



Blowback: Does Ron Paul Need a Different Explanation of It?

But the one part of Ron Paul's foreign policy that has been difficult to translate to much of the Republican base has been the idea of "blowback." Blowback is the concept that when some apparently innocent actions are undertaken by the U.S. government abroad, they produce a violent reaction. Rep. Paul's opponents in the 2008 presidential election used his explanation of blowback to imply that he believed that the United States was responsible for the September 11 attacks, just as his opponents imply today that he's "soft" on Iran because of a lack of willingness to engage in aggressive military attacks against Iran.



Ron Paul's [explanation](#) of blowback first attained national attention in a May 15, 2007 presidential debate in South Carolina. Asked by Fox News moderator Wendell Goler why he opposed foreign interventionism, the following exchange between Paul, Goler, and Rudy Giuliani [ensued](#):

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Paul: Have you ever read the reasons they attacked us? They attack us because we've been over there; we've been bombing Iraq for 10 years. We've been in the Middle East — I think Reagan was right.

We don't understand the irrationality of Middle Eastern politics. So right now we're building an embassy in Iraq that's bigger than the Vatican. We're building 14 permanent bases. What would we say here if China was doing this in our country or in the Gulf of Mexico? We would be objecting. We need to look at what we do from the perspective of what would happen if somebody else did it to us. (Applause.)

Goler: Are you suggesting we invited the 9/11 attack, sir?

Paul: I'm suggesting that we listen to the people who attacked us and the reason they did it, and they are delighted that we're over there because Osama bin Laden has said, "I am glad you're over on our sand because we can target you so much easier." They have already now since that time — (bell rings) — have killed 3,400 of our men, and I don't think it was necessary.

Giuliani: Wendell, may I comment on that? That's really an extraordinary statement. That's an extraordinary statement, as someone who lived through the attack of September 11, that we invited the attack because we were attacking Iraq. I don't think I've heard that before, and I've heard some pretty absurd explanations for September 11th. (Applause, cheers.)

And I would ask the Congressman to withdraw that comment and tell us that he didn't really mean that.



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But, of course, Ron Paul did not take it back. He went on to describe the blowback with the example of the CIA's toppling of Iran's elected government in favor of the Shah in 1953. The blowback from that interventionism happened when the Ayatollah Khomeini toppled the Shah and took 52 American hostages in 1979.

It was an eloquent explanation that convinced some — but not enough — voters. Those who claimed Ron Paul was blaming America for September 11 had done enough damage to keep him from the Republican nomination in 2008 (along with Paul repeating his long-standing but then-unbelievable [claims](#) that a major recession was coming from the housing and financial bubble fostered by the Bush administration).

Today, Ron Paul is still using the same exact argument to convince Republican voters. And while an increasing number of independents (and [even Democrats](#)) have found this explanation persuasive, a substantial portion of the Republican base remains unconvinced by the same old explanation.

Ron Paul's old explanation involved two separate arguments. First, he used multiple examples — Saudi Arabian bases, Iraqi bombings, and Iranian government toppling. Second, he used the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you." The argument is persuasive with people well-informed on history and those who have some understanding of Islamic culture. But those who have (1) little understanding or interest in history and (2) those who are convinced Islam is by its nature an irredeemably aggressive and violent religion largely remain unconvinced.

Most of the Republican base falls into one of these latter two categories, rather than the former two. So Ron Paul and traditionalists interested in a non-interventionist foreign policy need a new argument to reach these people. And there may be no better way to get the uninformed to reconsider than to use an analogy. Here are a few possible explanations:

1. Stroll through a troubled neighborhood analogy

Perhaps the best way to explain blowback is to use the example of a woman strolling alone through Cincinnati's Central Parkway/Liberty Street neighborhood alone at night. This was considered the [most dangerous neighborhood in America](#) by [NeighborhoodScout.com](#). Consider that this woman is attacked and robbed. Was it her fault? Of course not. It was the fault of the thieves who stole her purse, and might do much worse to their next victim. But consider also that she could more easily have taken another route to her home and avoided the neighborhood altogether, but instead decided to take the longer Central Parkway route home. Obviously, her actions have some bearing on her being robbed. She was still not responsible for the robbery, but nevertheless she could have avoided the robbery (blowback) by taking the safer and shorter path home.

2. School yard fight analogy

The typical school yard fight could easily be used to explain the September 11 attacks. One boy (the United States) insults another boy (Saudi Arabia) by placing permanent bases on Islamic holy lands, and the second boy hits the first boy. The second boy is wholly responsible for starting the fight, but the first boy could have (and should have) avoided the fight altogether by not insulting the second boy and upsetting him.

3. Crime scene analogy

The third analogy that could be used to explain why blowback is important is the crime scene analogy. When a crime is committed, police always look for a motive for the culprit. The motive not only helps to



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prove guilt to the jury in a trial, but knowing the motive also helps police to prevent more crimes. By knowing why and how the culprit committed his crime, police can change patrol patterns to deter more crimes. For example, we might find that some after-hours thieves target jewelry stores that don't put the semi-precious stones in the safe with the diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. The motive is to steal the less valuable gems, because they are easier to fence on the black market. Police can then put out a warning to jewelry stores to put semi-precious stones in the safe to deter the thieves from robbing in the first place.

This is similar to the September 11 attacks. The [CIA had warned before September 11](#) that putting U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia might result in [attacks against the United States](#). And the [9/11 Commission Report](#) talked about blowback for that reason as well, specifically quoting the grievances of hard-line Saudi religious fundamentalists who converted Osama bin Laden from a [CIA asset in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan](#) to a man obsessed with attacking the United States.

It's well known by our intelligence agencies — and common sense — that when the United States bombs another country, the people being bombed (and their friends and relatives) tend to get mad at this country. Blowback is real. And the more Americans who understand it, the safer this country will be. The more the United States limits its bombings to those directly linked to specific attacks against the United States, the fewer Americans will be targeted by terrorists.

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