

What is National Security?
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The first duty of a government is to keep its citizens (or subjects) safe. Safe from what? We live in such relative safety that most of us have forgotten what the world was like for our ancestors\227and what it is like for too many people around the globe today.

Many governments in history that kept their subjects safe were dictatorial and monstrous. Yet the devil they knew (the local tax collector or executioner) were better than the other devil they remembered all too well\227thuggish anarchy.

The Chinese, Iranians, and Russians remember well that when their central governments were weak or in decline, warlords seized the opportunity to take land and war on each other\227until eventually one would become strong enough to form the next monarchy. If it were just a matter of one warlord against another, nobody would have cared. But it was not. These warlords made war on each others\222 peasants. They trampled fields, destroyed crops, burnt villages, murdered and raped. That was total war well before development of weapons of mass destruction. Swords and warhorses were good enough to do the job.

Remember the image of the four horsemen of the apocalypse: War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death? These horsemen have been riding through different parts of Africa during the late 20th century. This is what the people of Darfur in Sudan endure\227as have the Somalis and those in the Congo and before that in Rwanda and Liberia. It was like that in Afghanistan between the end of the Soviet invasion and the American invasion.

But how does this apply to the United States today? Those four horsemen and their warlords are not prowling our borders. But we have other security issues\227some far more urgent than others\227and our political leaders must wrestle with them.

Serious issues are: having sufficient energy to sustain our economy; successful agriculture and surplus food; a safe and plentiful water supply; an education system that can produce the needed national talent for the future; and a health system that keeps a population vibrant and long-lived. And one of the newest threats to us is how to protect our all-invasive computer networks and satellites. We are already in an Anarchist cyber war launched by Wikileaks and Mr. Assange\222s cult followers. It is a national security threat indeed.

Less serious issues are dealing with terrorists, who today represent a culture that offers little more than a death cult to frighten us. The Muslim world is very backward in every indicator of modernity: education in useful disciplines (beyond theology), entrepreneurship, gender equality, a decent system of governance and jurisprudence. They are fighting a rear guard action against the modern, secular world\227and while they can plague us, they are essentially ineffectual and in their own death throes.

Because of our government\222s fear of being criticized for negligence whenever we have a terrorist attack, we are spending far too much money and effort to prevent these attacks. I would like to see Americans become as brave as the British were during those many years that they were under attack by Irish terrorists. Taking off my shoes off in the airport is silly.

On a global and foreign policy level, our national security is furthered by having the best relations we can muster with a large range of countries that share the preponderance of our values. Those countries that do not share these values must be watched, impeded when they become threatening (Iran, North Korea), and stopped when they are on the verge of nuclear mayhem.

We do not have to invade dangerous countries and then try to impose a modern democracy on them. This is not in the interest of National Security. We can manage relationships with countries that are not democracies, but are firmly governed. The bad social behavior of such countries can be better challenged by non-government human rights groups, the press, and the media. Villains are notoriously thin-skinned about bad publicity.

National Security should be an issue for public debate. Tell me what you think.

675 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and writer. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink