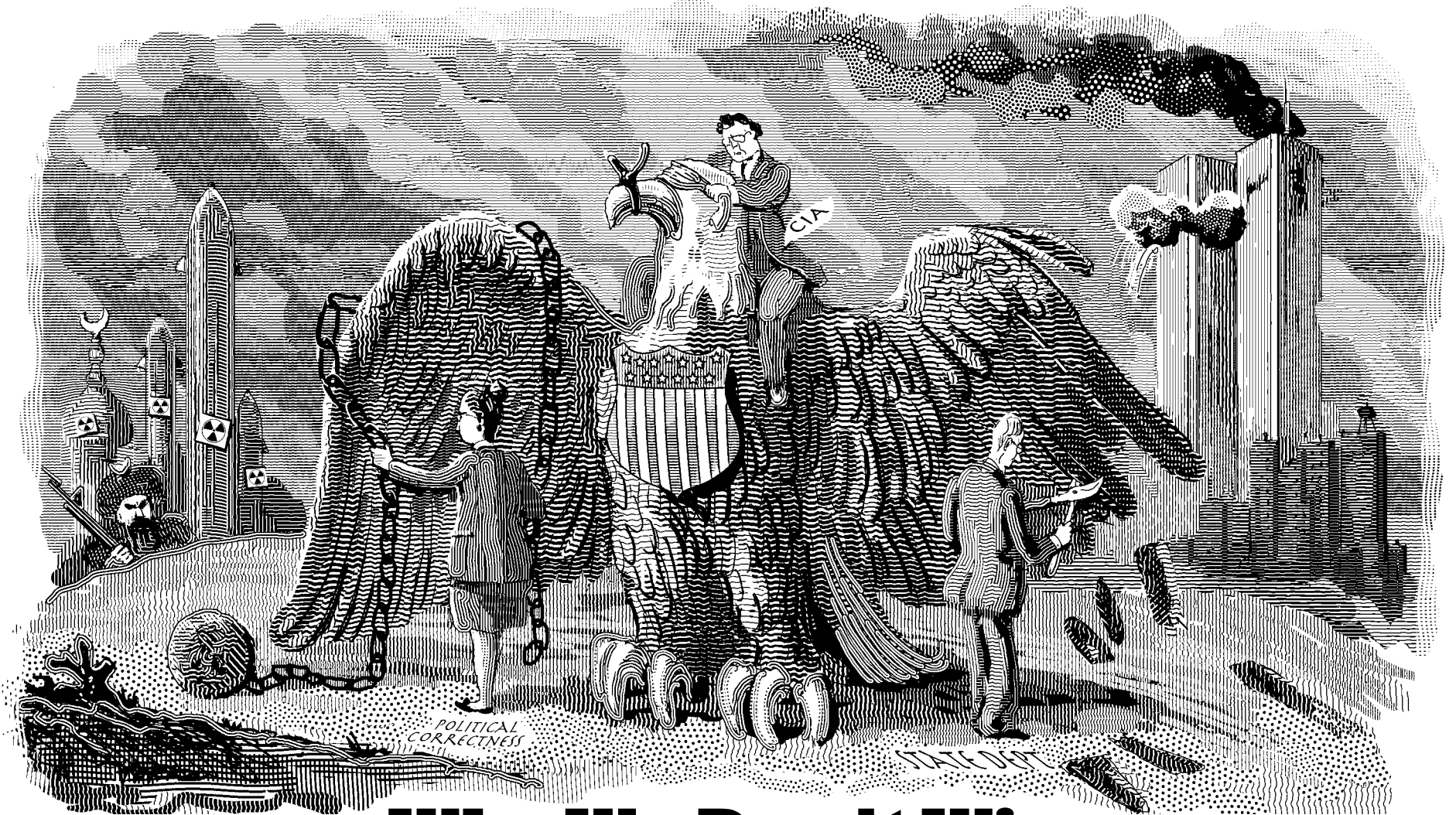


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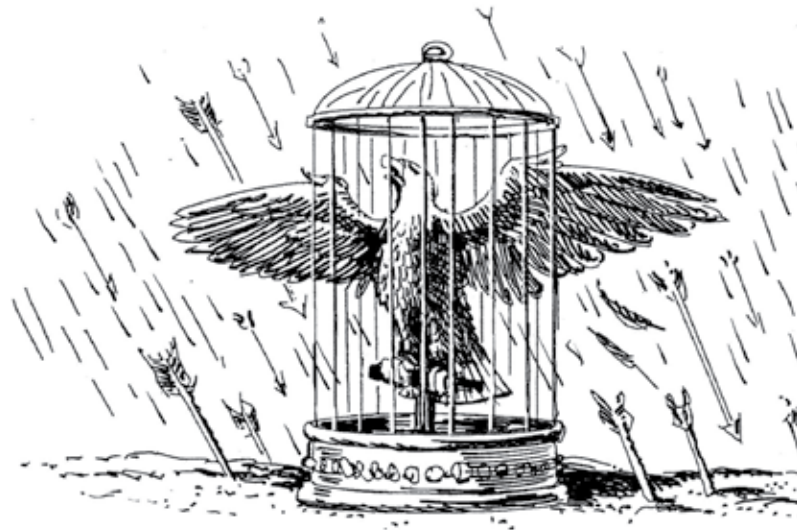
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Essay by Angelo Codevilla

WHY WE DON'T WIN



MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS AFTER A GANG of Arabs murdered 3,000 Americans, no one argues that the U.S. government has managed to avenge our fellow citizens, much less ensure our peace, safety, and “Enduring Freedom.” Nearly a decade after September 11, lower Manhattan’s Ground Zero remains a hole—in Bret Stephens’s words, “a site of mourning turned into a symbol of defiance turned into a metaphor of American incompetence.” Only a third of Americans now tell pollsters that we are winning against the terrorists. Two-thirds of respondents are angry with their government; about half of these are “very angry,” having lost faith in its capacity to perform even basic functions. Rasmussen reports that although a third of those polled think the country’s best days are ahead, a majority believes that America’s future will be worse than its past.

