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FROM WOUNDED KNEE TO IRAQ: A CENTURY OF U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

by Dr. Zoltan Grossman

The following is a partial list of U.S. military interventions from 1890 to 2010.

Below the list is a [Briefing on the History of U.S. Military Interventions](#).

The list and briefing are also available as a [powerpoint presentation](#).

This guide does *not* include:

- mobilizations of the National Guard
- offshore shows of naval strength
- reinforcements of embassy personnel
- the use of non-Defense Department personnel (such as the Drug Enforcement Administration)
- military exercises
- non-combat mobilizations (such as replacing postal strikers)
- the permanent stationing of armed forces
- covert actions where the U.S. did not play a command and control role
- the use of small hostage rescue units
- most uses of proxy troops
- U.S. piloting of foreign warplanes
- foreign or domestic disaster assistance
- military training and advisory programs not involving direct combat
- civic action programs
- and many other military activities.

Among sources used, beside news reports, are the *Congressional Record* (23 June 1969), *180 Landings* by the U.S. Marine Corp History Division, Ege & Makhijani in *Counterspy* (July-Aug. 1982), "Instances of Use of United States Forces Abroad, 1798-1993" by Ellen C. Collier of the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, and Ellsberg in *Protest & Survive*.

Versions of this list have been published on [Zmag.org](#), [Neravt.com](#), and numerous other websites.

Translations of list: [Spanish](#) [French](#) [Turkish](#) [Italian](#) [Chinese](#) [Greek](#) [Russian](#) [Czech](#) [Tamil](#) [Portuguese](#)

Quotes in [Christian Science Monitor](#) and [The Independent](#)

[Turkish newspaper](#) urges that the United States be listed in *Guinness Book of World Records* as the Country with the Most Foreign Interventions.

COUNTRY OR STATE	Dates of intervention	Forces	Comments
SOUTH DAKOTA	1890 (-?)	Troops	300 Lakota Indians massacred at Wounded Knee.
ARGENTINA	1890	Troops	Buenos Aires interests protected.
CHILE	1891	Troops	Marines clash with nationalist rebels.
HAITI	1891	Troops	Black revolt on Navassa defeated.
IDAHO	1892	Troops	Army suppresses silver miners' strike.
HAWAII	1893 (-?)	Naval, troops	Independent kingdom overthrown, annexed.
CHICAGO	1894	Troops	Breaking of rail strike, 34 killed.
NICARAGUA	1894	Troops	Month-long occupation of Bluefields.
CHINA	1894-95	Naval, troops	Marines land in Sino-Japanese War
KOREA	1894-96	Troops	Marines kept in Seoul during war.
PANAMA	1895	Troops, naval	Marines land in Colombian province.
NICARAGUA	1896	Troops	Marines land in port of Corinto.

CHINA	1898-1900	Troops	Boxer Rebellion fought by foreign armies.
PHILIPPINES	1898-1910 (-?)	Naval, troops	Seized from Spain, killed 600,000 Filipinos
CUBA	1898-1902 (-?)	Naval, troops	Seized from Spain, still hold Navy base.
PUERTO RICO	1898 (-?)	Naval, troops	Seized from Spain, occupation continues.
GUAM	1898 (-?)	Naval, troops	Seized from Spain, still use as base.
MINNESOTA	1898 (-?)	Troops	Army battles Chippewa at Leech Lake.
NICARAGUA	1898	Troops	Marines land at port of San Juan del Sur.
SAMOA	1899 (-?)	Troops	Battle over succession to throne.
NICARAGUA	1899	Troops	Marines land at port of Bluefields.
IDAHO	1899-1901	Troops	Army occupies Coeur d'Alene mining region.
OKLAHOMA	1901	Troops	Army battles Creek Indian revolt.
PANAMA	1901-14	Naval, troops	Broke off from Colombia 1903, annexed Canal Zone 1914.
HONDURAS	1903	Troops	Marines intervene in revolution.
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1903-04	Troops	U.S. interests protected in Revolution.
KOREA	1904-05	Troops	Marines land in Russo-Japanese War.
CUBA	1906-09	Troops	Marines land in democratic election.
NICARAGUA	1907	Troops	"Dollar Diplomacy" protectorate set up.
HONDURAS	1907	Troops	Marines land during war with Nicaragua
PANAMA	1908	Troops	Marines intervene in election contest.
NICARAGUA	1910	Troops	Marines land in Bluefields and Corinto.
HONDURAS	1911	Troops	U.S. interests protected in civil war.
CHINA	1911-41	Naval, troops	Continuous occupation with flare-ups.
CUBA	1912	Troops	U.S. interests protected in civil war.
PANAMA	1912	Troops	Marines land during heated election.
HONDURAS	1912	Troops	Marines protect U.S. economic interests.
NICARAGUA	1912-33	Troops, bombing	10-year occupation, fought guerillas
MEXICO	1913	Naval	Americans evacuated during revolution.
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1914	Naval	Fight with rebels over Santo Domingo.
COLORADO	1914	Troops	Breaking of miners' strike by Army.
MEXICO	1914-18	Naval, troops	Series of interventions against nationalists.

