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## IRAQ

In the infinite array of discussion, charge and counter-charge, one thing is overlooked. America is the only power that can afford to be prudent and wise.

The [UN report by Blix](#), signaling that no weapons of mass destruction could be found is a potential blow to the Bush Administration. They are going to have to bring out intelligence data that substantiates some of the claims about anthrax, botulism, and the other agents or, else, risk being branded an empire in the eyes of the rest of the world. They need to focus, laser-like, on the production of biological and chemical weapons.

Hussein can be contained but then the Bush Administration gives every indication that it is willing and able to, not simply take out Hussein, but to commit American resources for 10 years in that region. There has to be something more. Many raise the specter of oil but I don't think that's the case. It may be a factor but it's not enough to initiate this invasion. Revenge for the attempted assassination of the President's father might be among the true motives. It's something that would weigh-in but wouldn't be the central reason. The central reason to go into Iraq is to set up intelligence operations in that very strategic area and, eventually, restructure the middle-east. From Iraq, intelligence could keep tabs on Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and more importantly, terrorist groups in their recruitment and operational activities. Eventually, the plan would be to restructure the middle-east away from its medievalism and bring it into the West, much as Japan was after World War II. Is it a bad thing? It's a very risky thing that could only be contemplated in a country with too much power and time on its hands. It's something to look at in the aftermath of what is most probably an attack in several weeks.

And, it's doubtful that the American people fully understand that American troops and tax money are going to support Iraq for at least a decade.

The scenario that is brewing could only come out of an intelligence community convinced that unless the US restructures the middle-east, the terrorist threat will grow and grow and pose a grave threat to the future of the United States. The strategy seems to be to force the action and get the networks and their sympathizers tied up with the American military in their own arena. That would be an effective way to keep them from American soil.

Immediately, one distrusts those who don't show any evidence of wrangling with a difficult question. The anti-war groups are full of empty slogans and ignorance.

The attack-at-all -cost group is full of frustration at the hatred thrown against the country.

But, the undeniable fact is that the United States is the great power in the world. It can isolate Hussein, monitor him, contain him until he cracks, makes a fatal mistake, or finds himself in a fractured, rebellious government. Kudos go to President Bush for carrying the big stick and forcing the action. The United Nations did not impress Hussein. The military might of the United States, moving toward the Gulf, does impress him. And now U-2's fly over Iraq and the UN inspectors are in the front door. The President exhibited leadership ability in going thus far.

But, when an issue of this complexity comes into being you need to put the good and bad on either side of an equation sign and see if they add up. The negative, seems, at this point to be overwhelming. The blood shed, the spontaneous outbreak of anti-Americanism, the threat to oil through an attack on [Ras Al Khafji](#), possibility of Iranian incursion to regain territory lost in the Iran/Iraq war of the 80's, the permission it gives to Hussein to defend himself and his govt. "by all means necessary," the absolute certainty that the American people will have to re-build Iraq for decades at the cost of billions and billions of dollars, a renewed spirit of American hatred by the Islamic terrorists that would last many years, fractured alliances in Europe, deep division in our own country, among other things that seem likely. And the positive? One, aging tyrant gone from the scene (perhaps) and his ability to develop WMD neutralized. That is, unless Hussein has an escape plan in place and will leave Iraq, along with a good portion of those biological agents.

It could be that the Bush Administration has convinced itself it's the necessary path, after September 11th. The old world has swung a trap door behind him after he's deployed the troops, but the focus on Hussein is sufficient at this point. It was much more likely Hussein was going to do something crazy before September 11th, 2001. Now that the intense focus is thrown his way he's like a little puppy dog. And that focus will continue until he gives up the ghost one way or the other. America and the allies are not going back to a lacksidaiscal attitude for a long-time; not as long as the ability to manufacture, transport, and deploy some of these weapons still exists. Hussein is counting on it and hopes that the military planners will call off an invasion after April. That may happen but the US and, perhaps, United Nations will deploy a [cordon sanitaire](#) around Iraq until the problem is resolved. It's the oldest maneuver in the book; [the siege](#).

Even the insular Bush Administration must understand how tragic, for all concerned, an attack is at this point in time. We understand the hatred of the world. We understand a good deal of it is orchestrated by tyrants, secular and religious, who use the ancient trick of deflecting attention from themselves by developing a common enemy. We understand these things. But, it doesn't remove the singular fact that we are the power in the world and are the only ones who are capable of acting prudently and wisely.

The American people, as well, need to look at themselves. What fear went through them on the report of a heightened terrorist alert! So, they go out and buy all the duct tape in the world and look like fools in the process.

I think, however, the blame game does no one any good. A real danger exists that in the 21st century, groups and, even, countries who have an animus against the US or wealthier nations or neighbors will acquire these demoralizing, highly disruptive weapons partly rationalized as, "the equalizers." This very dangerous scenario has a lot more chance of being played out than the Armageddon between the Americans and Soviets during the Cold War. So, the President and other powers have to act decisively and put the law down. There's no question, in my mind, that the terrorists have been testing the resolve of the US and west, generally, for a long time. It impressed them when [Reagan moved the troops from Beirut](#). It impressed them when the senior Bush and Clinton viewed the Pam Am attack and the first World Trade Center attacks as law-breaking rather than acts of war. In their own mind, they were at war. They were emboldened by all this.

Invasion, at this point, is not the answer. Isolating Hussein and mandating perpetual inspections and U2 flyovers is a good way to put the law down.

Vigilance is very necessary during these days. There are sound arguments for not invading Iraq at this time. They rely on the notion that we will not get rid of weapons of mass destruction and that we will suffer economically and more hatred will fuel more attacks and innocent blood will be on our hands. These are compelling arguments. A powerful nation like the United States has to take these arguments seriously.

There are sincere people who question the wisdom of the policy. There are some questions, though, that they need to confront: Is the situation in Iraq going to get better by doing nothing? At what point is it prudent to change the regime by military force? Is it when Hussein violates the UN mandate? Is it when it is discovered he is talking to terrorist groups and financial transactions are taking place? Is it when we wake one day and a dirty bomb has gone off in New York, paralyzing the city and shutting down the economy?

