

America at War: The Moral Imperative to Self-Defense

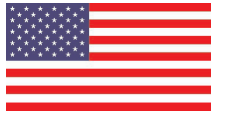
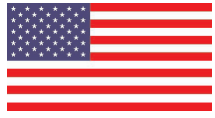
By Dr. Andrew Bernstein

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“END STATES WHO SPONSOR TERRORISM”

By Leonard Peikoff

Fifty years of increasing American appeasement in the Mideast have led to fifty years of increasing contempt in the Muslim world for the U.S. The climax was September 11, 2001.

Fifty years ago, Truman and Eisenhower surrendered the West's property rights in oil, although that oil rightfully belonged to those in the West whose science, technology, and capital made its discovery and use possible. The first country to nationalize Western oil, in 1951, was Iran. The rest, observing our frightened silence, hurried to grab their piece of the newly available loot.

The cause of the U.S. silence was not practical, but philosophical. The Mideast's dictators were denouncing wealthy egotistical capitalism. They were crying that their poor needed our sacrifice; that oil, like all property, is owned collectively, by virtue of birth; and that they knew their viewpoint was true by means of otherworldly emotion. Our Presidents had no answer. Implicitly, they were ashamed of the Declaration of Independence. They did not dare to answer that Americans, properly, were motivated by the selfish desire to achieve personal happiness in a rich, secular, individualist society.

The Muslim countries embodied in an extreme form every idea—selfless duty, anti-materialism, faith or feeling above science, the supremacy of the group—which our universities, our churches, and our own political Establishment had long been upholding as virtue. When two groups, our leadership and theirs, accept the same basic ideas, the most consistent side wins.

After property came liberty. “The Muslim fundamentalist movement,” writes Yale historian Lamin Sanneh, “began in 1979 with the Iranian [theocratic] revolution . . .” (NYT 9/23/01). During his first year as its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, urging a Jihad against “the Great Satan,” kidnapped 52 U.S. diplomatic personnel and held them hostage; Carter's reaction was fumbling paralysis. About a decade later, Iran topped this evil. Khomeini issued his infamous Fatwa aimed at censoring, even outside his borders, any ideas uncongenial to Muslim sensibility. This was the meaning of his threat to kill British author Rushdie and to destroy his American publisher; their crime was the exercise of their right to express an unpopular intellectual viewpoint. The Fatwa was Iran's attempt, reaffirmed after Khomeini's death, to stifle, anywhere in the world, the very process of thought. Bush Sr. looked the other way.

After liberty came American life itself. The first killers were the Palestinian hijackers of the late 1960s. But the killing spree which has now shattered our soaring landmarks, our daily routine, and our souls, began in earnest only after the license granted by Carter and Bush Sr.

Many nations work to fill our body bags. But Iran, according to a State Department report of 1999, is “the most active state sponsor of terrorism,” training and arming groups from all over the Mideast, including Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Nor is Iran's government now “moderating.” Five months ago, the world's leading terrorist groups resolved to unite in a holy war against the U.S., which they called “a second Israel”; their meeting was held in Teheran. (Fox News 9/16/01)

What has been the U.S. response to the above? In 1996, nineteen U.S. soldiers were killed in their barracks in Saudi Arabia. According to a front-page story in The New York Times (6/21/98): “Evidence suggesting that Iran sponsored the attack has further complicated the investigation, because the United States and Saudi Arabia have recently sought to improve relations with a new, relatively moderate Government in Teheran.” In other words, Clinton evaded Iran's role because he wanted what he called “a genuine reconciliation.” In public, of course, he continued to vow that he would find and punish the guilty. This inaction of Clinton's is comparable to his action after bin Laden's attack on U.S. embassies in East Africa; his action was the gingerly bombing of two meaningless targets.

Conservatives are equally responsible for today's crisis, as Reagan's record attests. Reagan not only failed to retaliate after 241 U.S. marines in Lebanon were slaughtered; he did worse. Holding that Islamic guerrillas were our ideological allies because of their fight against the atheistic Soviets, he methodically poured money and expertise into Afghanistan. This put the U.S. wholesale into the business of creating terrorists. Most of them regarded fighting the Soviets as only the beginning; our turn soon came.

For over a decade, there was another guarantee of American impotence: the notion that a terrorist is alone responsible for his actions, and that each, therefore, must be tried as an individual before a court of law. This viewpoint, thankfully, is fading; most people now understand that terrorists exist only through the sanction and support of a government.

We need not prove the identity of any of these creatures, because terrorism is not an issue of personalities. It cannot

be stopped by destroying bin Laden and the al-Qaeda army, or even by destroying the destroyers everywhere. If that is all we do, a new army of militants will soon rise up to replace the old one.

The behavior of such militants is that of the regimes which make them possible. Their atrocities are not crimes, but acts of war. The proper response, as the public now understands, is a war in self-defense. In the excellent words of Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense, we must “end states who sponsor terrorism.”

A proper war in self-defense is one fought without self-crippling restrictions placed on our commanders in the field. It must be fought with the most effective weapons we possess (a few weeks ago, Rumsfeld refused, correctly, to rule out nuclear weapons). And it must be fought in a manner that secures victory as quickly as possible and with the fewest U.S. casualties, regardless of the countless innocents caught in the line of fire. These innocents suffer and die because of the action of their own government in sponsoring the initiation of force against America. Their fate, therefore, is their government's moral responsibility. There is no way for our bullets to be aimed only at evil men.

The public understandably demands retaliation against Afghanistan. But in the wider context Afghanistan is insignificant. It is too devastated even to breed many fanatics. Since it is no more these days than a place to hide, its elimination would do little to end terrorism.