HAITI	1914-34	Troops, bombing	19-year occupation after revolts.
TEXAS	1915	Troops	Federal soldiers crush "Plan of San Diego" Mexican-American rebellion
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1916-24	Troops	8-year Marine occupation.
CUBA	1917-33	Troops	Military occupation, economic protectorate.
WORLD WAR I	1917-18	Naval, troops	Ships sunk, fought Germany for 1 1/2 years.
RUSSIA	1918-22	Naval, troops	Five landings to fight Bolsheviks
PANAMA	1918-20	Troops	"Police duty" during unrest after elections.
HONDURAS	1919	Troops	Marines land during election campaign.
YUGOSLAVIA	1919	Troops/Marines	intervene for Italy against Serbs in Dalmatia.
GUATEMALA	1920	Troops	2-week intervention against unionists.
WEST VIRGINIA	1920-21	Troops, bombing	Army intervenes against mineworkers.
TURKEY	1922	Troops	Fought nationalists in Smyrna.
CHINA	1922-27	Naval, troops	Deployment during nationalist revolt.
HONDURAS	1924-25	Troops	Landed twice during election strife.
PANAMA	1925	Troops	Marines suppress general strike.
CHINA	1927-34	Troops	Marines stationed throughout the country.
EL SALVADOR	1932	Naval	Warships send during Marti revolt.
WASHINGTON DC	1932	Troops	Army stops WWI vet bonus protest.
WORLD WAR II	1941-45	Naval, troops, bombing, nuclear	Hawaii bombed, fought Japan, Italy and Germy for 3 years; first nuclear war.
DETROIT	1943	Troops	Army put down Black rebellion.
IRAN	1946	Nuclear threat	Soviet troops told to leave north.
YUGOSLAVIA	1946	Nuclear threat, naval	Response to shoot-down of US plane.
URUGUAY	1947	Nuclear threat	Bombers deployed as show of strength.
GREECE	1947-49	Command operation	U.S. directs extreme-right in civil war.
GERMANY	1948	Nuclear Threat	Atomic-capable bombers guard Berlin Airlift.
CHINA	1948-49	Troops/Marines	evacuate Americans before Communist victory.
PHILIPPINES	1948-54	Command operation	CIA directs war against Huk Rebellion.
PUERTO RICO	1950	Command operation	Independence rebellion crushed in Ponce.
KOREA	1951-53 (-?)	Troops, naval, bombing , nuclear threats	U.S./So. Korea fights China/No. Korea to stalemate; A-bomb threat in 1950, and against China in 1953. Still have bases.