Is Hussein another Hitler type who has used the legitimacy of state to further a mad fantasy for power? And will his "appeasement" lead to the destruction of, perhaps, thousands and thousands of people? These are the difficult questions of our time. Simply spouting "peace" is not enough. Or, for that matter, shouting, "war."

The lack of an easy answer adds to how final and absolute the decision will be. If nothing else, it emphasizes why the President is so significant a figure and, why, ultimately, every vote counts.

We need to think about and address the question of, "what is the responsibility of the only remaining "super power?"

Is it American arrogance or the perception of how fractured and weak the rest of

the world truly is? And that most especially includes western Europe. Surely, the old world understands the necessity of engagement and the dangers of isolationism.

President Bush's presidency is hanging in the balance. The Republican domination of government is hanging in the balance. He has been punished by a world community that didn't like his attitude from the beginning of his Presidency. Unless more evidence is mounted against Hussein, Bush will lose a great deal by invading. During Hitler's rise, reporters and observers were alarmed by the re-militarization of Germany. It was self-evident and out in the open. If President Bush is certain that the stores of biological weapons exist, then he will be justified in going in. But, if nothing is discovered? And is the President committed to the reconstruction of Iraq? Is the American people? I don't think so. The Bush Administration has been playing a high stakes game; betting that another horrific attack on US soil will be more damaging to the Administration than the untold difficulties of an invasion into Iraq.

We come back to the one fact: We are the power. Therefore, we can afford to be prudent and wise. If we act like inexperienced, frightened children then that power, eventually, will be taken from us. Each incident, each confrontation with a problem as complex as this one we are dealing with today, reveals whether we are children or citizens of a great power; a great and good power.

### [IRAQ- Some Impressions on the Invasion](#)

So strange and eerie how it has all passed, now, almost a memory. The evil dictator is gone but the problems of building democracy in Iraq, remain. Did America prove that the rest of the world is irrelevant? No, not necessarily. But, the judgment of the rest of the world is tainted by theocratic beliefs or totalitarian beliefs of one sort or another. The minds of many intellectuals wanted massive cries of revenge from the masses in the Middle-East.

While a good and decent person can have questions about the war, the same good and decent person must be able to look at facts and at the truth of the modern world and conclude that his or her government has operated tolerably well. As long, that is, as the "war on terrorism" is a legitimate war. As long as dedicated people have the desire and seek the ability to wipe out a few cities or paralyze them, to take one piece of evidence. We know what they are capable of when left alone with their seething hatreds. When all is said and done we may recognize that the terrorist depended on surprise and the slap-on-the-wrist that had been administered previously for several decades. And once the element of surprise was over and the American government treated them as enemies in a war, then they vaporized under the pressure. The jury is still out.

The problem President Bush has is in the embarrassment over the lack of

"weapons of mass destruction." How can any new grand pronouncement about Iran or any other country be taken seriously? We are at the moment when America made the fatal decision to go full-speed into Vietnam, based on intelligence reports that were deeply flawed. That is, the lie about the Tonkin Gulf incident. President Johnson's, "credibility gap," harmed his chances of making his case to the people. When government is not truthful, it loses the heart and mind of the people. It sows the seeds of its own destruction. People who would harm the US always make the government out to be a lying beast for that very reason. Well, we know the government is not truthful all the time, but it is not always wrong. If its untruth, however, leads the nation down a path of waste, in lives and money, in prestige and global friendship, then it loses the hearts and minds of the good people and condemns culture to its wholesale slaughter which we witnessed in the 70's.

There will come a time when we are, as they say in the Bible, "sorely tested."

Democracy is proven through the dignity of the people. Without dignity, without substantial meaning in the people, democracy is a charade commanded by the criminal element in a society. Can men and women stand up and speak their minds? Can they choose their employment? Can they develop as they please? Can they ignore any idiocy that is thrown in their face from official government or the commercial system? These are a few of the tests of a democracy.

Dignity says, primarily, "you are a free person, go and make it a reality, and join with your brothers and sisters who, too, have made their freedom a great reality."

Posted May 29, 2003

We, who are builders, do not like to see destruction. And we do not fear the destroyers. But the impulse is to build and create, even a city, through the vitality of the people.

And don't we build and create a feeling for a nation? For our nation, where our forefathers came over 400 years ago? And isn't that feeling destroyed as well as created? And we assert that the best in ourselves come through the constructive principles, whether it is a piece of art or a nation.

The question goes beyond agreement or disagreement. It goes to the heart of what a nation is, and how it lives in the hearts and minds of the people.

And we assert that if 99% of the people are for destruction we will be with the tiny 1% that asserts the creative, constructive principle. It is our freedom. And this is the freedom we live and die for. None other.

Some things we have seen and not seen: While there was not the outbreak of Americanism in Iraq, neither was there a great outbreak of anti-Americanism. My

feeling was that Baghdad would be defended by the civilian population, almost all of whom have guns. That didn't happen, thankfully. The outcome was almost perfect for the Bush Administration. I'm not convinced it was a perfect outcome for the United States but the jury is still out. My concern is that these things have happened before. The British Empire went into the Middle-East, with some of the same rationalizations and created some of the havoc that plays in the region today. And, Britain is not exactly a great power these days.

The one anomaly are the "weapons of mass destruction." We see a fascinating shift of American strategy from western Europe to eastern Europe, pointing at the Middle-East and Caspian Sea area.

The Hussein government was that classic combination of true believers who have no opposition; no checks and balances and fated to the types of corruption evident before the war.

As we've stated before, America is the only power in the world who can afford to be prudent and wise. We need to mend some fences while ignoring a lot of the vicious hatred that is promulgated by a variety of potentates.

No one seems upset that the charge of Iraq possessing "weapons of mass destruction," was erroneous, yet, was the pretext for entering the country.