For decades, under Democrats and Republicans, liberal internationalists, neoconservatives, and realists, the U.S. government let the terrorist wave build. Then after 9/11 it spent over 5,000 American lives in Afghanistan and Iraq without achieving anything that it had promised, while conducting a self-discrediting diplomacy toward Iran, Russia, North Korea, and China. At home, the Homeland Security department diminished our liberty without increasing our security. In this respect, the differences among Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter, and Richard Nixon, and among Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, Warren Christopher, George Shultz, and Henry Kissinger, are less important than their similarities: the “small war” of terrorist acts that has

beset us since the 1960s—infinitesimal as wars go—was enough to expose our bipartisan ruling class’s incomprehension and incompetence. America’s problem is that this class has set the country on a downward slope in foreign as well as domestic matters, and that it is increasingly difficult to imagine America on any other trajectory with it at the helm.

Whatever It Takes?

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, FIFTEEN SAUDI Wahabis, plus two from the Emirates and one from Lebanon, led by an Egyptian Muslim Brother, brutally deprived America of peace. They executed a plan devised by the (secular) terrorist network of Khalid Sheik Muhammed—the very people who had first attacked the World Trade Center in 1993, carrying passports from Iraq. But though peace is the natural aim of statecraft, American statesmen never considered how to restore our peace.

Defeat and victory are obvious and undeniable. Winners celebrate a better future; losers mourn a better past. Winners live confidently in peace; losers scurry after ever receding mirages of it. The news of 9/11, the images of burning Americans jumping to their deaths and of iconic buildings in flames, set off victory dances in the Arab street. Crocodile tears from what our political class likes to call “the international community” thinly veiled its satisfaction that, as Barack Obama’s mentor Jeremiah Wright would put it, “America’s chickens came home to roost.” To the many who celebrated the end of the American era, the future looked brighter than the past. Not so to the American people. Com-

binning outrage with mourning, they demanded (as a rescue worker at Ground Zero shouted to President Bush) “whatever it takes” to destroy terrorists and all who had anything to do with them. But America’s bipartisan ruling class never intended to turn the mourners into revelers, and vice versa.

Our best and brightest refused to take seriously the possibility of holding Middle Eastern governments responsible for the incitement of these attacks, for both the money and the terrorists that flow from their jurisdictions. Nor did they identify any other source of the problem. Hence, regardless of how the operations they ordered might fare, our experts were not going to solve America’s problem. Instead, they promoted the notion that 9/11 would “change everything, forever”—*in America*. They accepted terrorism as a fact of modern life and told Americans to get used to finding public spaces turned into fortresses, to showing documents and being frisked. The slogan “united we stand” did not tell Americans to eliminate our enemies, but to stand still, to commemorate our dead, to believe and obey Washington. There would be no victory, much less peace. Demands for either would be deemed extremism. The terror threat would remain “orange” indefinitely, and the bloodletting would have no end. It’s a wonder that Americans’ spirits held up as long as they did.

September 11 brought to America the Muslim world’s endemic warfare. As a routine matter, Sunni Arab secular regimes violently repress the Muslim Brotherhood while deflecting their zealous anger toward Westerners. Somewhat similarly, Saudi Arabia’s regime turns the mur-



ERASMUS AND VOLTAIRE

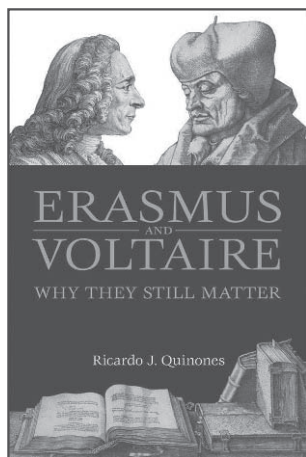


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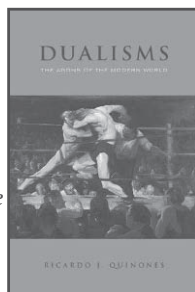
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derous Wahabi sect with which it is intertwined against impure Muslims and Westerners. All repress the Shia in their midst. Iran's Shia regime fights its Sunni neighbors for elbow room by supporting Shia elements in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, and affirms its Muslim credentials by fighting Westerners. Terrorism is the Muslim world's tool of choice for international as well as domestic affairs.

The diplomacy of Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt toward the West combines demands—and vague suggestions that satisfying those demands might lead to some lessening of terrorist activity against us—with dark hints of violence if the demands are not met. By contrast, America and Europe now live in fear of attacks on behalf of causes espoused by these states. Western policy is based on the notion that peace for us depends on satisfying them. Hence every president since Richard Nixon has promoted one version or another of "the peace plan," seeking to trade our side's concrete concessions for Arab promises to stop trying to destroy Israel, Western civilization's outpost in the Middle East; to curtail Arab governments' anti-Western incitement; and to stop facilitating terrorists. Every secretary of state from Henry Kissinger to Hillary Clinton has pressed Israel to "take chances for peace."

America's own concessions have resulted in a Muslim world ever less inclined to give us peace. In the 1970s the U.S. government agreed to the Arab world's demands to treat Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization as the Palestinian people's sole legitimate representative, and even started financing it secretly. Similarly, in the 1980s the U.S. helped Syria take over Lebanon, and in 1991 ensured the survival of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The Bush Administration's reaction to 9/11 was gratuitously to declare Arab governments allies in the war against terrorism. Barack Obama confessed America's sins (not his own) to the Muslim world and proposed mutual understanding. Today, it is inconceivable that any of the Muslim world's governments, which routinely police public expression in their countries with iron fists, would recommend to its subjects even elementary courtesy to Jews, Christians, or mere Westerners.