“If our appeasement has led to an escalation of disasters in the past, can it do otherwise in the future? The survival of America is at stake. The risk of a U.S. overreaction, therefore, is negligible. The only risk is underreaction.”

Terrorism is a specific disease, which can be treated only by a specific antidote. The nature of the disease (though not of its antidote) has been suggested by Serge Schmemmann (NYT 9/16/01). Our struggle now, he writes, is “not a struggle against a conventional guerrilla force, whose yearning for a national homeland or the satisfaction of some grievance could be satisfied or denied. The terrorists [on Tuesday] . . . issued no demands, no ultimatums. They did it solely out of grievance and hatred—hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage, but abhorred by religious fundamentalists (and not only Muslim fundamentalists) as licentiousness, corruption, greed and apostasy.”

Every word of this is true. The obvious implication is that the struggle against terrorism is not a struggle over Palestine. It is a clash of cultures, and thus a struggle of ideas, which can be dealt with, ultimately, only by intellectual means. But this fact does not depreciate the crucial role of our armed forces. On the contrary, it increases their effectiveness, by pointing them to the right target.

Most of the Mideast is ruled by thugs who would be paralyzed by an American victory over any of their neighbors. Iran, by contrast, is the only major country there ruled by zealots dedicated not to material gain (such as more wealth or territory), but to the triumph by any means, however violent, of the Muslim fundamentalist movement they brought to life. That is why Iran manufactures the most terrorists.

If one were under a Nazi aerial bombardment, it would be senseless to restrict oneself to combatting Nazi satellites while ignoring Germany and the ideological plague it was working to spread. What Germany was to Nazism in the 1940s, Iran is to

terrorism today. Whatever else it does, therefore, the U.S. can put an end to the Jihad-mongers only by taking out Iran.

Eliminating Iran's terrorist sanctuaries and military capability is not enough. We must do the equivalent of de-Nazifying the country, by expelling every official and bringing down every branch of its government. This goal cannot be achieved painlessly, by weaponry alone. It requires invasion by ground troops, who will be at serious risk, and perhaps a period of occupation. But nothing less will “end the state” that most cries out to be ended.

The greatest obstacle to U.S. victory is not Iran and its allies, but our own intellectuals. Even now, they are advocating the same ideas that caused our historical paralysis. They are asking a reeling nation to show neighbor-love by shunning “vengeance.” The multiculturalists—rejecting the concept of objectivity—are urging us to “understand” the Arabs and avoid “racism” (i.e., any condemnation of any group's culture). The friends of “peace” are reminding us, ever more loudly, to “remember Hiroshima” and beware the sin of pride.

These are the kinds of voices being heard in the universities, the churches, and the media as the country recovers from its first shock, and the professoriate et al. feel emboldened to resume business as usual. These voices are a siren song luring us to untroubled sleep while the fanatics proceed to gut America.

Tragically, Mr. Bush is attempting a compromise between the people's demand for a decisive war and the intellectuals' demand for appeasement.

It is likely that the Bush administration will soon launch an attack on bin Laden's organization in Afghanistan and possibly even attack the Taliban. Despite this, however, every sign indicates that Mr. Bush will repeat the mistakes made by his father in Iraq. As of October 1, the Taliban leadership appears not to be a target. Even worse, the administration refuses to target Iran, or any of the other countries identified by the State Department as terrorist regimes. On the contrary, Powell is seeking to add to the current coalition these very states—which is the equivalent of going into partnership with the Soviet Union in order to fight Communism (under the pretext, say, of proving that we are not anti-Russian). By seeking such a coalition, our President is asserting that he needs the support of terrorist nations in order to fight them. He is stating publicly that the world's only superpower does not have enough self-confidence or moral courage to act unilaterally in its own defense.

For some days now, Mr. Bush has been downplaying the role of our military, while praising the same policies (mainly negotiation and economic pressure) that have failed so spectacularly and for so long. Instead of attacking the roots of global terrorism, he seems to be settling for a “guerrilla war” against al-Qaeda, and a policy of unseating the Taliban passively, by aiding a motley coalition of native tribes. Our battle, he stresses, will be a “lengthy” one.

Mr. Bush's compromise will leave the primary creators of terrorism whole—and unafraid. His approach might satisfy our short-term desire for retribution, but it will guarantee catastrophe in the long term.

As yet, however, no overall policy has been solidified; the administration still seems to be groping. And an angry public still expects our government not merely to hobble terrorism for a while, but to eradicate it. The only hope left is that Mr. Bush will listen to the public, not to the professors and their progeny.

When should we act, if not now? If our appeasement has led to an escalation of disasters in the past, can it do otherwise in the future? Do we wait until our enemies master nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare?

The survival of America is at stake. The risk of a U.S. overreaction, therefore, is negligible. The only risk is underreaction.

Mr. Bush must reverse course. He must send our missiles and troops, in force, where they belong. And he must justify this action by declaring with righteous conviction that we have discarded the clichés of our paper-tiger past and that the U.S. now places America first.

There is still time to demonstrate that we take the war against terrorism seriously—as a sacred obligation to our Founding Fathers, to every victim of the men who hate this country, and to ourselves. There is still time to make the world understand that we will take up arms, anywhere and on principle, to secure an American's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on earth.

The choice today is mass death in the United States or mass death in the terrorist nations. Our Commander-In-Chief must decide whether it is his duty to save Americans or the governments who conspire to kill them.



Leonard Peikoff is the founder of the Ayn Rand Institute.

Founded in 1985, the Ayn Rand Institute promotes Objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand.

Miss Rand was the author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*.

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