IRAN	1953	Command Operation	CIA overthrows democracy, installs Shah.
VIETNAM	1954	Nuclear threat	French offered bombs to use against seige.
GUATEMALA	1954	Command operation, bombing, nuclear threat	CIA directs exile invasion after new gov't nationalized U.S. company lands; bombers based in Nicaragua.
EGYPT	1956	Nuclear threat, troops	Soviets told to keep out of Suez crisis; Marines evacuate foreigners.
LEBANON	1958	Troops, naval	Marine occupation against rebels.
IRAQ	1958	Nuclear threat	Iraq warned against invading Kuwait.
CHINA	1958	Nuclear threat	China told not to move on Taiwan isles.
PANAMA	1958	Troops	Flag protests erupt into confrontation.
VIETNAM	1960-75	Troops, naval, bombing, nuclear threats	Fought South Vietnam revolt & North Vietnam; one million killed in longest U.S. war; atomic bomb threats in 1968 and 1969.
CUBA	1961	Command operation	CIA-directed exile invasion fails.
GERMANY	1961	Nuclear threat	Alert during Berlin Wall crisis.
LAOS	1962	Command operation	Military buildup during guerrilla war.
CUBA	1962	Nuclear threat, naval	Blockade during missile crisis; near-war with Soviet Union.
IRAQ	1963	Command operation	CIA organizes coup that killed president, brings Ba'ath Party to power, and Saddam Hussein back from exile to be head of the secret service.
PANAMA	1964	Troops	Panamanians shot for urging canal's return.
INDONESIA	1965	Command operation	Million killed in CIA-assisted army coup.
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1965-66	Troops, bombing	Marines land during election campaign.
GUATEMALA	1966-67	Command operation	Green Berets intervene against rebels.
DETROIT	1967	Troops	Army battles African Americans, 43 killed.
UNITED STATES	1968	Troops	After King is shot; over 21,000 soldiers in cities.
CAMBODIA	1969-75	Bombing, troops, naval	Up to 2 million killed in decade of bombing, starvation, and political chaos.
OMAN	1970	Command operation	U.S. directs Iranian marine invasion.
LAOS	1971-73	Command operation, bombing	U.S. directs South Vietnamese invasion; "carpet-bombs" countryside.
SOUTH DAKOTA	1973	Command operation	Army directs Wounded Knee siege of Lakotas.
MIDEAST	1973	Nuclear threat	World-wide alert during Mideast War.

CHILE	1973	Command operation	CIA-backed coup ousts elected marxist president.
CAMBODIA	1975	Troops, bombing	Gas captured ship, 28 die in copter crash.
ANGOLA	1976-92	Command operation	CIA assists South African-backed rebels.
IRAN	1980	Troops, nuclear threat, aborted bombing	Raid to rescue Embassy hostages; 8 troops die in copter-plane crash. Soviets warned not to get involved in revolution.
LIBYA	1981	Naval jets	Two Libyan jets shot down in maneuvers.
EL SALVADOR	1981-92	Command operation, troops	Advisors, overflights aid anti-rebel war, soldiers briefly involved in hostage clash.
NICARAGUA	1981-90	Command operation, naval	CIA directs exile (Contra) invasions, plants harbor mines against revolution.
LEBANON	1982-84	Naval, bombing, troops	Marines expel PLO and back Phalangists, Navy bombs and shells Muslim positions.
GRENADA	1983-84	Troops, bombing	Invasion four years after revolution.
HONDURAS	1983-89	Troops	Maneuvers help build bases near borders.
IRAN	1984	Jets	Two Iranian jets shot down over Persian Gulf.
LIBYA	1986	Bombing, naval	Air strikes to topple nationalist gov't.
BOLIVIA	1986	Troops	Army assists raids on cocaine region.
IRAN	1987-88	Naval, bombing	US intervenes on side of Iraq in war.
LIBYA	1989	Naval jets	Two Libyan jets shot down.
VIRGIN ISLANDS	1989	Troops	St. Croix Black unrest after storm.
PHILIPPINES	1989	Jets	Air cover provided for government against coup.
PANAMA	1989 (-?)	Troops, bombing	Nationalist government ousted by 27,000 soldiers, leaders arrested, 2000+ killed.
LIBERIA	1990	Troops	Foreigners evacuated during civil war.
SAUDI ARABIA	1990-91	Troops, jets	Iraq countered after invading Kuwait. 540,000 troops also stationed in Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Israel.
IRAQ	1990-91	Bombing, troops, naval	Blockade of Iraqi and Jordanian ports, air strikes; 200,000+ killed in invasion of Iraq and Kuwait; large-scale destruction of Iraqi military.
KUWAIT	1991	Naval, bombing, troops	Kuwait royal family returned to throne.