Profiles of Defeat

BY CONTRAST THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS officially declared that Islam—all parts of it—is a "religion of peace," and that Muslim countries are pillars of the international community. To discourage the American people's natural reaction to their attackers as well as to search for ways of reaching out to Muslims at home and abroad, the U.S. employs Muslims to craft codes of speech and behavior for its employees and for members of the armed

forces, codes that the mainstream media effectively spread through civil society. In 2006, under Hasham Islam, a protégé of then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, the Pentagon franchised the American Muslim Council (whose leader was later convicted of plotting a murder) to supply Muslim chaplains for the U.S. armed forces.

When a Muslim murders shouting "Allahu Akhbar," as did U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan as he shot 51 colleagues at Fort Hood, Texas, the official reaction grimly recalls Groucho Marx's joke about how a man answered his wife when she caught him *in flagrante*: "Who you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?" After the shootings, President Obama warned against "jumping to conclusions," and Army Chief of Staff George Casey added that "it would be a greater tragedy if diversity became a casualty here" (emphasis added). Never mind that Hasan identified himself on his business card as "SoA" (a soldier of Allah), that he attended a Wahabi mosque, and that he had lectured colleagues, on the Koran's authority, that infidels should have burning oil poured down their throats and be beheaded. The *New York Times* editorialized that many soldiers returning from deployments exhibit high levels of violence, that Americans had taunted Hasan for being Muslim, and in its letters column that America itself manufactures many Hasans. Chicago's mayor Richard Daley blamed the American public's love of guns. The presidential commission's report on the matter, prepared by former Army Secretary Togo West, blamed "extremist behavior" (of which Americans and Christians are at least as guilty as anyone) and never mentioned Muslims, Arabs, or any reason for avoiding the obvious.

Why do our leaders avoid the obvious? Because, as *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas pointed out, talking about Muslims committing terrorist acts tends to "get the right wing going," which the ruling class fears more than they fear foreign terrorism. Noting that terrorism comes chiefly from the Muslim world is in bad taste among our rulers because it amounts to "profiling." Yet they profile all the time. The FBI fruitlessly focused its investigation of the 9/11 anthrax attacks tightly on two persons it hounded to death and on another to whom it was forced to pay \$5.8 million in damages—because these three fit its profile of the "mad scientist." Attributing anti-American terrorism to the American people's own defects is an even more common profile, part of that polite narrative which Thomas Friedman describes as

the cocktail of half-truths, propaganda and outright lies about America that have taken hold in the Arab-Muslim world since 9/11. Propagated by jihadist Web sites, mosque preachers, Arab intellectuals, sat-



elite news stations and books—and tacitly endorsed by some Arab regimes—this narrative posits that America has declared war on Islam, as part of a grand “American-Crusader-Zionist conspiracy” to keep Muslims down.

Adopting the narrative of those who would kill you is the surest sign of defeat.

Consistent with this narrative, the FBI also launched operation “Vigilant Eagle” in February 2009, which profiles for surveillance as possible terrorists American “militia/sovereign-citizen extremist groups” and veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. On April 7, a Department of Homeland Security memo made this official U.S. policy. No evidence told our ruling class that these Americans were dangerous. But the profile did. By contrast, though the government had intercepted Major Nidal Hasan’s e-mail exchanges with an al-Qaeda cleric in Yemen (who later wrote: “the only way a Muslim could Islamically justify serving as a soldier in the U.S. Army is if his intention is to follow in the footsteps of men like Nidal”), he fit a profile that allowed him to become part of an advisory group to President Obama’s 2009 transition task force on security. In short, our governing class’s profiles reflect prejudices at odds with reality.

The Logic of Insecurity

THE LOGIC OF OUR RULING CLASS’S burgeoning security apparatus is that any person is neither more nor less likely to be a terrorist than any other, and that focusing on Muslims (especially of a certain age, etc.) is some kind of crime. That logic mandates bothersome but impotent surveillance of the general population. Whenever terrorist incidents spotlight that impotence, this logic prescribes ever-greater doses of the same. On Christmas Day 2009, a young Nigerian whose prominent father had warned the U.S. embassy of his son’s Muslim anti-Americanism almost blew up an airliner over Detroit with a bag of high-explosive powder attached to his underwear—having been let on board without even showing his passport. Republicans and Democrats rushed to enhance security by forcing all air travelers through scanners that would show us naked (with faces obscured) to security officers. (Inevitably, these officers’ cubicles will be tagged “Peeping Toms’ Cabins.”) What can be said of a ruling class that pursues security through universal nakedness?

To what next step will our rulers’ security paradigm take us? It is no secret that nakedness is insufficient because drug couriers routinely take onto airliners far more stuff hidden in body cavities than the Christmas bomber had in his underwear, and because objects hidden in body

cavities can be discovered only by body cavity searches. That is why male and female inmates processed into maximum-security prisons undergo body cavity searches either manually or by ultrasound. Were a jihadist to use a cavity bomb to bring down an airliner, might the notion of treating us all like high-security convicts be ludicrous enough for our rulers to rethink their cultural-political paradigm? What would it take for our experts to admit that security starts with focusing on political and social differences, rather than with the pretense that these are irrelevant?

Ingrained Ineptitude

OUR RULING CLASS’S PERSISTENT DENIAL of the fact that war arbitrates human differences, and its belief that “victory” is a dangerous relic from a less enlightened age, explain why terrorists have confounded it so easily. Consider the record. During the Korean War our best and brightest chose not even to cut the enemy army’s supply line from China, and prevented the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan from opening a second front. On such sophistication they established an academic orthodoxy. Bernard Brodie’s canonic book *The Absolute Weapon* (1946) assumed that because the next war would wipe out mankind, all nations now shared a primordial interest in peace. In the 1950s Robert Osgood (*Limited War: The Challenge To American Strategy*, 1957), Henry Kissinger (*Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*, 1957), and Thomas Schelling (*The Strategy of Conflict*, 1960) expanded the orthodoxy, arguing that all peoples want essentially the same things and that all governments maximize their interests by acting within matrices of rational choices.

