to believe with all your heart that this is one promise that will be kept. But arrayed against them are mighty forces, mountains of money, a corrupted political system, and habits deeply ingrained in the human psyche.

That Minnesota radio host who told the Newtown families “to go to hell” is hardly alone in placing his freedom to own weapons over a child’s right to live. The gun industry’s most conspicuous pitchman, Wayne LaPierre, is the walking embodiment of the sociopathic mentality, one radically devoid of empathy.

His National Rifle Association spent \$18.6 million on the 2012 elections and then at least \$800,000 lobbying the federal government in just the first three months of this year, pushing back against those like Sandy Hook Promise who have been calling for change after the Newtown massacre.

But Gregg Lee Carter, the editor of the encyclopedia *Guns in American Society*, told the Center for Public Integrity: “The issue is not so much how much the NRA gives any senator or member of the House, it’s how they can make their lives miserable. And how they make their lives miserable is they e-mail ’em, they call ’em, they fax ’em, they show up at meetings. They’re much more activist than the other side and that’s what really produces their gains.”

As the NRA holds its annual meeting in Houston this weekend (expected attendance: more than 70,000), you see their tracks everywhere. A kindred, pistol-packing spirit, the Arizona Citizens Defense League has been raffling off an AR-15 semi-automatic at their website’s online store, similar to the weapon Adam Lanza used at Sandy Hook Elementary School. They’ve taken it down from their site now, when we first saw the offer, there were only five tickets left, so maybe it’s sold out, but here’s what the offer looked like (including the Statue of Liberty brandishing a rifle, Rambo-style).

That same group cheered on Arizona Governor Jan Brewer this week as she signed two pro-gun bills, one that prohibits local governments from keeping lists of people who have firearms not that any of them were and another that requires police to take guns that are voluntarily surrendered in buyback programs and instead of destroying them, sell them back to the public. That’s right: get them off the street and then get them back on the street as fast as you can. Perhaps they should install a drive-through window at the precinct houses.

Granted, this is in Arizona, where the OK Corral is hallowed ground (reenactment daily at 2 pm) and there's even a TV station in Tucson with the call letters K-GUN, but the mindset pervades across the country, even as there have been eight school shootings since Newtown and more than 3,800 gun deaths.

The killing field that is America never calls a truce. In Kentucky this week, a two-year-old girl was accidentally shot and killed by her 5-year-old brother who was playing with a rifle he had received as a gift. In Alabama, a stray bullet fired nearby killed a 24-year-old mother holding her 10-day-old baby in her arms. She fell onto a couch by the door still clutching her child.

Hold that image in your head and in your heart, so emblematic of a country that has taken leave of its senses. Remember all the dead from all the solitary shootings and all the massacres. Some senators suggest there may be another vote on background checks before the end of the year. If, as David Wheeler suggested to us, this is a tipping point for the movement against gun violence, the moment has come to push harder than ever.

Make the promise: THIS TIME THERE WILL BE CHANGE.

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