If Hussein viewed his biological weapons as gold, wouldn't he store a cache that he could take with him in exile? It would have happened in a Bond movie and, by the way, we are living in a Bond movie. Or, do we forget the small nuclear device that was to blow up Fort Knox by the evil Goldfinger? I say that as a tribute to the Ian Fleming novels I read when I was an impressionable 12 year-old.

To the Entertainment Class: Don't let this opportunity pass you by. America is exactly where, (1) Greece after Alexander the Great, (2) Rome (3) Islam (4) Western Europe from 1500-1950 were at different moments. That is, at the moment when the creative mind flourished. It comes and then it goes. It has arrived in America and it will go, at some point. Every ignorant Entertainer needs to study these civilizations and what they produced when they were top dog.

P.S. The academics will steer you in the wrong direction.

**Posted May 11, 2003**

The President counts. His perspective makes history. It is a perspective that is held accountable every four years and one that is always being checked throughout the system. Only one man plays that role. I, however, as a citizen have other roles to play, much less dramatic of course but of significance in its own way. I can, for instance, take the perspective of the Iraqi citizen who suffers both Hussein and coalition bombs and say, from his point of view, the world is a hell that neither the US nor anyone else can solve. Then again, I can take the perspective of some historian in the future who is looking at the very beginning of

the 21st Century for clues as to how things got to the point they did, later in the 21st Century. And I can simply take the perspective of the honest, free citizen who ignores the braying on the left and right and attempts to assess "what is going on."

The central question, for Americans, is this: How deadly is the threat of terrorism? The answer to that clears up the moves into the Middle-East since September 11th. It is very evident that the Bush Administration believes it's in a war. And they have decided to strike boldly where the enemy is rather than waiting for something to happen. This is the crux of the matter.

I agree with those who believe American intentions, for the most part, are benign. I don't think it should be exhalant, however. Arrogance would lead to this scenario: Mexico is sending too many illegal immigrants over the border and that it is creating a lot of instability. Not only that, the Mexican government is a bad one, inefficient and corrupt, with ties to drug cartels. Therefore, in order to protect our vital national interests, we will mount a campaign similar to Iraq under the flag of, "giving Mexico back to the people..." This is why it is crucial to understand the exact nature of our mission in Iraq and our intentions in foreign policy. I, as a free citizen, am confused a bit.

The Bush Administration would be in a better position if it had said, "The war in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism. Once Iraq is secure we will be able to monitor other states like Syria, Iran, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, as well as the terrorist networks. In war, you bring whatever competitive advantage you have to the table...." A skeptical person would say that "rebuilding Iraq" is merely a ploy to keep American presence in that region for military and intelligence operations. In fact, most Arabs believe that is the case. But then, if we are in a war on terrorism, isn't it the smartest thing to do?

In the end, I think American policy will win out because it will be seen that the market-driven, democratic country, connected to the secular West in trade, science, and technology, is superior to the medieval states that exist there today. Should it be standard practice though? Given some of the gruesome facts of the world I have grave doubts.

It is no fluke that America attacked a socialist nation and that the name of Russia keeps popping up. American leadership assumes that socialism is dead as a political rival and has nothing to fear from it.

There's hardly been a time in history when power has not been reviled. America has an opportunity to establish new forms of power that signal a new epoch on the planet. In many ways it has already demonstrated that through the Marshall Plan, Peace Corps, billions in foreign aid, defeat of nazism and communism, adventure into space, among some of the instances of a benign use of its power.

From the perspective of a person of the old world, either in Europe or the Middle-East, America looks like an alien force that has landed on the otherside of the globe and built a stupendous economy and military with a privileged citizenry who live life as though there are no problems: Who look like the other humans on

the planet except they laugh too much and are in love with guns. They do not feel the sting of generations of conflict or theocracy or military dictatorship. It's really the same perspective of old residents of a city who resent gentrification. Or, the classic conflict between the poor who look with jealousy of the rich and with hatred at the police who they always view as acting on behalf of the wealthy.

It's an unavoidable perspective with thousands of cameras on the surface of the planet. The perspective, however, is narrow-minded because the right thing to do would be to study the United States and try to understand how it produces such a strong and stable nation. And then apply those to one's own land. Wise leaders would do this. We are discovering how corrupt the Hussein government was. And any truthful investigation of other middle-eastern governments would reveal much of the same.

Poor Europe must have nightmares about the transformation of history they have witnessed in a short period of time. And they know, better than anyone, that history flows in one direction. Rome never regains its powers. Egypt never flourishes again. So, the bitterness on that end is palpable.

The attack on Iraq was not a rogue one but it makes it absolutely necessary for the Bush Administration to define the nature of its goals in foreign policy.

The astounding thing is how opposed the older, World War II generation is to this conflict. It speaks to the changes that occur in a generation as well as how pessimistic people get as they age. I keep hearing, "This is not the America I grew up in..." It indicates to me that we are quickly changing from an idealistic culture orientated to change, to one of power, orientated to the status quo we create.

The colleges ended their Latin studies a bit prematurely I think.

Of course, America is not Rome. America possesses at least three qualities that Rome did not have: Democracy, Science, and a belief in Progress. Democracy because the free people are able to organize for their own ends, therefore they have a stake in what's going on. The Romans lost heart when it was apparent that the Empire belonged to a few families. Science gives us a technique to gauge success and failure and change things. Progress lurches the mind forward and treats everything as becoming rather than basking in an Eternal Now or reaching back to some ideal, lost past.

These are the principles that will be put to the test in the 21st Century and will determine whether we live or perish as a nation-state.

**Posted April 22, 2003**

Ultimately, the people have the wisdom to know when they've been wronged or screwed. This is one reason tyranny always perishes, no matter how much torture, weapons, police intelligence it has. I'm pretty convinced that if you ask the majority of Iraqi people several years from now, "are you, your family, and

country better off now than when Hussein was in power?" they will say yes. But, for how long? And all the intelligent warnings I've read have been about the aftermath, not the military engagement itself.