In that fertile decade, too, our bipartisan ruling class came to see itself as the patron of the world’s truly progressive, revolutionary forces, persuading itself that they would be America’s pupils and friends. Thus the CIA financed Gamal Abdul Nasser’s Free Officers’ movement that took over Egypt in 1953, as well as parts of the National Liberation Front that took Algeria from France between 1954 and 1962. Saddam Hussein got his start as a lowly CIA agent in 1959. When Fidel Castro took over Cuba in the same year, he joked: “I got my job through the *New York Times*,” the slogan of the want-ad section of the American establishment’s newspaper.

Always surprised whenever the “Third World” they helped create turned against them, our experts grew to accept William Appleman Williams’s explanation in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959): the American people are racist, greedy, and arrogant, and have been on the wrong side of oppressed peoples’ struggles for justice and progress. The Vietnam War

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

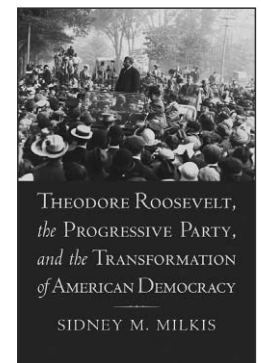
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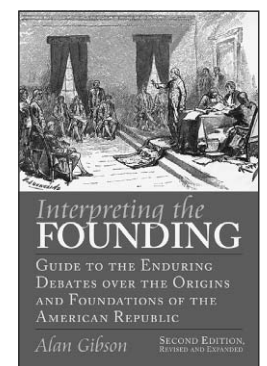
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showed what happens when a country's ruling class believes that foreign enemies are less the problem than its own citizens. Robert McNamara, secretary of defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson during most of the Vietnam War, later admitted in *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995) that he had always regarded the American majority's pressures for victory as more dangerous than the North Vietnamese. Henry Kissinger acknowledged in *Diplomacy* (1994) that only a minority of Americans ever favored *reducing* military pressure on the enemy. But, like McNamara, he was part of that ruling bipartisan minority.

When fantasies and proclivities clash with foreign realities, our experts have sought "exit strategies" and accepted what they formerly had deemed unacceptable. In the 1960s they outgrew their commitments to Vietnam. In 1979 they repudiated their commitment to Iran's shah, then bet on ingratiating themselves with the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, then loudly deemed his Islamic Republic unacceptable, and finally tried to accommodate it in ever more embarrassing ways. When the U.S. government sent Marines in token objection to Syria's takeover of Lebanon in 1983, Secretary of State George Shultz boasted: "the Marines can take care of themselves." But when Syria's agents killed 241 of them with a truck bomb, the U.S. government preferred leading America in mourning to losing its furies. Hollow boasting followed by impressive mourning is now a U.S. specialty.

Our government's reaction to American leftists' hijacking passenger aircraft to Cuba in the 1960s exhibited the priorities and assumptions that have dictated its reaction to terrorist acts ever since: Do not hold any foreign government responsible for facilitating the acts, or failing to stop them. Take no account of the perpetrators' or sympathizers' political identity. Remember that the American majority's overreaction poses a greater danger to peace and good governance than any terrorist act. And if forced to use the armed forces against foreigners, avoid focusing them on regimes, and instead use them as cops and as shields behind which you can try turning your enemies into friends. But wrap it all in patriotic rhetoric.

Evading the Question: Afghanistan

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 THE U.S. GOVERNMENT tied itself in knots over the question "who's responsible?" But the answer was as self-evident as it had been for just about every terrorist act since the 1960s—namely, the host of governments that espouse violent anti-American causes and that facilitate the individuals who actually do the killing. Our rulers shunned this reality in order to avoid com-

ing to grips with the practical question: "what do we have to do to make those governments crush the very causes they encourage and the people who serve them?" Hence, they fixed on a far less meaningful inquiry: "who had been the hijackers' direct supporters?" Based on evidence never made public, George W. Bush adopted unquestioningly the CIA's answer that Osama bin Laden had masterminded 9/11, and he accepted, too, the Agency's consequent equation of America's terrorist problem with al-Qaeda. Subsequently, the government, followed by the media, defined the "war on terror" as a campaign to destroy al-Qaeda. In practical terms, that meant doing something in Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda was living.

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But nothing that Americans might do in Afghanistan could have removed our terrorist problem. Crushing the Taliban for having hosted bin Laden—our enemy, to be sure, regardless of whatever role he had in 9/11—might have been useful as an example of what America would do to any and every regime that abetted our enemies. But even the death of every "Afghan Arab" would hardly have dented a problem that predated 1998—when bin Laden and company came to the U.S. government's notice by bombing U.S. embassies in Africa—and that involved far greater numbers of people, institutions, and anti-American trends. At best, the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan that began in October 2001 might have been incidental to later operations aimed at the problem's heart. No such operations were ever conceived.

Military success in Afghanistan came after the White House decided to support the war that the Northern Alliance of Tajik and Uzbek tribes had been waging against the Pashtun Taliban's regime. With U.S. air support, the Alliance routed the Taliban coalition's tribes, most of which switched sides and sold the "Afghan

Arabs" in their midst to the Americans, who shipped these "terrorist detainees" off to Guantanamo Bay. But this success proved how insignificant the Taliban and al-Qaeda were. Though the U.S. captured most of the people who had ever associated with bin Laden—perhaps a fifth of whom had committed crimes or were highly motivated at the time of capture—others who had never heard of al-Qaeda before 9/11 started committing anti-Western acts in its name around the world. No one has reported seeing Osama bin Laden alive since October 2001, though several people have reported attending his funeral. Nevertheless, the U.S. government continued to speak and act as if he and al-Qaeda were the fount of anti-American terrorism. Although capturing him would not have eliminated our terrorist problem, not finding him, and accepting as genuine the tapes issued in his name, actually exacerbated the problem.