IRAQ	1991-2003	Bombing, naval	No-fly zone over Kurdish north, Shiite south; constant air strikes and naval-enforced economic sanctions
LOS ANGELES	1992	Troops	Army, Marines deployed against anti-police uprising.
SOMALIA	1992-94	Troops, naval, bombing	U.S.-led United Nations occupation during civil war; raids against one Mogadishu faction.
YUGOSLAVIA	1992-94	Naval	NATO blockade of Serbia and Montenegro.
BOSNIA	1993-?	Jets, bombing	No-fly zone patrolled in civil war; downed jets, bombed Serbs.
HAITI	1994	Troops, naval	Blockade against military government; troops restore President Aristide to office three years after coup.
ZAIRE (CONGO)	1996-97	Troops	Marines at Rwandan Hutu refugee camps, in area where Congo revolution begins.
LIBERIA	1997	Troops	Soldiers under fire during evacuation of foreigners.
ALBANIA	1997	Troops	Soldiers under fire during evacuation of foreigners.
SUDAN	1998	Missiles	Attack on pharmaceutical plant alleged to be "terrorist" nerve gas plant.
AFGHANISTAN	1998	Missiles	Attack on former CIA training camps used by Islamic fundamentalist groups alleged to have attacked embassies.
IRAQ	1998	Bombing, Missiles	Four days of intensive air strikes after weapons inspectors allege Iraqi obstructions.
YUGOSLAVIA	1999	Bombing, Missiles	Heavy NATO air strikes after Serbia declines to withdraw from Kosovo. NATO occupation of Kosovo.
YEMEN	2000	Naval	USS Cole, docked in Aden, bombed.
MACEDONIA	2001	Troops	NATO forces deployed to move and disarm Albanian rebels.
UNITED STATES	2001	Jets, naval	Reaction to hijacker attacks on New York, DC
AFGHANISTAN	2001-?	Troops, bombing, missiles	Massive U.S. mobilization to overthrow Taliban, hunt Al Qaeda fighters, install Karzai regime, and battle Taliban insurgency. More than 30,000 U.S. troops and numerous private security contractors carry our occupation.
YEMEN	2002	Missiles	Predator drone missile attack on Al Qaeda, including a US citizen.
PHILIPPINES	2002-?	Troops, naval	Training mission for Philippine military fighting Abu Sayyaf rebels evolves into combat missions in Sulu Archipelago, west of Mindanao.

COLOMBIA	2003-?	Troops	US special forces sent to rebel zone to back up Colombian military protecting oil pipeline.
IRAQ	2003-?	Troops, naval, bombing, missiles	Saddam regime toppled in Baghdad. More than 250,000 U.S. personnel participate in invasion. US and UK forces occupy country and battle Sunni and Shi'ite insurgencies. More than 160,000 troops and numerous private contractors carry out occupation and build large permanent bases.
LIBERIA	2003	Troops	Brief involvement in peacekeeping force as rebels drove out leader.
HAITI	2004-05	Troops, naval	Marines land after right-wing rebels oust elected President Aristide, who was advised to leave by Washington.
PAKISTAN	2005-?	Missiles, bombing, covert operation	CIA missile and air strikes and Special Forces raids on alleged Al Qaeda and Taliban refuge villages kill multiple civilians. Drone attacks also on Pakistani Mehsud network.
SOMALIA	2006-?	Missiles, naval, covert operation	Special Forces advise Ethiopian invasion that topples Islamist government; AC-130 strikes and Cruise missile attacks against Islamist rebels; naval blockade against "pirates" and insurgents.
SYRIA	2008	Troops	Special Forces in helicopter raid 5 miles from Iraq kill 8 Syrian civilians
YEMEN	2009	Missiles	Cruise missile attack on Al Qaeda kills 49 civilians.

(Death toll estimates from wars can be found in the [Historical Atlas of the 20th Century](#) by [alphabetized places index](#), [map series](#), and [major casualties](#).)

A BRIEFING ON THE HISTORY OF U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

By **Zoltán Grossman**, October 2001

Published in [Z magazine](#). Translations in [Italian](#) [Polish](#)

Since the September 11 attacks on the United States, most people in the world agree that the perpetrators need to be brought to justice, without killing many thousands of civilians in the process. But unfortunately, the U.S. military has always accepted massive civilian deaths as part of the cost of war. The military is now poised to kill thousands of foreign civilians, in order to prove that killing U.S. civilians is wrong.

The media has told us repeatedly that some Middle Easterners hate the U.S. only because of our "freedom" and "prosperity." Missing from this explanation is the historical context of the U.S. role in the Middle East, and for that matter in the rest of the world. This basic primer is an attempt to brief readers who have not closely followed the history of U.S. foreign or military affairs, and are perhaps unaware of the background of U.S. military interventions abroad, but are concerned about the direction of our country toward a new war in the name of "freedom" and "protecting civilians."

