

the world, it may take decades to judge the success of our most recent military actions. Short-term victories don't always translate into long-term success.

Indeed, we can trace the roots of these two latest wars and the September 11 attacks to conflicts we had won two decades earlier.

In 1979 the United States still saw the Soviet Union as the biggest threat in the world. It was then that we began arming and training groups of Islamic fundamentalists who came to be known as the Mujahadeen. Our aim, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, was to "to induce a Soviet military intervention" in Afghanistan and give "the USSR its Vietnam war."¹ Our military assistance to the Mujahadeen continued throughout the Reagan presidency and became the largest and most expensive covert CIA operation in history.

The strategy succeeded brilliantly. The Soviets got completely bogged down, drained their treasury on the war, and suffered about 50,000 casualties. They withdrew in 1989 completely demoralized. Brzezinski and many others credit the war with hastening the fall of the Soviet Union.

But did we succeed in the larger sense? Did we create a safer more peaceful world? We certainly didn't create a more peaceful Afghanistan. Some estimate that a million and a half Afghan civilians died in the conflict. The Afghan economy was left totally shattered. When the Soviets pulled out, we lost interest in Afghanistan, and together with the Soviets we left the country splintered by civil war, lawless, and hungry.

And what of our own peace and security? Even if we assume that our victory in the Cold War was hastened by our strategy in Afghanistan, we must also add one huge unintended consequence of our strategy there to the balance. Never during the entire Cold War had the Soviets attacked a target in the U.S. But what we experienced on September 11 can be traced largely to our strategy in Afghanistan. A leading member of the Mujahadeen was a man we had trained and armed and once praised as a freedom fighter, Osama bin Laden. And al-Qaeda grew out of structures we helped create in the effort to funnel funds and arms to the Mujahadeen.

Like Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein also received military, technical, and financial support from the United States. His infatuation with chemical weapons probably got its start back in 1967 when he and other Iraqi officers were given a tour of the principal U.S. chemical weapons

facilities. There he was shown the basic design of chemical weapons and witnessed their manufacture and deployment.²

Shortly after his ruthless ascent to power in Iraq in 1979, the U.S. began supplying Saddam, directly and through our allies, with both conventional arms and with the materials and technical means for creating his own chemical and biological weapons. We continued to do so even after it was clear that he was using these "weapons of mass destruction" in his war with Iran and on his own people.

Donald Rumsfeld, our current Secretary of Defence, was sent in 1983 to Iraq by President Reagan to meet with Saddam. According to the Washington Post, "Declassified documents show that Rumsfeld traveled to Baghdad at a time when Iraq was using chemical weapons on an 'almost daily' basis in defiance of international conventions." Reagan officials turned a blind eye to these abuses because they considered it in America's strategic interest to keep Iran and Iraq deadlocked in a war to prevent either side from gaining an upper hand in the region.³

As the world eventually learned during the Iran-Contra scandal, the U.S. was also supplying Iraq's enemy, Iran, with weapons (and illegally using the money generated by these arms to fund another covert military operation in Central America).

Despite this embarrassing discovery, the U.S. administration could argue that it had achieved its strategic goals. We had neutralized the threat that both Iran and Iraq posed to our interests in the region by keeping them fighting and helping them exhaust themselves in a war we kept either side from winning.

But what about the larger goal of long-term peace and security? Even if we can ignore the estimated one million Iranian and Iraqi soldiers who died in the conflict, we have to recognize that we helped facilitate Saddam amassing his chemical and biological weapons when we thought it served our interests. These same weapons we helped him develop were our central justification for going to war with Iraq.

We won the Cold War, but the corpse of the "Evil Empire" was hardly cold when the "Axis of Evil" rose up in its stead. It seems that we can stomp out one tyrant, but not without scattering the seeds of future tyrannies. And each time we stomp

¹ Brzezinski interview, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, January 15-21, 1998.

² Neil Livingstone, *PBS Frontline*, September 11, 1990.

³ Washington Post, December 30, 2002; Page A01.