Our ruling class was impervious to the fact that artificial national boundaries divide all of Afghanistan's five major ethnic groups from their kin in neighboring states, and that each tribe always welcomes money and guns, but seldom foreigners. Misreading their 2001 success as a victory of moderates over extremists, the Americans set about trying to moderate the whole country. The resulting flow of billions of American dollars through some tribal networks to the disadvantage of others, American lecturing on lifestyles (including birth control), and the killing or maiming of innocents in dragnets for Taliban remnants, roused Afghans to insurrection. The non-Pashtun resented the central government because the Pashtuns dominated it. But many Pashtun resented the government because it represented the forces that had defeated a Pashtun regime, and because the national army now contained 80,000 Tajiks. So when money from wealthy Wahabis in the Gulf began paying the Pashtun tribes on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to do what they increasingly felt like doing, and funneled suicide bombers to them, the insurrection grew. Americans might have left Afghanistan in 2001 having strengthened the Tajiks and Uzbeks, shielded the Hazara from pressure from the Pashtun, and made clear to the latter that harboring Afghan Arabs hostile to America is a bad idea. Instead, by 2006 Afghanistan was a problem bigger than ever and Americans were stuck occupying an increasingly hostile country.

Everything but War: Iraq

IN 2002, THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND CIA were particularly protective of Saddam Hussein's Iraq—State because keeping Iraq under Sunni rule pleased the Arab world, and CIA because it believed that Saddam's Baathist ruling party contained "moderate" kindred



souls. Hence both strove to prevent the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Afterward they pressed for occupying the country to further their own particular visions of it. Meanwhile the Pentagon just wanted to overthrow Saddam. Because straddling these conflicts took priority over critical thinking about ends and means, the U.S. government's official justifications for the 2003 invasion of Iraq gave no strategic guidance; and its decision to occupy and reform the country turned an initial military success into a parody of war deadlier than war itself.

The United States might have decided to invade Iraq because it sponsored terrorism. Saddam's defiance of America had made him, arguably, the Arab world's most prominent person. He used that prominence to whip up hatred against us, and televised his encouragement of all manner of terrorism against both America and Israel. The people who attacked the World Trade Center in 1993 had come from Iraq. There was plenty of evidence of contacts between his intelligence service and al-Qaeda. Had the U.S. government invaded to make the country inhospitable to terrorism, any military planner could have designed operations to inflict on its governing class the kind of terrible end that would discourage its successors and other regimes from risking the same fate. In fact, this is what the Pentagon wanted to do: turn Iraq over to the people who had been fighting its regime, and who would finish it off. Then America's Iraq operation would have ended. But CIA argued that Iraq's past or present support for terrorism was not a legitimate reason for using force against it, because CIA could not (nor did it want to) prove Iraq's "direction and control" of 9/11.

Was the invasion meant to rid Iraq of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)? The State Department and CIA argued that the only legal justification for military action against Iraq was its defiance of United Nations resolutions requiring it to rid itself of WMDs, and that the only danger Iraq posed to America was that it might pass these weapons on to terrorists at a future time. President Bush invoked WMDs as the principal reason for the invasion. But had the invasion really been a weapons hunt, any military planner could have worked up an operation to scour the country, with high assurance of doing so successfully and then to end. But it was never going to be a mere weapons hunt. What precisely, then, should U.S. forces do in Iraq beyond overthrowing its government? And what would it take to accomplish that ultimate end? Neither the president nor any of those who advocated reforming Iraq had a clear notion.

Precisely because neither the president nor the relevant bureaucracies had settled on coherent ends and means, the invasion was named "Iraqi Freedom." That Saddam's regime was beastly

to its own people was obvious, as was the fact that his overthrow would free them from him. But what "Iraqi Freedom" might mean was hotly disputed in Washington and would be argued with blood in Iraq. The concept's inherent imprecision and the disputes arising from it made it impossible for military planners to devise operations with a logical end, in the sense both of a purpose and a termination point. What was the problem that overthrowing Saddam's regime was supposed to fix? The answer should have determined what was to be done there. But the problem was never defined, and America left its operations in Iraq open-ended.

Iraq itself was torn by a multitude of conflicting factions with very long memories: Kurds (about 25% of the population) would fight to separate from all Arabs; Shia Arabs (55%) would fight to do unto Sunnis what the Sunnis had been doing unto them; and the Sunni (15%) would fight to keep as much of their historic privileges as they could. Iraq's neighbors would take sides for their own reasons: Iran sent arms, men, and encouragement to their fellow Shia; the Saudis sent money, Wahabis, and suicide bombers to their fellow Sunni; and Syria provided sanctuary, headquarters, and transit routes as well as arms to their fellow Baath Party members, who were organizing the Sunni insurgency against the Americans and the Shia. In short, Iraq was full of, and surrounded by, people who killed for very particular interests. They knew *their* war. Our political class never figured out its own war.

Imagining that America's interest lay in achieving harmony among Iraqis, the U.S. government tried to effect a "national reconciliation"—in practice, offering concessions to the Sunnis and Baathists to entice them to give up their war. But the majority Shia wanted to shake off their Sunni masters, the Kurds were even less kindly disposed toward them, and the proclaimed goal of democracy posed an insurmountable problem. Iraq's national elections in 2005 confirmed that Iraq comprises not one people but several, whose desires are incompatible. Hence war. Our highly credentialed officials placed American troops in the middle of that war and kept them there in the service of an objective that none of the parties to the war shared. This made our troops everybody's target.

Only one fifth of American casualties came in what one normally thinks of as combat. Some three fifths came from "improvised explosive devices," roadside bombs, or other booby traps. That is, from our troops having to operate in what amounted to a constantly replenished minefield. About one fifth came from rules of engagement that prohibited our troops from defending themselves until after enemies had started trying to kill them. Although living in

minefields and among people who are as likely to shoot you as not is contrary to military common sense and fits neither the definition of war nor of occupation, it was essential to a so-called strategy that required Americans to mix with hostile factions on their terrain. The field grade and general officers who made careers executing this "strategy" made their predecessors in Vietnam look like faithful stewards of their men's lives and forthright advocates of military truths to political power.