The United States military has been intervening in other countries for a long time. In 1898, it seized the **Philippines**, **Cuba**, and **Puerto Rico** from Spain, and in 1917-18 became embroiled in **World War I** in Europe. In the first half of the 20th century it repeatedly sent Marines to "protectorates" such as **Nicaragua**, **Honduras**, **Panama**, **Haiti**, and the **Dominican Republic**. All these interventions directly served corporate interests, and many resulted in massive losses of civilians, rebels, and soldiers. Many of the uses of U.S. combat forces are documented in *A History of U.S. Military Interventions since 1890*: <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/interventions.html>

U.S. involvement in **World War II** (1941-45) was sparked by the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, and fear of an Axis invasion of North America. Allied bombers attacked fascist military targets, but also fire-bombed German and Japanese cities such as Dresden and Tokyo, partly under the assumption that destroying civilian neighborhoods would weaken the resolve of the survivors and turn them against their regimes. Many historians agree that fire-bombing's effect was precisely the opposite--increasing Axis civilian support for homeland defense, and discouraging potential coup attempts. The atomic bombing of Japan at the end of the war was carried out without any kind of advance demonstration or warning that may have prevented the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

The war in **Korea** (1950-53) was marked by widespread atrocities, both by North Korean/Chinese forces, and South Korean/U.S. forces. U.S. troops fired on civilian refugees headed into South Korea, apparently fearing they were northern infiltrators. Bombers attacked North Korean cities, and the U.S. twice threatened to use nuclear weapons. North Korea is under the same Communist government today as when the war began.

During the Middle East crisis of 1958, Marines were deployed to quell a rebellion in **Lebanon**, and **Iraq** was threatened with nuclear attack if it invaded Kuwait. This little-known crisis helped set U.S. foreign policy on a collision course with Arab nationalists, often in support of the region's monarchies.

In the early 1960s, the U.S. returned to its pre-World War II interventionary role in the Caribbean, directing the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs exile invasion of **Cuba**, and the 1965 bombing and Marine invasion of the **Dominican Republic** during an election campaign. The CIA trained and harbored Cuban exile groups in Miami, which launched terrorist attacks on Cuba, including the 1976 downing of a Cuban civilian jetliner near Barbados. During the Cold War, the CIA would also help to support or install pro-U.S. dictatorships in **Iran**, **Chile**, **Guatemala**, **Indonesia**, and many other countries around the world.

The U.S. war in **Indochina** (1960-75) pit U.S. forces against **North Vietnam**, and Communist rebels fighting to overthrow pro-U.S. dictatorships in **South Vietnam**, **Laos**, and **Cambodia**. U.S. war planners made little or no distinction between attacking civilians and guerrillas in rebel-held zones, and U.S. "carpet-bombing" of the countryside and cities swelled the ranks of the ultimately victorious revolutionaries. Over two million people were killed in the war, including 55,000 U.S. troops. Less than a dozen U.S. citizens were killed on U.S. soil, in National Guard shootings or antiwar bombings. In Cambodia, the bombings drove the Khmer Rouge rebels toward fanatical leaders, who launched a murderous rampage when they took power in 1975.

Echoes of Vietnam reverberated in **Central America** during the 1980s, when the Reagan administration strongly backed the pro-U.S. regime in **El Salvador**, and right-wing exile forces fighting the new leftist Sandinista government in **Nicaragua**. Rightist death squads slaughtered Salvadoran civilians who questioned the concentration of power and wealth in a few hands. CIA-trained Nicaraguan Contra rebels launched terrorist attacks against civilian clinics and schools run by the Sandinista government, and mined Nicaraguan harbors. U.S. troops also invaded the island nation of **Grenada** in 1983, to oust a new military regime, attacking Cuban civilian workers (even though Cuba had backed the leftist government deposed in the coup), and accidentally bombing a

hospital.

