

integrity of the Constitution, that is not victory, but a catastrophe.

- If, in revenge for the deaths of innocent American citizens you kill approximately the same number of innocent Afghan citizens, that is not victory but either murder or negligent manslaughter.

- If you were unable to decide who the enemy was until after you've started fighting, that's a sign you might have thought about it all a bit more first.

- If two of your biggest 'evildoers' - namely bin Laden and Hussein - were in part creations of your own intelligence agencies, getting rid of them is not a victory but a salvage operation that could have been avoided by being right the first time.

- If, thanks to the policies of your government and the enemies it has created, you can longer travel, act, or speak in the manner of free Americans over the past two centuries, that is not a victory but the deepest of tragedies.

Bottom line

The curable cause of the present crisis was never to be found in a cave in Afghanistan nor at a military headquarters in Palestine. Rather it was to be found in a half century of abusive American policy towards the Islamic world including a deadly embargo against Iraq; the suppression of Palestinian statehood; the promotion, assassination and/or manipulation of national Arab leaders against the best interests of peace, their people, and our own security; and our repeated refusal to listen to the nearly unanimous voice of the United Nations in general assembly. We have wantonly - and at enormous damage to our creditability, safety, and honor - pursued the goals of militarists, CIA adventurists, the oil industry, the Israeli lobby, and Ivy League imperialists of the Council on Foreign Relations - all mindlessly cheered on by a servile and slanted media.

We have absolutely nothing to gain by continuing to follow the self-serving, avaricious, and reckless goals of those who have caused our nation such hurt. By admitting that these policies have been wrong, we have nothing to lose but decades of bad ideas and the shame that has accompanied them.

These policies have not been American in any indigenous sense; rather they have been the work of greedy corporations, arrogant intellectuals in search of machismo, violent militarists, and a terminally uncritical press. Nowhere is the defense of Israeli

aggression mentioned in the Constitution. Patrick Henry did not say, "Give me a pipeline or give me death." Nathan Hale did not declare, "I regret have but one life to give for hegemony in Eurasia."

In fact, no policy by any president has been more alien to American ideals than that now being pursued by George W. Bush. He is destroying our Constitution, bringing disgrace to our history, and endangering the entire planet. And to his sins, he adds the hypocrisy of calling it patriotic.

Many say there is no other course, but that is absolutely false. One reason it doesn't seem so is because the media refuses to give time or space to other than apostles of violence and revenge. The voices of calm, reason, and rational resolution have been blacklisted by almost all the major media - including those supported by tax dollars and public contribution.

If it were otherwise, we might realize that even the far from adequate peace efforts of the Clinton administration had brought a calm that was abruptly destroyed by the codependent, abusive egos of bin Laden, Sharon, and Bush. In 1995, by the State Department's own count, there were 6,400 terrorist casualties around the world, including 70 Americans. By 1999 there were only 939 including 11 Americans. Only seven casualties occurred in North America. It is reasonable to hypothesize that even bin Laden was restrained by the obvious potential for progress.

In a last burst of self-aggrandizement, however, Clinton attempted to reach a Middle East settlement *before* leaving office. Unfortunately, he so hyped this deadlined effort that when it failed, it was seen not merely as his failure but that of all future possibility. Within months, violence began escalating and the voices of vengeance with it.



Carefully concealed in the theatrics of war, the bombast of propaganda, and the lights and sirens of new security measures is the simple fact that on September 11, America suffered an unprecedented defeat at the hands of those armed with the most meager of weapons. It was a defeat not only deeply humiliating in its character but unnecessary in its origins.

These facts are not erased by the moral failures of our foe. We have not been the victims of an unpredictable, spontaneous combustion of evil, but rather of a long series of missteps and misjudgments of which the angry, bitter, and deranged simply took advantage.

Neither can these facts be mitigated by a continued loyalty to the very leadership that so endangered the country by its disastrous policies, inadequate

preparation, and taunting arrogance. What happened on September 11 did not have to happen and until we face that truth, and deal with its implications, we will live in fear and danger.

Those in power - in government, media, corporations, and academia - have made terrible mistakes. If they had true capacity for shame, most of the members of the Council on Foreign Relations would go into monasteries to repent, the editorial boards of the New York Times and Washington Post would resign en masse, and most national politicians would have the good grace not to run again.

These after all, are the people who have assured us that if we were merely loyal enough to Israel, if we merely spent enough on the military, and merely gave up enough rights in the name of security, everything would be fine. And these are the people who said it was okay to build the largest buildings in the world without observing city fire codes.

These are not new mistakes. Our unbalanced Middle East policy has a long provenance, backed by the best and the brightest that the American establishment could produce. They were dead wrong. There were lonely exceptions such as George Ball, but their thoughts were repeatedly suppressed and ignored. To this day the elite rhetoric on the subject presumes an irreversible dichotomy in the Middle East, as though it were impossible to be simultaneously as fair and decent to Arabs as it is to Israelis.

And it's far from just a matter of intellectual error. For decades a sane military policy has been subverted by a voraciously greedy defense industry with its codependent enclaves in the Pentagon where tens of billions of dollars are misspent, misdirected, or just plain missing. For decades, criminal or corrupt combinations have infested our politics - including Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Arkansas Mafia - badly distorting direction, destroying integrity, and damaging programs, including those designed to protect the citizen in times of emergency. For decades a corporate coup against democracy has been underway subverting both our domestic and foreign policies. Throughout this period a culture of impunity has arisen among our leaders that permits them to function outside the constraints of our constitution, ideals, or traditions. And throughout this period, the major media have preferred to share in the power rather than to speak truth about it.

America, under this tawdry, corrupt, intellectually vacuous, and morally decadent leadership, became an extraordinarily easy mark. Easy to hate, easy to target, and easy to devastate.

While excoriating bin Laden for taking advantage of this is both natural and just, but does not add one iota to either our wisdom or our safety. Neither does applauding those whose arrogance, ignorance and carelessness led us to this disaster. They should not be cheered but accused, called to account, and judged severely. Only when we face how we got into this mess will we start to find the way out.

We can still stop the madness. What we need is enough humility to admit that our country has been wrong, enough rationality to understand that one does not eradicate evil by compounding it, and enough courage to oppose the evisceration of our liberties and values by those whose words do not reflect patriotism but the blasphemy of political bullies.

It is part of the myth of the moment that the work of bin Laden was without provenance other than his own malicious soul. But like other violence emerging from history's failures, it was, in fact, dependent on the despair and aggravation of an aggrieved constituency and remains inevitably strengthened or weakened by the worsening or resolution of this anger and frustration.

We can either resolve the causes of alienation between America and one billion Muslims or, on the other hand, we can condemn ourselves and our children to lives of fear, anger, and confusion - and perhaps even worse - all because our leaders were unwilling to act with the honor, decency, and sense of fair play that were once the hallmark of an American.

The liberal aristocracy and the fall of America

Future historians seeking to discover why America so easily surrendered its democratic traditions and constitutional government will find plenty to study in the rise of a liberal aristocracy that became increasingly disinterested in such values. Like all aristocracies, it existed primarily to protect itself, had an impermeable faith in its own virtue, and held in contempt those who did not share its values or accept its leadership. For many years, 20th century liberalism was saved from becoming an aristocracy because of the dominance of such constituencies as labor, immigrants and their children, and ethnic minorities. Eventually, however, these constituencies - thanks in part to successful liberal policies - advanced socially and economically to the point that the bulk no longer functioned as a massive reminder of what liberalism was meant to be about.

With the end of the Great Society, liberal Democrats began a steady retreat from liberalism climaxing in the