A democracy demands several items: A constitution that spells out the obligations of government. It has to be made so that all the factions have loyalty to it. It needs to institutionalize checks and balances and due process through guaranteed rights. There needs to be enough freedom to produce dynamic opinion that individuates the citizens while making them loyal to the idea of the constitution. It has to produce stable, mediating institutions like political parties, free press, community services, etc. that becomes wholly identified with Iraqi culture.

One could go on I suppose. It needs a strong middle-class since they are the true defenders, as a class, of the constitution. The poor feel it's a sham and the wealthy believe it's their own private document to protect them. The middle-class understands the true power of the document.

Whether some of these things can be implemented in Iraq is a question to think about.

It's important to note, too, that post-Vietnam, America abandoned it's policy of "nation-building." Is there resource, intelligent and otherwise, in the Bush Administration to re-start this policy?

**Posted April 11, 2003**

War fuels its own belief in its rightness. The generals coolly stand over their maps and calculate the movement of troops and material but the context of war is always madness. The madness within. And the madness is never really transformed; it's always latent and releases, in the words of Shakespeare, "the dogs of war."

Saddam, the tyrant, is gone; no doubt about it. The kill was quick and easy even if he's still alive. He has become irrelevant.

But, the debate over just and unjust wars is a good one, a necessary one, especially now where it looks like America could be involved in more of these types of conflict down the road.

The democratic citizen is caught between two clashing rocks. On the one hand no self-respecting citizen allows him or herself to be bowled over by the government or military and intelligence communities. That occurs in tyrannies not democracies. On the other hand, the citizen has to have a cold and objective view towards the world. And one of the first things he or she has to resolve is that we live in a system of nation-states and are not "one" in any sense of the word, despite the existence of the United Nations.

As people have commented all along, the war will be easy but the peace will be hell.

Such is the world we live in today. One thing needed: A universal outpouring of solidarity with the Iraqi people and their suffering.

Posted April 9, 2003

There are plenty of questions that can be raised about the war in Iraq. However, it's rather suspicious that the intellectual community, en masse, have come out automatically against it. This simply makes their arguments predictable and easily dismissed. "Ah yes, the people who desire power, yet possess not a drop of it. How well some of us understand that bitterness!"

It's not *criticism* that is so rare and needed but truth-seeking. And a person seeking truth would address some questions that might be held obnoxious in the minds of those safely tucked away on college campuses. For instance, the proposition, "Iraq will be a healthier, freer, wealthier, happier nation in the aftermath of this battle." That would be a proposition a truth-seeker would pursue in order to investigate everything that his or her ideology would not permit. Or, the proposition, "What would the world do with Saddam if the United States did not exist?" Or, even, "If a group of people, identified as terrorists and their state sponsors, declare war on another country, can that country defend itself by any means necessary?"

Credibility plays a huge role in deciphering the ideas and opinions of different groups. With the government, one is already skeptical, it is built-in. But, with both the churchmen and the intellectual crowd, a huge dose of skepticism is necessary. We have to throw the comical entertainers in there as well, as representatives of a massively corrupt commercial culture. Truth is, indeed, the first casualty of war.

Posted April 6, 2003

I had an opportunity to hear Bob Woodward lecture in a grand old theater that was filled with over 3,500 people. He had some illuminating things to say about the war effort. For one, he's firmly convinced that this is George Bush's war, not Rumsfeld's or Cheney's. He stated that Bush was transformed by the attacks on New York and the Pentagon. More importantly, when the war plan was written up one of the military objectives was to "bring democracy to Iraq." Woodward emphasized this was a military objective. That's why the war is being conducted in the way it is; with ground troops first, and air support second. The overriding concern is to preserve the integrity of the fascinating and troubled nation.

I have no doubt these are correct assessments. But, it raises the question that has always played heavily in war. In the struggle between political objectives and military objectives, who wins out? In Vietnam, the political objectives were primary and the result was a catastrophe. The problem with embedding a political objective in a military one, is that it presents an opportunity for Hussein to do

what he's always intended to do: Bog down coalition forces and let the American people win the war for him. That is a danger. It is unlikely because of the overwhelming advantage to the coalition forces.

Woodward can be a funny guy.

Posted April 2, 2003

As I write this, bombs are destroying portions of the city of Baghdad. Whatever else they say about the precision-bombing, one thing is clear. An attack of this nature does not weaken the resolve of the people, it strengthens it. It's as old as Sumer. I know that if I lived in the outer districts of San Francisco and some foreign power was destroying the City Hall area, I would not be comforted and I would be extremely mistrustful of that power. This is human nature. And it is one of the primary reasons why you never attack unless provoked.

I know of no case where people wanted a foreign army to come in and liberate them. The only exception is when a foreign invader, itself, has taken over the country as was the case in France in 1944. And the case can be made that Hussein is not the legitimate leader and that the people are in a constant state of fear and loathing in regards to him.

All the attack has done has been to turn oppressed, defeated lives into the most meaningful of moments: they are the Defenders of Baghdad. They suddenly realize that if they can hold off and defend their city they will be great heroes throughout the Arab world. They will be remembered through time. Just as in Vietnam, the American government has miscalculated the reaction of the people it's trying to save.

Cops face a similar situation in domestic disputes. The husband and wife are close to killing each other, they have driven each other nuts for years, but when the cops show up, they turn on the cops. I see very little evidence that America is being hailed as a liberator. From the privileged perches of the government and mid-America, we may look like liberators. We can rationalize our action as one of liberation, but, do the people purportedly being liberated? It's too early to tell. Nothing would be better than if the people embraced the American troops as they roll into Baghdad and Hussein's army, looking at their happy comrades, throw down their arms.

There's no more dangerous animal than one defending its own territory.

The fighting in and around Baghdad is going to be fiercer than imagined. This is now the standard report and the American public is being geared to expect it.

Speeding troops up a desert for hundreds of miles, over days and nights, with occasional fire fights with the enemy, do not make for battle-ready troops.