The U.S. returned in force to the Middle East in 1980, after the Shi'ite Muslim revolution in **Iran** against Shah Pahlevi's pro-U.S. dictatorship. A troop and bombing raid to free U.S. Embassy hostages held in downtown Tehran had to be aborted in the Iranian desert. After the 1982 Israeli occupation of **Lebanon**, U.S. Marines were deployed in a neutral "peacekeeping" operation. They instead took the side of Lebanon's pro-Israel Christian government against Muslim rebels, and U.S. Navy ships rained enormous shells on Muslim civilian villages. Embittered Shi'ite Muslim rebels responded with a suicide bomb attack on Marine barracks, and for years seized U.S. hostages in the country. In retaliation, the CIA set off car bombs to assassinate Shi'ite Muslim leaders. Syria and the Muslim rebels emerged victorious in Lebanon.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the U.S. launched a 1986 bombing raid on **Libya**, which it accused of sponsoring a terrorist bombing later tied to Syria. The bombing raid killed civilians, and may have led to the later revenge bombing of a U.S. jet over Scotland. Libya's Arab nationalist leader Muammar Qaddafi remained in power. The U.S. Navy also intervened against **Iran** during its war against Iraq in 1987-88, sinking Iranian ships and "accidentally" shooting down an Iranian civilian jetliner.

U.S. forces invaded **Panama** in 1989 to oust the nationalist regime of Manuel Noriega. The U.S. accused its former ally of allowing drug-running in the country, though the drug trade actually increased after his capture. U.S. bombing raids on Panama City ignited a conflagration in a civilian neighborhood, fed by stove gas tanks. Over 2,000 Panamanians were killed in the invasion to capture one leader.

The following year, the U.S. deployed forces in the Persian Gulf after the Iraqi invasion of **Kuwait**, which turned Washington against its former Iraqi ally Saddam Hussein. U.S. supported the Kuwaiti monarchy and the Muslim fundamentalist monarchy in neighboring **Saudi Arabia** against the secular nationalist **Iraq** regime. In January 1991, the U.S. and its allies unleashed a massive bombing assault against Iraqi government and military targets, in an intensity beyond the raids of World War II and Vietnam. Up to 200,000 Iraqis were killed in the war and its immediate aftermath of rebellion and disease, including many civilians who died in their villages, neighborhoods, and bomb shelters. The U.S. continued economic sanctions that denied health and energy to Iraqi civilians, who died by the hundreds of thousands, according to United Nations agencies. The U.S. also instituted "no-fly zones" and virtually continuous bombing raids, yet Saddam was politically bolstered as he was militarily weakened.

In the 1990s, the U.S. military led a series of what it termed "humanitarian interventions" it claimed would safeguard civilians. Foremost among them was the 1992 deployment in the African nation of **Somalia**, torn by famine and a civil war between clan warlords. Instead of remaining neutral, U.S. forces took the side of one faction against another faction, and bombed a Mogadishu neighborhood. Enraged crowds, backed by foreign Arab mercenaries, killed 18 U.S. soldiers, forcing a withdrawal from the country.

Other so-called "humanitarian interventions" were centered in the Balkan region of Europe, after the 1992 breakup of the multiethnic federation of Yugoslavia. The U.S. watched for three years as Serb forces killed Muslim civilians in **Bosnia**, before its launched decisive bombing raids in 1995. Even then, it never intervened to stop atrocities by Croatian forces against Muslim and Serb civilians, because those forces were aided by the U.S. In 1999, the U.S. bombed Serbia to force President Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw forces from the ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo, which was torn a brutal ethnic war. The bombing intensified Serbian expulsions and killings of Albanian civilians from **Kosovo**, and caused the deaths of thousands of Serbian civilians, even in cities that had voted strongly against Milosevic. When a NATO occupation force enabled Albanians to move back, U.S. forces did little or nothing to prevent similar atrocities against Serb and other non-Albanian civilians. The U.S. was viewed as a biased player, even by the Serbian democratic opposition that overthrew Milosevic the following year.

Even when the U.S. military had apparently defensive motives, it ended up attacking the wrong targets. After the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, the U.S. "retaliated" not only against Osama Bin Laden's training camps in **Afghanistan**, but a pharmaceutical plant in **Sudan** that was mistakenly said to be a chemical warfare installation. Bin Laden retaliated by attacking a U.S. Navy ship docked in **Yemen** in 2000. After the 2001 terror attacks on the United States, the U.S. military is poised to again bomb **Afghanistan**, and possibly move against other states it accuses of promoting anti-U.S. "terrorism," such as **Iraq** and Sudan. Such a campaign will certainly ratchet up the cycle of violence, in an escalating series of retaliations that is the hallmark of Middle East conflicts. Afghanistan, like Yugoslavia, is a multiethnic state that could easily break apart in a new catastrophic regional war. Almost certainly [more civilians would lose their lives](#) in this tit-for-tat war on "terrorism" than the 3,000 civilians who died on September 11.