Exit Strategy in Iraq

AS EARLY AS 2004 OUR OFFICIALS HAD BEGUN looking for an "exit strategy"—that is, for a way out of Iraq without looking too bad. The insurgency's Baathist leaders in Damascus demanded that the Americans establish a new government in Baghdad much like the Baath regime overthrown in 2003. But forcing such wholesale surrender upon the Shia would have taken an even bigger, more senseless war. So the U.S. government tried surrender at the retail level. In May 2004, it turned Fallujah over to insurgents in exchange for their no longer shooting at Americans. Immediately, Fallujah became the insurgency's fort, which the Marines had to pay with their lives to retake in November. Despite American soldiers' valor and sacrifice, their government's objectives and rules of engagement could not secure such an "exit strategy," much less victory.

Nor did U.S. force determine the war's outcome, because the violence in Iraq after April 2003 had always been (and always would be) about which Iraqi group would get what, at which other group's expense. A "united and democratic" Iraq had always been an exclusively American chimera. Freedom from the Baath regime was always going to mean ethnic-religious separation and cleansing. The practical questions always were: What would be the boundaries between Kurdistan and an Arab world with which it would deal as little as possible? And because Sunni and Shia Arabs could not get away from each other so neatly, what would the relationship be between the Shia in Baghdad and southern Mesopotamia, and the Sunni in the northwest of what had been Iraq?

The resolution of these questions and the end of America's involvement began in February 2006, when Sunni insurgents bombed the Shia Golden Mosque in Samarra. This loosed the Shia's fury. They squeezed the Sunni out of most of Baghdad and into western Iraq, torture-killing thousands, and the question quickly became not how much the Sunni would *gain* by war, but how much more they would *lose*. Only the Americans could stop the Shia.

Hence the Sunni insurgents asked American commanders for a version of the Fallujah deal:



they would stop shooting Americans, would withdraw the welcome they had extended to Saudi suicide bombers, and would turn over people whom *they* designated al-Qaeda sympathizers. In return, the Americans would arm and pay the Sunni insurgents, now called “sons of Iraq,” and entrust to them their zones’ security. The Americans would also move lots of troops into Baghdad and other places where the Shia death squads had been raging. On top of that, the Americans would get the Shia government to promise to take the Sunni units into the Iraqi army, pay them, and continue entrusting security to them. The U.S. government grabbed the deal as a lifeline. The outline of the Sunni-Shia provisional settlement emerged. This was “the Surge.”

According to conservative mythology, “surging” an extra 40,000 troops to Iraq crushed the insurgency. But American troops never crushed it. During 2008, the year of the Surge, there was *much less* contact between Americans and hostile forces, and two-thirds *fewer* casualties than any of the previous three years. American troops were used primarily to separate Sunni and Shia populations, especially in the Baghdad area, often by erecting physical barriers. Leaders of groups that had slaughtered Americans and Shia expressed delight that the Americans were leaving them—entrenched, better armed, better paid—in a superior position to press

their enduring agenda upon the Shia after the Americans’ departure.

In short, by turning Iraq’s two main Arab communities over to the persons and groups strongest within them, having already done that in the Kurdish provinces, the U.S. government helped to consummate de facto Iraq’s tripartite division. And so Iraq in 2010 looks very much like what would have resulted after the 1991 Gulf War, had our political class stood aside and allowed the Shia and Kurdish revolt to topple Saddam’s regime—instead of keeping him in power, and later occupying the country, precisely but futilely to prevent its division. As the *New York Times’s* John Burns reported, “Six and a half years from the moment when American troops captured Baghdad on April 9, 2003, nothing is settled.” After America’s departure, the locals will do the settling. They never forgot their stakes. Our ruling class never settled what America’s stakes were.

Accepting the Unacceptable: Iran

JUST AS MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPEND ON HOW well strategy employs arms to serve well-chosen ends, so diplomacy depends on how well diplomats’ words represent well-calculated actions to achieve such ends. Lucius Annus summed it up in the 4th century, B.C.: “How we act will affect the main issue more than what we

say. Once we have set our plans in order, it will be easy to find words to fit our deeds.” Diplomacy works only at the service of a competent ends-means calculus. First, set in motion events apt to make your version of peace happen. Then, express in words the coercive situation you are managing to a successful conclusion. Words can serve policy, but never substitute for it. But U.S. diplomacy has squandered the fruits of our military power by placing it at the service of nonsensical policy, and ended up by accepting what its words once had deemed unacceptable. Our dealings with Iran are a prime example.

U.S. diplomacy bears much responsibility for making Iran into an ever-worsening problem for America. From the 1950s through the 1970s, when Iran’s royal regime was the fulcrum of American interests in the Middle East, our experts in foreign affairs persuaded its shah that secularizing his country would serve his own interests as well as America’s. This helped make the shah a stranger in his country and vulnerable to the anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini. As the Ayatollah beat on the palace gates in 1978, the same experts concluded that America’s interest lay in getting along with his prospective regime. When that regime seized the American embassy in Tehran along with the diplomats in it, the United States chose to respond to a textbook act of war with a combination of verbal abuse and token actions—what Theodore Roosevelt used to call “peace with insult,” the most disastrous of policies. Our ruling class’s Iran policy has been bankrupt ever since.