The one justification for the attack is the presence of chemical and biological weapons. They must be found and scrutinized by the independent press, even that strange organization called the United Nations.

Never blame the men and women who fight for their country. It's one of the very strange facts of human nature that we demonize the other soldier when we know, very clearly, that he is us.

The protests are not as compelling as the Vietnam War protests. They seem too politically charged and too pat. I don't see the anti-war protestors addressing the dilemma that Hussein poses and, generally, that terrorism poses.

There is a sense of rightness in overcoming Hussein. There is a sense of rightness, even, in putting the United States smack dab at the center of the Middle-East and yanking the region into the modern age. The argument is over the means to achieve the goal. The Bush Administration will either rise in esteem or collapse horribly as it abandons any plans to structure Iraq towards democracy.

I'm sympathetic to those who say they never choose to live in a dominant world power and are uneasy at the powers it has and the things it must do to remain strong. But, here we are.

War always introduces the "myth of the eternal return." The Nietzschean belief that history is a pattern repeated every generation. We've changed the technology to stimulate our failing imaginations but it is, in the end, only the legions going to the outposts near the Danube to protect the borders. Men slaughtering men. Fire. The Wailing of Women and Children.

Sometimes, not always, I am embarrassed by what I hear from the commentators on TV. They are as ignorant as the people who are running the government. I sense some reckless and pent-up hatred is running through a lot of them. Sometimes they sound just like commentators in a tyranny who speak from fear. In the tyranny it is fear for their life; here it is fear for one's public career.

It is the type of fear that will countenance most anything. Freedom is the pursuit of truth. And the truth can not and should not be compromised by power.

The computer has taken over the battlefield. It reminds me of a claim I heard in the mid-70's. One day, "two warriors will square off in front of computers and simulate a war, the best gamer giving his country a piece of the other's territory or, at least, just compensation." And, indeed, it's very possible that in the future, wars will be fought by robots. It's more likely that will happen, especially if there's a spate of wars involving nuclear devices.

Nonetheless, there is bravery and human skill still involved in the fighting of wars. The soldier, adhering to the conventions of war, is never to be blamed. War is a political decision. The blood is on the hands of political leaders.

But the good citizen is in this dilemma. The President has made his decision. Success will be better than failure. In fact, one could characterize the failure to

capture Baghdad and get Hussein as catastrophic. And we don't want this to happen. So, we must witness, be patient, and account for the outcome through political means. President Bush will be held accountable in November of 2004 and the jury is still out. It could be a magnificent victory for him. Or it could be Dienbienphu.

Conflict amazes the future who read about the deeds, the heroism, the awful deaths, the destructive fury human beings are capable of. Our wars, like our art is different than in the past. The Civil War was always explained as the "first modern war," since the rifled bullet, grapeshot, trains used for transport, telegraph, submarine, machine gun, mortar, ironclad, balloons, were all used for the first time on a regular basis. Plus, it was photographed. There is Lincoln in the tent at Antietam looking tall and grim with some farmers house in the background. One could imagine the farmers kids at the high window looking over at the battlefield. And the dead with their mouths slung open. The dead with puffed up bellies and palms turned outward as if saying, "in gods name why?" And the free blackmen burying the dead, digging the graves. The game of baseball is unimaginable without the civil war.

Now we have weapons of mass destruction. We possess, in fact, what mythology gave to the gods: Thunderbolts to destroy the enemies cities; turn them into pillars of salt. Sometimes I imagine that our moral codes were built so that the blueprints for modern weaponry would not be discovered. But, here they are. And we could be in the first century that sees their wide spread use in ways that only evil can fathom at this point.

Humanity has a say in it though and won't tolerate the use of these huge weapons.

At this point it's far more prudent for creative types to pull back, meditate on the nature of the world, world power, American purpose, and one of the more dangerous periods of recent history.

**Posted March 28, 2003**

We have two perspectives. One comes from the media since a camera is stationed along every visceral latitude known today. We get to see the bombs drop and the people wail in the streets. Had the Roman citizens been able to witness what was happening along the periphery of the Mediterranean Sea, would they have had different thoughts about Rome? Perhaps. Perhaps it would have proven to be greater entertainment than the gladiator games. We won't jump to the conclusion that a people who witnesses, through mass media, massive death will ipso facto, become corrupt. That would initiate a terrible pessimism we can't bear at this stage of things.

On the other hand we have history. And history is a kind of TV with a fairly large

camera, as large as a good and generous mind. The camera is an inhuman thing that is meaningless in and of itself. The mind is the difference between peace and war; between barbarism and culture. And many times it is razor-thin.

The camera in our day has made things slow and dense since it utterly absorbs the mind blinking uncritically before it and presents a thousand conundrums that wouldn't be there otherwise. Text belongs to a man or woman of the world who knows a few things. The camera belongs to the Manchurian Candidate type of brain-wash so valuable in a market-driven political economy such as this.

**Posted February 19, 2004**

Listening to the good, heart-felt discussion about diversity and affirmative action it's apparent that the old progressive era is gone for good. An idea thirty years in the harness can not be sold as either an ideal or a solution. But, generally, the problem for all those who want strong, active domestic programs is two-fold. One is the condition of the current economy. And the second is the "war on terrorism." Now, politics may be able to slice and dice an issue and wrangle about what sort of war it is; whether it is a war, who's lying and who's got the hidden agenda, and who is naive, etc. Certainly, that belongs to the crude art of politics. However, it is experienced as a crisis as long as people have an image of the planes flying into the buildings and a knowledge that progress implies evil as well as good. We know that the weapons will get nastier, more efficient, more portable in the future. The question is, "will the U.S. be a target?" A question raised at this level activates that survival instinct that seems so lacking in a big, fat, comfortable or comfort-seeking culture like this one. And so the sort of ambience that created the progressive era of the 60's and 70's is quite gone and will not return for quite awhile. Neither Donohue nor Gore can save liberalism. Even the best liberal among us, the good Bill Moyers, can't do it. It's got to fold-in, go back to the very basics, build up very humbly and then meet the crisis that will test the nation in the next few decades.