COMMON THEMES

Some common themes can be seen in many of these U.S. military interventions.

First, they were explained to the U.S. public as defending the lives and rights of civilian populations. Yet the military tactics employed often left behind massive civilian "collateral damage." War planners made little distinction between rebels and the civilians who lived in rebel zones of control, or between military assets and civilian infrastructure, such as train lines, water plants, agricultural factories, medicine supplies, etc. The U.S. public always believe that in the next war, new military technologies will avoid civilian casualties on the other side. Yet when the inevitable civilian deaths occur, they are always explained away as "accidental" or "unavoidable."

Second, although nearly all the post-World War II interventions were carried out in the name of "freedom" and "democracy," nearly all of them in fact defended dictatorships controlled by pro-U.S. elites. Whether in Vietnam, Central America, or the Persian Gulf, the U.S. was not defending "freedom" but an ideological agenda (such as defending capitalism) or an economic agenda (such as protecting oil company investments). In the few cases when U.S. military forces toppled a dictatorship--such as in Grenada or Panama--they did so in a way that prevented the country's people from overthrowing their own dictator first, and installing a new democratic government more to their liking.

Third, the U.S. always attacked violence by its opponents as "terrorism," "atrocities against civilians," or "ethnic cleansing," but minimized or defended the same actions by the U.S. or its allies. If a country has the right to "end" a state that trains or harbors terrorists, would Cuba or Nicaragua have had the right to launch defensive bombing raids on U.S. targets to take out exile terrorists? Washington's double standard maintains that an U.S. ally's action by definition "defensive," but that an enemy's retaliation is by definition "offensive."

Fourth, the U.S. often portrays itself as a neutral peacekeeper, with nothing but the purest humanitarian motives. After deploying forces in a country, however, it quickly divides the country or region into "friends" and "foes," and takes one side against another. This strategy tends to enflame rather than dampen a war or civil conflict, as shown in the cases of Somalia and Bosnia, and deepens resentment of the U.S. role.

Fifth, U.S. military intervention is often counterproductive even if one accepts U.S. goals and rationales. Rather than solving the root political or economic roots of the conflict, it tends to polarize factions and further destabilize the country. The same countries tend to reappear again and again on the list of 20th century interventions.

Sixth, U.S. demonization of an enemy leader, or military action against him, tends to strengthen rather than weaken his hold on power. Take the list of current regimes most singled out for U.S. attack, and put it alongside of the list of regimes that have had the longest hold on power, and you will find they have the same names. Qaddafi, Castro, Saddam, Kim, and others may have faced greater internal criticism if they could not portray themselves as Davids standing up to the American Goliath, and (accurately) blaming many of their countries' internal problems on U.S. economic sanctions.

One of the most dangerous ideas of the 20th century was that "people like us" could not commit atrocities against civilians.

- German and Japanese citizens believed it, but their militaries slaughtered millions of people.
- British and French citizens believed it, but their militaries fought brutal colonial wars in Africa and Asia.
- Russian citizens believed it, but their armies murdered civilians in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and elsewhere.
- Israeli citizens believed it, but their army mowed down Palestinians and Lebanese.
- Arabs believed it, but suicide bombers and hijackers targeted U.S. and Israeli civilians.
- U.S. citizens believed it, but their military killed hundreds of thousands in Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Every country, every ethnicity, every religion, contains within it the capability for extreme violence. Every group contains a faction that is intolerant of other groups, and actively seeks to exclude or even kill them. War fever tends to encourage the intolerant faction, but the faction only succeeds in its goals if the rest of the group acquiesces or remains silent. The attacks of September 11 were not only a test for U.S. citizens attitudes' toward minority ethnic/racial groups in their own country, but a test for our relationship with the rest of the world. We must begin not by lashing out at civilians in Muslim countries, but by taking responsibility for our own history and our own actions, and how they have fed the cycle of violence.