For example, our experts never considered sending a bill for the geopolitical favor that America did Iran by ending Saddam Hussein’s rule in Iraq. Without a Sunni-dominated Iraq, Iran is freer to pursue its agenda against the Sunni world, and against America. Our diplomats might have demanded that Iran stop sponsoring Hezbollah lest perhaps the U.S. expeditionary force in Iraq add Iran’s Kurdish zones to the new Kurdistan. Conversely, they might have considered asking Iran to support our mission in Iraq in exchange for the U.S. lessening support for the Sunni Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf. Competent diplomacy would have faced the Iranians with the choice between easy gains against ancestral Sunni enemies, and big losses inflicted by Americans who would pursue the Iranians from Iraq back into Iran. But U.S. diplomacy neither coerced Iran nor diverted it. Instead, it declared unacceptable various Iranian-backed militias’ attacks on our troops in Iraq, and then accepted them.

Similarly, our ruling class has dealt with Iran’s development of nuclear weapons by complaints, and declarations of unacceptability, followed by acquiescence. It forgot that giving is less contemptible when not preceded by chest-thumping.

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To Iran's highly consequential weapons programs, our foreign policy establishment opposes grandiose words and inconsequential means. Under President Obama as under President Bush, public discussion reflects the high-level policy oscillation between bombing Iran's nuclear facilities and negotiating the Iranians into forsaking nuclear weapons, supposedly by threatening economic sanctions while offering the country full membership in "the international community." Both options are evidence of incompetence. Bombs and missiles could destroy some but far from all of Iran's nuclear program. They could start a war, but not finish it. Indeed, no one who advocates such strikes proposes a plan to bring hostilities to a successful conclusion, or to occupy Iran indefinitely, or explains why Iran's post-strike regime would abstain from rebuilding the nukes. On the other hand, those who advocate bargaining fail to see that their sticks and carrots are orders of magnitude too small for the objective they seek.

The economic sanctions our foreign policy establishment considers are unserious because they would not involve banning trade with any country that trades with Iran. Such secondary proscriptions are what make economic warfare serious, because they force every country to take one side or the other of the fight. But this is out of the question precisely because our establishment knows that its ritual statements that "the international community is united" in opposition to Iran's acquisition of nukes are untrue, and because it fears Iran's nukes less than it does displeasing Russia and the European Union.

Is a "grand bargain" to turn Iran's Islamic Republic away from anti-Americanism possible? We will never know, because serious bargains are beyond our establishment's imagination. The Iranian regime's rhetoric aside, most Iranians' immanent foreign policy concern is their millennial confrontation with the Arab Sunni world, wherein Wahabism preaches killing the Shia to Arabs inclined to do it. For a generation, by far the most hurtful thing America has done to Iran has been to take sides against it in that struggle. An American offer to switch sides, henceforth to support Persian and Shia interests as it did in the days of the shah, might or might not move Iran to reset itself on the international scene in ways pleasing to America and reassuring to Israel. Such a reset would also involve rejecting Russia's 30-year role in the Islamic Republic. Were there to be such a bargain, the resulting peace would deprive nuclear weapons of much relevance.

The nuclear issue would also loom much smaller within a peace achieved by a no-nonsense American war. Such a war should leverage opposition to the regime by focusing on the very

authorities who have earned their compatriots' hatred by their ever more corrupt and repressive rule. These elites happen to be America's enemies, the very people responsible for kidnapping U.S. diplomats and for making war on U.S. troops in Iraq. We should insist that these individuals be killed or turned over to us, and we should squeeze Iran's economy and food supply until this happens. The regime's overthrow from within would soon follow. Military operations would become necessary if the regime retaliated by trying to close the Straits of Hormuz or by unleashing Hezbollah and other terrorists—all of which America could crush disproportionately, to the regime's discredit. But to direct the war against the nuclear program rather than against the regime would be counterproductive because it would preclude a peace acceptable to Iran's majority, which has an inalienable interest in the Shia world's strength and status *vis-à-vis* the Sunni.

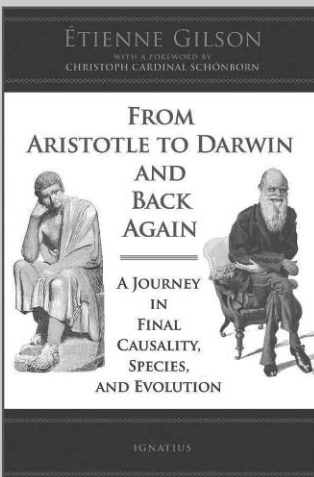
Serious war and serious diplomacy are both beyond our foreign policy establishment. Its fecklessness contributed to making Iran a problem, and condemns us at present to accepting the unacceptable. Iran's people may well resolve that problem by changing their regime by themselves, for their own reasons. The less they listen to Washington's wisdom, the likelier this will be.

Afghanistan: A Foregone Conclusion?

REFORMING PROBLEM NATIONS BY USING force, but not really making war, has been American statecraft's default tool since the 1960s. It failed in Vietnam and, more recently, in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush's strong criticism of nation-building was part of the longstanding conservative "hard-line" position that America should pursue its own interests, by war if necessary, without meddling in other nations' business. But when the Bush Administration turned the "war on terror" into a nation-building counterinsurgency in Iraq, the Left opposed this as "Bush's war." Because the liberals' "soft line" now occupied the opposite pole from nation-building, partisan logic led many Republicans to regard the latter as the new conservative hard line. Between 2002 and 2009, however, that logic became more convoluted as the Left criticized Bush for not devoting even more troops to nation-build Afghanistan—but only as a way of urging withdrawal from Iraq. The Bush Administration increased troops in Afghanistan from 2,000 to 68,000, plus some 30,000 support personnel, to pursue what seemed to have become Washington's bipartisan *modus operandi*.

By 2009 nation-building in Afghanistan had turned bloodier and less popular. When Barack

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ÉTIENNE GILSON
WITH A FOREWORD BY
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 AND
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 AGAIN

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 IN
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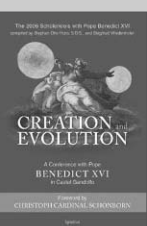



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Obama's election completed his party's control of Washington, Democrats had to choose between leaving Afghanistan, which most of the party really preferred, and devoting even more resources to a style of foreign affairs in which they no longer had to pretend to believe, but in which many Republicans actually had come to believe. But the Democrats feared that advocating withdrawal would brand them as endangering America by abandoning Afghanistan to the terrorists.