Fears will paralyze the ability to build a future. We would like the fears expelled so we can walk with a good, sober-mindedness and not let the fears influence the great decisions ahead.

The question that can be addressed and will be, certainly for the 2004 election, is, "can the US create goodwill again?"

On that question we could muse about many things.

**Posted June 20, 2003**

The [loyal opposition of the Democrats](#) may have disintegrated in Iraq but the necessity for sharp, clear critique of what went on is always uppermost. The most egregious mistake was the faulty intelligence about weapons of mass destruction. If it was faulty at that, why should it be trusted to know what's going on in Iran or Pakistan? A second point that should be analyzed is whether or at what point will America over-extend itself and have to pull back to her own borders? Another

mistake was in not clarifying what the aftermath was going to entail. Are we there to rebuild Iraq as a sterling democracy or are we there to use Iraq as a staging area for military and intelligence operations in the area? My view is the latter rather than the former and the fear is that once the networks are broken and Iran subdued, America will cut and run from Iraq and make the situation much more difficult for the people and, in fact, lower American's esteem even more.

Has everyone forgotten [North Korea?](#)

The Caspian Sea area is increasingly significant for all kinds of reasons. One is the attempt to get oil out of it and find a way to distribute it to the Persian Gulf or, even, the Mediterranean Sea. Another is the unstable condition of Russia and Chechnya where there are terrorists and caches of chemical and biological weapons that aren't safely guarded. The new attention on this part of the world will be done at the expense of Western Europe whose spirit has been shattered for over a half a century; like an old woman it just wants peace and quiet and dream about its wonderful past.

However, as Kenneth Pollack points out in an article in Foreign Affairs, "America's primary interest in the Persian Gulf lies in ensuring the free and stable flow of oil from the region to the world at large." And he makes a prediction that if the flow of Persian Gulf oil were to be disrupted, the globe would be plunged into a world-wide depression. It raises two interesting points: If the U.S. got rid of its dependence on cheap, foreign oil would it still have to protect the Gulf to ensure a stable flow to the rest of the world? And, two, if a new government with Islamic radical ties were to arise in Saudi Arabia how swift would be the U.S. response? He points out the very delicate balance needed between too much and too little involvement in the affairs of that region.

The prudent and wise road is the best one.

For those who don't believe the terrorism threat is real or mounting, read Jessica Stern's article in the same issue of Foreign Affairs. It's called the Protean Enemy and mentions the triborder region between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina where terrorists, including white supremacists, meet. She raises the possibility that Venezuela may be giving sanction to some of the terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

And what about the domestic scene? The people want spending money in their pocket and safety. But, you have some very large problems looming on the horizon. One is the energy system that is creaking and cracking as the northeast experienced recently. The energy system will have to change as fossil fuel burning looks more and more like smoking cigarettes: A bad habit to be broken. Good people have been saying this for years but it's time to initiate some action.

We should be heartened in the reports that have seen a rise in income among minorities because of educational opportunities and entrepreneurship.

The reports I've seen about a looming water crisis should be looked at very

carefully.

Posted August 15, 2003

Though it appears to have been unavoidable, it would have been better to capture the Hussein boys and interrogate them about their father, weapons of mass destruction, and other questions that still linger. According to the reports they were the typical corrupt sons of power who lack the character of not spilling the beans to protect their hides.

What other part of the world understands fully what macho, Texas cowboyism is about, than the Middle-East? They only respect those who defeat them on the battlefield. They have contempt for the legal negotiations the West offers up from time to time.

The full humiliation of what happened in Iraq will be felt through the region, esp. the young who will turn to western media and ape it as they mock their elders. Just as the Russian kids did for a good 15 years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Islamic world will never be the same. It will be better in the long run without a doubt.

Posted June 20, 2003

In foreign affairs, the citizen is sucked into the final drop of calculation the state is capable of; out of bureau's stacked one on top of the other. The citizen is helpless before the onslaught and protects himself with mythology, either of perfection or of fear. Understanding foreign affairs entails understanding a great deal about the rest of the world: that is, the forms of state and the forms of the people. What are the aims of the state? What are the problems of the people? What is the world striving for? Where is conflict apt to break out? What, exactly, is the self-interest of the U.S. or, for that matter, any country?

- A map and a few good magazines are a place to start.
- The world is greater than our abstractions but, somehow, we have to live with the abstractions.
- Predicting anything is a dangerous affair.
- It is necessary to have some definite grasp of history.

People and nations have not had to lug around so much material and processes as they have in this period of time. The fact that every coordinate of the world is "covered" by an expert or some interested party and, certainly, by a camera opens things up as never before. Knowledge, then, is at a premium and, one would guess, wisdom in some guise is sure to follow.

The mind, so extended, does not solve anything. But it is less apt to be swallowed

by lies as long as it returns to the prime center and renews itself at the core of things.

Posted August 23, 2003

### **Persons struggle with the threat of Annihilation**

Our fears did not start in September of 2001. Our fears were there at the beginning when we understood that human beings now had the ability to [destroy cities in a moment of time](#). So we, like some St. George out to slay the dragon, went out and wrangled with this fearsome problem. It exhausted us and dragged us through all the unwanted complexity the world asserts as its reality. We know that it has all emerged from deep dream states but that's neither here nor there. We gave it a shot and came up empty. There was no solution possible. The genie was out of the bottle. We even laughed out-loud when [President Reagan announced his plans for Star Wars in 1983](#). "Been there, done that, Mr. President." At least in the mind, where it all begins and ends anyway.

We threw in [environmental degradation](#) and [resource depletion](#) as two other threats that wrings the neck of the soul. And, in the final analysis, what we saw was that the threats were so powerful that they would be able to, ipso facto, strip the liberal, democratic culture of its suppleness and belief in itself and transform it into a gargoyle-like mutation. And as it mutated it would produce new forms of conflict and the new forms of conflict would, eventually, destroy the basis of a liberal, democracy. Not one bomb would have to go off.

