

The war on terror has done absolutely nothing to get to the root of the problem

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It's hard to imagine how the war on terror could be viewed as a success.

Among other things, terrorism is up sharply since the war to end it began — even before the horrific bombings in London last week. The number of serious international terrorist attacks more than tripled — to 655 last year from 175 the year before — according to U.S. government figures.

The Bush administration was hoping to keep these discouraging numbers secret, and so decided last April not to include them in its annual terrorism report to Congress. But congressional aides, briefed on the statistics, released them. It was the second year in a row the administration tried to hide a dramatic rise in terrorist attacks.

This raises the question: has the war on terror actually increased terrorism?

Perhaps terrorism would have increased anyway, but I'd guess the war on terror has made things worse. The heavy-handed methods used by George Bush (and helper Tony Blair) — including invading Iraq even though it had no links to 9/11 terrorists, and illegally detaining and torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay — have only exacerbated the rage many in the Middle East already felt against the U.S.

The war on terror certainly does nothing to get to the root of the problem.

For several years now, a new kind of "political correctness" has prevented meaningful public discussion about this entire subject. Despite the endless commentary generated by the attacks of Sept. 11, one thing was clear from the outset: any probing of the so-called "root causes" would be strictly off-limits in mainstream debate.

Perhaps this was understandable; discussing "root causes" seemed to reward the terrorists by paying attention to issues they wanted on the agenda. But it's also created a wilful blindness.

It's interesting to note there was no such wilful blindness about the "root causes" of the Nazi rise to power. I recall being taught in school about the deep sense of grievance felt by the German people over the reparations imposed on them after World War I. This background wasn't meant in any way to let Hitler off the hook for his atrocities. It simply helped explain how he'd managed to manipulate the German public to win power.

The people of the Middle East have legitimate grievances against America — from the U.S. overthrow of a democratically elected government in Iran in 1953 to decades of U.S. backing of tyrants in the region (including Saddam Hussein in the 1980s) to unwavering U.S. support for Israel during its 38-year military occupation of Palestine.

Until the U.S. changes its behaviour, the Middle East will be fertile ground for Islamic extremists to win recruits — and even some public support.

As long as we refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the grievances felt in that part of the world, let alone try to correct them, we'll go on as we are, enjoying the satisfaction of venting our rage against the evils of terrorism. We just won't do much to stop it.