

Last week the National Bureau of Economic Research published a report on the effect of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq that confirmed what critics of our foreign policy have been saying for years: the killing of civilians, although unintentional, angers other civilians and prompts them to seek revenge. This should be self-evident.

The Central Intelligence Agency has long acknowledged and analyzed the concept of blowback in our foreign policy. It still amazes me that so many think that attacks against our soldiers occupying hostile foreign lands are motivated by hatred toward our system of government at home or by the religion of the attackers. In fact, most of the anger towards us is rooted in reactions towards seeing their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and other loved ones being killed by a foreign army. No matter our intentions, the violence of our militarism in foreign lands causes those residents to seek revenge if innocents are killed. One does not have to be Muslim to react this way, just human.

Our battle in Afghanistan resembles the battle against the many-headed Hydra monster in Greek mythology. According to Former General Stanley McChrystal's so-called insurgent math, for every insurgent killed, 10 more insurgents are created by the collateral damage to civilians. Every coalition attack leads to 6 retaliatory attacks against our troops within the following six weeks, according to the NBER report. These retaliatory attacks must then be acted on by our troops, leading to still more attacks, and so it goes. Violence begets more violence. Eventually more and more Afghans will view American troops with hostility and seek revenge for the death of a loved one. Meanwhile, we are bleeding ourselves dry, militarily and economically.

Some say if we leave, the Taliban will be strengthened. However, those who make that claim ignore the numerous ways our interventionist foreign policy has strengthened groups like the Taliban over the years. I've already pointed out how we serve as excellent recruiters for them by killing civilians. Last week I pointed out how our foreign aid, to Pakistan specifically, makes it into Taliban coffers. And of course we provided the Taliban with aid and resources in the 1980s, when they were our strategic allies against the Soviet Union. For example – our CIA supplied them with Stinger missiles to use against the Soviets, which are strikingly similar to the

ones now allegedly used against us on the same battlefield, according to those Wikileaks documents. As usual, our friends have a funny way of turning against us. Manuel Noriega and Saddam Hussein are also prime examples. Yet Congress never seems to acknowledge the blowback that results from our interventionism of the past.

Our war against the Taliban is going about as well as our war on drugs, or our war on poverty, or any of our government's wars – they all tend to create more of the thing they purport to eradicate, thereby dodging any excuse to draw down and come to an end. It is hard to imagine ever “winning” anything this way.