There had been tremendous emotional turbulence from the early to mid-70's. It felt as though we had entered some particularly disturbed period of time. The human spirit wants to live, it wants to blossom forth and it always, in life, meets its adversary. What profound pessimism wracked the brain in those days!

A person finally asks himself, "what do the menace of these weapons do to me as an individual?" Without doubt they sharpened reality. And it plunged us, at times, into the worst sort of pessimism. It was as if the point of the weapon were resting on the tip of our heads and the destiny of the species resided in a small centimeter of brain matter. Fortunately, we had the ability to grow out of the pessimism's of youth and recover whatever is destroyed by it.

This is a terror not created by terrorists but by our own nature. Life lived on this scale is not life; it is mythology, it is nightmare, it is insanity. The central dilemma of the problem is the nature of scenarios that can be developed in relation to something very real, if not probable. Therefore, a stop in the flow of continuity and, so, absurdity.

Well, the youthful spirit asks, "what is wrong with absurdity? It can be quite pleasurable from time to time since it removes huge amounts of responsibility and signals that, perhaps, a possibility exists that didn't exist before. Perhaps we can create the world anew!" This is why youth is so attracted to absurdity and often wears it like an old bear skin. It hides and dances in the bear skin knowing what it

will meet if it throws it off.

Youth is curious and asks, "what would the end of the world entail?" And the man, exiting youth asks, "why is consciousness so brave that it says, "ah yes, the end of the world, bring it on. I am tired of this life. What does it gain a man to know the things we try to know in this world at this time?"

Posted September 4, 2003

The most fascinating and awful thing to confront is this. The conflict is not between some aspect of Islam versus the West. It is the old-world hemisphere versus the new-world hemisphere. Islam, like Rome, was a phase in the life of the Mediterranean world.

The old-world is possibility as it has been; the new world is possibility as it is.

Through its generations of refinement, the old-world has been a kind of self-repression that can't think outside the box. It wants to exist in a world where there are no machines, capital, mass communications, science even. The new-world is raucous because it has money and freedom. It will take generations to tame it. We laugh and scorn at its behavior at times but live happily in its energy. And are like silver coins tossed on a midnight ocean. We are not a past. We know the past and take up its most vital seeds and grow them in the direction of an emerging world.

In some people's minds [Europe will re-emerge and contend for the center of power with the United States](#). I doubt it but it's an interesting thesis. It's much more likely that Europe will descend into the type of civil wars we saw in Bosnia.

Twice in my lifetime I've heard credible reports of entities overtaking the United States. One was in the late 70's when the price of oil shot up and Middle-Eastern countries were buying up property in the U.S. "We're all going to have to learn to bow to Mecca," I heard on more than one occasion. The second time I heard this was with the rise of Japan in the 80's. Japanese banks were dominant, Japanese were buying U.S property at a rapid clip, Japanese products were favored by the domestic consumer. In both instances, the fear was groundless because those countries either didn't have the dynamics or real experience with bust and boom cycles. At any rate, the powers of the United State are real when they are measured by the success it has in maintaining a stable and growing economy through bust and boom cycles.

"We are the future." What does this statement mean? It could just be a form of jingoism, convincing ourselves that we are righteous all the while teetering on the abyss. It is true for this reason. We are free of the past and free to build a future that will be resisted by an old, smug world. And we need not take over one country, interfere with any other people, screw anyone out of anything.

Posted September 15, 2003

Common intuition says that the U.S. is at a cross-roads, a threshold point. What is

that threshold? It is, "what shape will it make out of itself given that it is a world power; in the adolescence of its world powerness?"

It's been very brief, say fifty years. Two things make it very difficult. (1) It never prepared itself for such a role. In fact, one can see that its early psychology was a kind of anti-empire, anti-world power mentality while feeling out its own territory. And, (2), the introduction of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the last half of the last century.

The U.S. has had to rely on old empire models in order to find some kind of equilibrium or guidance to this role that's been thrust on it. The British Empire was, obviously and ironically, the model adapted with the actions in the Middle-East closely resembling each other. One thing is very clear, The fact of being a world power makes for a profound transition which involves every aspect of national life. There are no absolute answers to the kinds of questions that arise. The citizen, finally, tries to be aware of as many of the details as possible.

And we are citizens first. We observe these things as a family observes itself.

One has to be alarmed at the secrecy and closed-off nature of the Bush Administration. It always points to disaster. It's very obvious that the inexperienced, naive President stumbled into something that has trapped him. The world has closed the trap door behind him and now we are in the proverbial mess. If the objective was to conduct a war on terrorism using Iraq as a staging area that would monitor, flush out, and get rid of the terrorist networks that's one thing. But, the two stated purposes of the invasion were to destroy WMD and to democratize Iraq. And clearly we need the President to stand up and tells us, in his own words, why we are in Iraq. That is the key to leadership. In 1964, when Lyndon Johnson begged his advisors to tell him why they were in Vietnam, the die was cast. If the commander-in-chief doesn't know, then no one else does. It's all useless speculation.

We think the Bush Administration was very successful following the terrorist attack. But, in Iraq there was no clear mission that has been articulated to the American people. And the fact they are so control-minded when it comes to the press tells one that the real purpose and the stated purpose are two different animals.

If things continue along the way they are there will be a change in administrations in 2004. And it is the brilliance of the founding fathers to make sure each President would have to stand for accountability every four years. The next administration will not have to eat crow but, rather, change a few of the attitudes and policies and make nice with the rest of the world.

**Posted October 7, 2003**

The idea that the U.S. can "rule the world," is an absurd notion. I heard that expressed by an intellectual from the Middle-east. The U.S. can act in the world. That is not an absurd notion. The intellectuals, pained no doubt as they watch

history flow above them, don't want any motion, any action, any use of power, any demonstration of U.S. resolve. Their response is automatic and calculated and suspect from the beginning. Some of their critiques sound a true note but it's like the old, dying musician who hits one key note while missing the rest.

