

THE ROOTS OF TERRORISM

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By Jim
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Fear, the pit, and the snare,
are on you who inhabit the earth. It will happen that he who flees from
the noise of the fear will fall into the pit; and he who comes up out of the
midst of the pit will be taken in the snare….

Isaiah
24:17-18a, WEB

With the
recent spate of terroristic threats, bombings, shootings and the like,
terrorism has replaced more trivial events like Oscar nominations on the world
scene. Fear is in the ascendancy as nations rush to build protective enclaves
for their leaders and train more and more police to guard them. Fear is
everywhere.

We respond
mainly to the superficial aspects of terrorism, like who did it, what groups do
they represent, who claims responsibility, where are they located, and how can
we gather support to oppose them. But amid all the uproar we miss the truth that
terrorism does not exist alone, but has roots reaching far back in cultural and
religious history.

America is
now well into the third decade of involvement in almost continuous war in the
Middle East. In his provocative series of lectures on The Wisdom of History, offered by The Great Courses of Chantilly,
Virginia, professor J. Rufus Fears
of the University of Oklahoma lists several lessons from history that we have
not yet learned. Among them is the vivid and vastly expensive lesson that the
Middle East is not only a birthplace of civilizations, but also the graveyard
of empires.

As geography

books detail it, the Middle East is centered in what formerly was called Mesopotamia. Its land area was not large, but over the centuries its mainly Islamic sphere of influence stretched west to east from North Africa to Indonesia, and north to south from the European Danube River and the steppes of Russia to the middle of Africa. It was a mixture of races, creeds, cultures---all presided over by various strongmen, hereditary tyrants, religious authorities, and even a few enlightened democrats. But far stronger than political leaders are the powerful historical ties of clan, tribe, and cultural commonality dating back 6,000 years to the beginnings of recorded history.

Our nation

needs to be extremely careful about involving ourselves directly in Middle Eastern disputes. The Roman Empire, Alexander the Great, and more recently the Ottoman Empire have fallen as a result of their failed attempts to conquer and rule the warring tribes and clans of the Middle East. The U.S. has already failed twice (Desert Storm and Iraq) to pacify and unite the Sunni and Shiite religious factions in Iraq, and we now seem poised for a third attempt that will likely also fail.

If you think

that the American Empire (Yes, I said empire because that's what we've got economically if not politically) is too large to fail, think about this. Yes, we have all the weapons to succeed, but do we have the financial ability and the moral high-ground on our side? Researchers tell us that the final costs of the Iraq debacle will approach \$3 trillion in immediate costs as well as the long-term-effects of war like veteran's benefits and interest on the heavy debt incurred. Even now we shortchange retired persons, students, veterans, the poor, childhood education, medical advances, infrastructure maintenance and repair, global warming, and over half of our own people because we can't resist the warmongers claiming that we must stop ISIS whatever the cost. Can we afford to alienate our own people just to feel safe from military incursions halfway around the globe?

There exists

a profound connection between world political, economic, social, and religious domination systems and a developing resistance by oppressed, marginalized groups who have "had enough," and as a result seem willing to take up with any group (even ISIS) offering hope and opportunity. That's the true cause of terrorism, but it seems as if we will demand any sacrifice from our own people before we become willing to deal truly with the roots of terrorism wherever they may be, even within our own system.