So as 2009 ended, President Obama finessed this dilemma with a pretend strategy: more troops would be sent...to immunize Democrats against Republican criticisms. But the president also required more of European allies than they would deliver, and set "performance benchmarks" for the Afghan army that its members' loyalties to their several tribes made it impossible to meet. These unmet requirements would be the putative basis for withdrawal—after the next election cycle. Clever as this strategy might be in domestic politics, it foreclosed seriousness about the serious things happening in Afghanistan.

In November 2009, the *New York Times* reported from northern Afghanistan's Kunduz province that "[t]his year the Taliban arrived 'with lots of cash, new dollars, and guns.'" The Taliban had vanished from Kunduz eight years earlier. Once, they hardly ventured into places like Kunduz, where warlike Tajik tribes dominated. But now the U.S.-led international coalition had displaced the Tajik warlords and entrusted security to the Afghan army, composed largely of Pashtuns (hence easily infiltrated), backed up by the non-shooting Germans. This situation had become typical in areas of mixed population. But wherever Pashtuns are a majority, more and more people now find safety and money, and see a future, in calling themselves Taliban.

What can explain the remarkable fact that U.S. forces, disposing of practically endless money, firepower, and mobility, became enablers of the people they had routed eight years before? What can turn overwhelming power into self-defeating impotence? Only ideas that insulate against reality. Self-evidently, neither of the options that our establishment lets into its digestive system—a long occupation with counterinsurgency forces, along with nation-building in a non-nation; or more remote-controlled pinprick drone strikes based on third-hand intelligence—is relevant to stopping the flow of dollars, guns, Wahabi missionaries, and suicide bombers into both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Officially, our establishment supposes that the insurgents' lavish financing and modern arms come from local opium traders, despite lit-

tle evidence of eleemosynary links between the Taliban and drug trafficking. Our establishment chooses not to see that dollars arrive in Afghanistan and Pakistan by courier from Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, whence also come guns, Wahabi missionaries, and suicide bombers. In fact while parts of Saudi Arabia's vast royal family and vaster entourage send these things, its government openly sponsors Pakistan's most problematic party, Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League. Yet the notion of tackling international problems at the source is taboo in Washington.

But so is making war, in the old-fashioned meaning of the term. When Pakistan's army launched a no-holds-barred offensive into the western mountains against any and all who had organized against Pakistan, nothing but dysfunctional ideas kept the U.S. government from ordering its forces in Afghanistan to run the same sort of pitiless campaign up the same mountains' eastern slopes to crush an inferior force between two superior ones.

Not that conventional war is the most economical means of dealing with enemies in Afghanistan. Where tribal allegiances are paramount, where outsiders are worth the guns and goods they bring to the tribe minus the trouble they cause and whatever enemies come after them, the calculus of conflict is straightforward: make it deadly for any tribe or clan to entertain your enemies, by empowering *its* enemies to do unto it as they please. This is how it's usually done. This is how the United States defeated the Taliban in 2001: by supporting the Tajiks and Uzbeks but not otherwise interfering with them. This is how the Taliban have retaken much of Afghanistan in recent years: by making offers to clans and families that they dare not refuse—to take good money to fight against people they don't like much anyway, or to be treated as enemies. But because American authorities see the tribes' and warlords' selfish interests as obstacles to nation-building, they dispense money and arms through central institutions for central purposes, asking the recipients to be part of something that includes their enemies and is led by foreigners. Thus do Americans spit against Afghanistan's prevailing winds.

This is because the logic that flows from the heights of American universities through the bureaucracies and the war colleges, which transforms conscientious junior officers into nodding generals, forecloses fruitful options leaving only the choice between the futility of nation-building counterinsurgency and the deadly unseriousness of drone strikes and hit teams. Typical of our ruling class's decisions, President

Obama's December 2009 Afghanistan plan committed to both: to nation-building while denying that he was doing so, and to remote strikes while holding out no hope of eliminating enemy strongholds.

On December 30, 2009, a suicide bomber's killing of the CIA officers to whom he had been providing intelligence provided a glimpse into the underlying reason for the strikes' limited effectiveness: the provenance of the information on which the targeting is based. Although our military controls the missile firing drones exquisitely, the CIA's congenital scarcity of information disposes it to look none too closely at what it does receive, or at its purveyors. Hence CIA's notion of who might actually be in the places that it designates as Taliban targets comes disproportionately from Taliban agents such as Hammam al Balali, who bombed our CIA officers *after* he had fooled them. That may explain why, after each strike, the U.S. government claims success against terrorists while Afghans and Pakistanis claim that innocents have died.

More and more of Afghanistan's tribes seem to be realizing how disastrous for them is the Americans' inept wielding of mighty force and endless cash among them. Curbing the Taliban may happen if and when these tribes manage to reestablish traditional balances of power and restraint among themselves.

THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO RUN OUR GOVERNMENT and occupy the commanding heights of our society seldom miss the fact that their ideas have not yielded the results they expected. But their very status and authority blind them to the reason why: the false axioms of their own miseducation. Lacking intellectual diversity and flexibility, they double down on their bets and dig deeper in failure. Akin to coaches who lead good teams to loss after embarrassing loss at the hands of inferior ones, they should be replaced. But firing a ruling class is hard. Replacing it is still harder. Nevertheless, just as sports teams rebuild by bringing in new talent, by reemphasizing blocking and tackling, pitching, fielding, and hitting, so countries intent on renewal must begin by rejecting the fashions—and the fashionable—of the age, by going back to basics, and drawing solutions for new problems from statecraft's perennial principles.

Angelo M. Codevilla is professor emeritus of international relations at Boston University. His most recent book is Advice for War Presidents (Basic Books).

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