



Could the American mainland be considered a legitimate military target?



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June 26, 2026



In December 1941, the Japanese Imperial Army launched an air strike on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on Oahu, in the Territory of Hawaii, located about 3,800 km (2,400 miles) from the U.S. mainland. Notably, the Japanese attack did not reach the American mainland. This event marked the last foreign attack on U.S. territory for nearly 85 years. Since that attack, the United States has not suffered another foreign attack on its soil. In fact, it has

been able to rely on the protection afforded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, comfortably sheltered between two oceanic fortresses.

After the end of World War II, the United States went on to create new enemies. As the Cold War emerged, Washington cast communism as the ultimate global threat, one that had to be contained and defeated at any cost. Western media, along with many academic and political institutions operating within capitalist systems, played a significant role in manufacturing public consent for this agenda. Nations and movements seeking liberation from Western imperialism and capitalist domination were frequently portrayed as dangerous, radical, or subversive. Consequently, many anti-colonial and national liberation movements were labeled as leftist or communist by Western media, regardless of their actual political goals or ideological diversity.

During World War II, many colonies saw the war as an opportunity to struggle for independence as the Western colonial powers were weakened. Other oppressed nations joined their ranks in the march toward freedom and democracy. As more nations sought to gain their freedom, the number of perceived enemies grew in the eyes of American imperialism. Meanwhile, the Soviets viewed this as an opportunity to challenge imperialism by aiding and supporting these countries. Above all, the Soviets regarded internationalism as one of the fundamental pillars of their ideology.

The United States' postwar doctrine of President Truman labeled many of these freedom- and democracy-seeking countries to be potential threats to its capitalist ideology and viewed them as members of the communist camp.

Many nations that had suffered under the exploitative policies of imperialist powers—including the United States, Britain, and France—and sought to pursue an independent course became targets of coups, military interventions, and other forms of external interference. Some were subjected to bombing campaigns or invasions, while others saw their democratically elected governments overthrown through coups.

In 1950, the United States military entered the already divided Korean Peninsula to push back the North Korean forces seeking to reunify the country. The war that followed claimed the lives of approximately three million people on all sides.

In 1953 and 1954, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), under President Eisenhower, orchestrated coups d'état in Iran and Guatemala, overthrowing democratically elected governments. Mohammad Mossadeq prime minister of Iran and Jacobo Árbenz President of Guatemala were portrayed as communist threats in western media. Iran for its oil fields and Guatemala for its banana plantations, both became victims of aggressive imperialism.

Thereafter, the orchestration of coups d'état, military interventions, covert operations, and the arming of CIA-backed groups became a significant component of U.S. foreign policy. The United States also waged economic warfare against numerous countries, imposing extensive sanctions, asset freezes, and embargoes on nations such as North Korea, Cuba, and Iran, which have been subject to such measures for approximately 76, 68, and 47 years, respectively. Critics argue that these policies have functioned as a form of economic siege, causing severe humanitarian consequences and contributing to hardship and death of millions of people.

The United States, along with its military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and member states, pursued an increasingly interventionist foreign policy during the postwar period, particularly from the 1960s onward. Together, they conducted numerous military interventions and operations against nations that sought to pursue political and economic paths independent of the Western capitalist order and resisted Western influence. In the name of "freedom" and "democracy," they employed military power, economic pressure, and covert operations to suppress movements for independence and self-determination in nations that resisted U.S. dominance.

One of the most decorated Marines in U.S. history, Major General Smedley Butler, famously stated that he had spent his career acting as a *"high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers,"* adding: *"In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism."*

The interventions and policies pursued by the United States, along with the atrocities and injustices committed by its allied and proxy states, contributed to the growth of resistance and national liberation movements across the globe. In turn, these developments led to further conflicts, including direct confrontations involving the United States. Covert operations conducted by the CIA and its proxy right-wing militant groups also became increasingly extensive and, in some cases, highly violent. One notable example was the Indonesian purge of 1965–1966, during which near a million people accused of communist sympathies were murdered.

The western capitalism with mainstream media at its side portrayed such events as necessary measures in the struggle against communism. According to this perspective, anti-communist narratives frequently overshadowed broader questions regarding the political, social, and economic causes of these conflicts.

Over the years, the United States has employed a wide range of instruments, including economic sanctions, trade embargoes, and military intervention, — to impose and push market capitalism as aggressively as possible, without compromise, into the economic veins of nations around the world, regardless of the disastrous consequences for people's lives.

This behavior became even more ruthless following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, which, in a way, had served as obstacles to the expansionist ambitions of the Western bloc, and NATO.

When the United States encountered no effective resistance or backlash for its actions—whether internationally through institutions such as the United Nations or domestically through political opposition—a sense of impunity emerged and gradually developed into arrogance. This dynamic, combined

with a perception of strategic invulnerability afforded by its geographic position between two oceans, contributed significantly to the development of an increasingly interventionist foreign policy.

