

Curious George asks: Why the "Vitriolic Hatred for America?"

By Richard Sanders, Editor, *Press for Conversion!*

After September 11, 2001, some Americans began asking: "Why would anyone in the Middle East hate America?" The fact that such a question had to be asked reflects a profound ignorance of the U.S. government's role in that region.

In setting out to research the history of U.S. military involvement in the Middle East and North Africa, I began by creating a timeline of America's part in wars, invasions, interventions, coups and regime changes in the region. Within a month, I had compiled an unwieldy list of more than 200 such events, reaching back to the very beginnings of American history.

Several U.S. military "firsts" occurred in the Barbary War (1801-1805), when the fledgling U.S. Navy fought North African "pirates," who would now be labeled "terrorists":

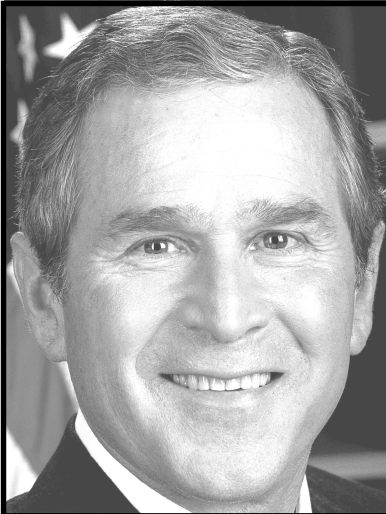
(1) It was the *first war* waged by the U.S. outside the Americas.

(2) In 1805, the U.S. military attempted its *first regime change* outside the Americas. But former U.S. consul of Tunis, William Eaton, failed in his scheme to use 600 mercenaries to foment a rebellion to replace Tripoli's ruler, Yusuf, with his brother, Hamet.

(3) Later in 1805, U.S. marines (commanding Greek mercenaries) overthrew Derna, a city in Tripoli. It was the *first time a city outside the Americas had been captured by U.S.-led forces*. This exploit is immortalized in the opening line of "The Marines' Hymn" (i.e., "From the Halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli...")

Soon after their failed war in Canada (1812), the U.S. launched another Barbary War in 1815. The two Barbary wars were not just about fighting "pirates." They were also about challenging colonial European (primarily British and French) control of Mediterranean trade, getting a piece of "Old Europe's" profits and creating useful pretexts to rationalize increasing the budget of America's first navy.

This early pattern is instructive. It has repeated itself for two centuries. The prime reason for the bewildering



'President' George W. Bush

"How do I respond when I see that in some Islamic countries there is vitriolic hatred for America? I'm amazed...that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about.... Like most Americans, I just can't believe it. Because I know how good we are.... We've got to do a better job of explaining to the people in the Middle East...that we don't fight a war against Islam or Muslims." Oct. 11, 2001

array of examples of U.S. meddling in the Middle East, and for that matter the rest of the world, is usually the same; the desire of corporate "pirates" to get their hands on foreign resources.

Excuses for U.S. military interventions in the region have covered the usual gamut of pretexts from protecting U.S. citizens to highly ironic lies about promoting peace, human rights and democracy. Since WWII, when U.S. military and intelligence operations in the region got increasingly frequent and intense, the real purpose of U.S. involvement was to gain access to one very specific, highly-craved natural treasure, namely, oil.

WWII was a turning point in the imperial contest for control of the region and its main prize. It was the twilight of the reigning British Empire's hegemony over the area and it was the dawn of U.S. neo-colonialism in the region. Eventually, competition between U.S. and British "pirates" gave way – at least on the surface – to cooperation between the two colonial powers. But their competition continues, even as they work together to siphon off the region's incredible wealth into their respective coffers.

America's drive to control the region's oil has been ruthless and the impact on people's lives has been devastating. The U.S. has been involved in at least three types of regional wars: (1) *Wars waged directly by U.S. forces*. These wars have killed or wounded hundreds of thousands, and many more were made homeless and refugees.

(2) *Proxy wars between states*. In several cases, both sides were armed, trained, paid and guided by the U.S.

(3) *Wars of repression waged by U.S.-client states against their own populations*. Countless activists have been killed, tortured and imprisoned by exceedingly violent, corrupt and repressive governments that were put into power (and then kept there) by the U.S. Sometimes, such regime changes occurred through the direct, *overt* use of U.S. military force. Usually though, such changes come about through more *covert* means, such as military coups, the rigging of elections, the arming and military training of some factions over others, financial coercion such as bribery, blackmail or tied loans, and many more subtle "dirty tricks" applied by intelligence agencies.

Whichever type of war is used to install and maintain U.S. client states, the ubiquitous problem of the poverty remains. U.S.-backed regimes enforce economic structures that impose crushing poverty upon the many, while creating huge profits for a few.

This issue of *Press for Conversion!* highlights only a handful of the most blatant examples of U.S. wars and regime changes in the Middle East and North Africa since WWII. Nevertheless, if even this limited history were known, Americans would begin to gain an understanding of why some people might be inclined to hate, *not the American people*, but their government, its military and "spies," and the corporate interests that they represent.