

Sudan

Sow the Wind and Reap the Whirlwind

Michael Ratner, Attorney Center for Constitutional Rights

Bombs can be made in a basement. They can be made by one person or a couple of people. No big terror network with roots in the mideast was necessary to blow up the federal building and kill 168 people. Two Americans did that with some fertilizer.

That is one reason the recent U.S. missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan were so foolish. They were foolish because they cannot put an end to bombings like those of the U.S. embassies in Kenya or Tanzania. Missiles are a blunt instrument that cannot kill all or even most of the claimed terrorists. The old adage about finding the needle in the haystack applies. U.S. officials have admitted this; it is implicit in their warning of an increase in attacks on Americans in retaliation for U.S. actions.

United States

U.S. officials make a claim that a terrorist attack was "imminent." This is more an attempt to legally justify the U.S. missile strikes as self-defense than to argue for their efficacy. But that legal justification has little merit. Self-defense can be employed only if there is insufficient time to take a matter to the Security Council. No U.S. official has asserted that an attack was to be launched in the next 24 hours; there appears to have been sufficient time to let the Security Council evaluate the evidence. U.S. officials claim that the plant in Sudan was manufacturing a "precursor" of a chemical weapon; that is hardly the imminence needed to justify bypassing the United Nations.

But whatever the evidence, bombing is not the best way to combat terrorism. More effective in the long run would be an end to U.S. support for terrorists. Ten years ago Osama bin Laden was a U.S. ally; we know where the camps are in Afghanistan because we helped build them. We were willing to support him and others as a means of forcing the Russians from Afghanistan. We knew these "freedom fighters" were not reliable allies and opposed the United States. But the U.S. was willing to look the other way in the name of defeating Communism. Now we are paying the price. In Nicaragua we supported the contras whose acts of terrorism and of drug dealing are well documented; as one of their many terrorist acts the contras murdered Ben Linder, an American engineer building a dam in Nicaragua. Similarly, we ignored Saddam Hussein's development of chemical weapons so long as he was battling Iran. Then we, and the Kurds, paid the price. Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

A more even-handed and fairer U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the Mideast, would also remove one of the underlying causes of terrorism. For example, open support for a

(Palestinian state, an end to settlements in the West Bank and an internationalization of Jerusalem would eliminate legitimate discontent with the United States. A lifting of the sanctions against Iraq would go a long way toward demonstrating our good-faith; those sanctions may have killed millions and Iraq has substantially complied with U.N. directives. U.S. continued support for repressive and reactionary regimes, like those in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, further exacerbate the situation.

The United States

One thing seems clear; a few U.S. missiles will not make ~~the~~ us safer.

United Nations