The United States has conducted military operations in numerous countries, some of which have resulted in high civilian casualties, including women and children. These actions have not always been justified by clear or legitimate strategic objectives and, in some cases, have been perceived as demonstrations of power intended to deter adversaries.

To this point, this article has attempted to provide a brief account of the brutality and ruthlessness of the capitalist system and its principal actors, namely the United States and its allied Western states.

Among the most frequently cited examples are the bombings of Afghan villages, particularly a 2008 strike on a wedding party in Afghanistan that resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians, including women and children. It is arguable that massacre such as this illustrate a perceived double standard in the application of moral and legal principles governing the use of force, particularly when such events are later characterized as mistakes occurring in the course of a legitimate military campaign against the Taliban. However, retaliatory attacks against civilian targets in the United States or other Western states would almost certainly be condemned as acts of terrorism, rather than being interpreted as errors within a context of self-defense or justified retaliation.

From this perspective, the concepts of "retaliation" and "the right to self-defense" are often defined and applied in ways that reflect existing power relations within the international system.

Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that actions directed against the United States have routinely been characterized and classified as acts of terrorism by U.S. officials and institutions, regardless of the motivations claimed by their perpetrators. At the same time, similar scrutiny is not always applied to the military actions of powerful states, raising questions about the

consistency with which concepts such as terrorism, right of self-defense, and retaliation are defined and applied within the international system.

According to this view, international institutions, including the United Nations, are seen as often reflecting the political influence of dominant Western powers in shaping these definitions and norms.

At this point, a number of crucial questions arise for societies that regard themselves as civilized and guided by high ethical standards—societies that define and promote concepts such as terrorism, fundamentalism, totalitarianism, radicalism, extremism, and fanaticism. Central among these questions is whether the moral principles they advocate are applied consistently, particularly when their own actions and interests are at stake.

Consider a scenario in which a state is subjected to sustained aerial bombardment by the United States of America, resulting in extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure and significant loss of life, including in residential areas, schools, and hospitals. The United States conducts these operations from a geographically distant position, beyond the effective military reach of the targeted state.

In response, a small team of military personnel from the affected state manage to enter U.S. territory. They carry out a series of attacks against military targets, which regrettably result in collateral damage and civilian casualties. These military individuals are subsequently apprehended and prosecuted before a domestic court.

In the prosecution's opening statement, the defendants' actions are characterized as acts of terrorism, and the accused are designated as terrorists under applicable domestic and international legal categories.

In contrast, the defense argues that the individuals are members of the armed forces of a recognized state, acting under military command and in the context of an ongoing armed conflict. On this basis, they reject the classification of their conduct as terrorism and instead frame it as conduct

associated with military operations in wartime and they should be treated as prisoners of war (POW) under the Geneva convention.

Would the United States, which regards itself as an ethical and civilized nation, accept the argument that an attack on its territory—carried out by an adversary engaged in an ongoing armed conflict—constitutes a lawful act of war rather than an act of terrorism, particularly where that adversary may invoke a right of self-defense or retaliation under international law governing armed conflict?

Would the United States, as a society that professes a commitment to ethical principles, be willing to regard military actions conducted on its territory by a foreign adversary as legitimate acts of war if similar actions—such as the indiscriminate bombing of a city—undertaken by the United States abroad are characterized as lawful military operations?

What is your judgment on this matter as a citizen of the United States of America?

And you—yes, you, a citizen of the civilized world—what would be your judgment on this ethical matter?

Should the United States continue to maintain a monopoly on the authority to define “terrorism” and “terrorist,” and on what constitutes legitimate retaliation or self-defense?

Perhaps the so-called civilized nations should stop acting as moral teachers when they themselves fail to uphold the virtues they preach.

It would be far more honorable to come out and say openly to the world:

“Yes, we are powerful. We possess immensely destructive military forces. We control vast financial resources. We hold many of the institutions of global power in our hands. We shape and control the narratives. We are stronger than you. We punish and destroy anyone who refuses to acknowledge our dominance. That is what the strong do.”

Such honesty would command far more respect than lectures about morality delivered by those who do not practice what they preach.

The next set of questions is perhaps the most challenging, as it concerns the future direction of the United States.

If the United States of America is regarded as a democratic state, the next questions concern the extent to which American citizens bear responsibility for, and should be held accountable for, atrocities committed in distant lands by a government they elect through democratic processes and entrusted with power.

"The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Could the American voters be regarded as complicit in acts of violence committed abroad by a government they democratically elected?

Could American citizens, in the age of information, plausibly make the same claim that Germans during the Nazi era made: **"Ich wusste es nicht?"**

To what extent should ordinary citizens in a democratic society be held morally accountable for failing to think critically and prevent their state from committing crimes in their name?



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