The modern intellectuals boxed themselves in with their affection for Marxist dialectics. It has prevented them from thinking outside the box, leaping imaginatively in a world never before seen, and lands them at the feet of totalitarian regimes with slobbering praise. Sartre was full of it. So is the linguist. The embarrassing fact is that they share the same instincts as the terrorists which can be summarized as, "I am outside, therefore I will make a bloody mark...."

They are only a concern inasmuch as they have powers in distinct regions and seek to turn the world against the United States. Their only hope is that the American government will look so bad that they will look good in contrast. And sometimes they succeed to do that very thing. The individual conscience is always ahead of the bumbling, gangly government. However, the individual conscience can't insure my freedom or protect me from madmen. So, there's that equation.

**Posted October 25, 2003**

President Bush's credibility wanes for some simple, clear-cut reasons. There was no thinking through the process of invading another nation, occupying it, solving it's political and infrastructure needs, keeping enemies at bay, and bringing wholesale democracy to the people. And it is way too early to call it a failure. And only the foolish suggest that pulling out is the only solution.

It's very clear President Bush will not stop the policy in Iraq. The question is, can he do anything to alter the situation. He can't expect the American people to be patient for three to five years as the terrorist ranks are thinned out.

The problem has always been the approach President Bush has with his own people. He has not shown leadership qualities except in the most calculated way. He appears ill-informed, distant, and without the ability to simply stand up and tell the American people the truth. Every President gets nailed precisely in this fashion. The leader does not have to tell everything, does not have to reveal state secrets; but he must be able to articulate to the people the express reason why we are killing and being killed.

President Bush looks bad on several fronts; his inexperience and inattention have caught up with him and he is in a dangerous spiral downward in terms of national support. The world already loathes him and have clapped the door shut behind him in Iraq. The people in America may do the same thing if a credible Democratic candidate steps up in 2004.

We mentioned before that by invading the country the U.S. turned defeated and distressed people into a people with a purpose, "brave defenders of the motherland...." The bad guys exploit this no end but the bad guys appear to have help or, at least, a population not zealous in stopping them.

It appears that the easy ground victory in Iraq was, possibly, a ruse on the part of the Baath's and others, not to confront the U.S. directly but to go underground and fight a grim guerilla war. And with Saddam still loose it appears that it may have been orchestrated from the very beginning.

We want the policy in Iraq to be successful. Will it be successful at this rate? And if things don't change, how long will the American people stand in support?

A most telling and awful image from yesterday: Iraqi citizens cheering the death of soldiers and holding up "souvenirs" from the wreckage.

**Posted November 3, 2003**

Can a good citizen agonize over the policy but love the country and still believe in its future? The hardest test this country went through in recent times was Vietnam. It was demoralizing to see the machinery of war grinding on for years when everyone, including the President, was trying to stop it. It revealed a great weakness in the vaunted modern world and initiated an anti-technology, anti-modern, and certainly anti-American phase of development that is still evident in the culture.

What many fail to understand is that a lot of criticism is a kind of premonition that the nation will not escape the fate of other nations; even empires. That America starts to follow the dead track of 18th-19th century Europe with its hollow sentiments and brute confidence.

It is, I suppose, when one looks at leadership in all fields and finds nothing but hollowness; nothing but bits of straw with bits of flame dangling at the end.

Nationalism was seen as a provincial sentiment that allowed for the sport of phony redemption promised by politicians.

The land itself; the great and profound geography that moves in all living space is what is loved. Along with that space are great gestures of the past and the genuine kindness of the people.

But in a pensive mood, one has the perception that it has to break so many molds to attain a kind of fruition. And what would the result be?

What is a freedom that simply demonstrates what people have always done in various ways, various times under adverse conditions? Is it possible for a people to get caught in a myth of freedom so nothing of any substance gets done?

The baby-boom generation turned off completely to geopolitics and adapted whatever was available in terms of a world view. Most of it resembled the Children's Crusade that led the innocent into the very maw of evil.

We live in a nation-state system. The U.N. is the good friend who will listen to both sides but the good friend will not stop earnest hatred or naked ambition on the part of leaders in the world. The focal point is on the executive in charge of

putting armies on the field, either with or without consent from Congress. The people actively involved in the geo-political battle in the world number very few. They would not, taken together, make up a small metropolitan area. That's not to say they are in some conspiratorial mode and fixing the world nice and pretty for themselves. In truth, most people including leaders contain in them the same seeds of conflict that break out in the general population. This natural condition of conflict makes it very unlikely that leaders of rival nations can conspire against the whole world.

Three images remain from the Vietnam conflict. The little naked girl running down the road screaming after a napalm bombing, the shooting of the Viet Cong prisoner in the streets of Saigon, and the release of hundreds and hundreds of bombs from the bellies of B-52 bombers.

The punishment did come home to the U.S., in the aftermath. There was a horrific self-vivisection of the culture, a crude release of crazy energies, and the end of an era that had started at the end of World War II.

It created a reaction without a doubt. And here we stand today, half in red, half in blue.

The greatest joy in a democratic culture is that it learns, grows, accepts its shadow, makes peace with its polar opposite, stands up and admits the good, bad, and ugly and dedicates itself to creating a better future. We are for the culture and its beneficence.

We just don't believe everything it does is right.

**Posted November 12, 2003**

The core issue still remains this: How real is the threat of terrorism? The experts have convinced me that the threat is real. Does this give carte blanche to the U.S. or any other country to fight a war on terrorism? It does, provided that the aim is clear, the intelligence is true, and the results are effective.

Two fears crop up. One is that nothing will happen for awhile, the country will get complacent, it will let its guard down and then be vulnerable to attack. The other fear is that in the next two years an attack will occur on U.S. soil that competes with 9/11 for its brutality and carnage. This would have an immeasurably worse effect than 9/11 since it will appear, at that time, that the U.S. is defenseless. After invading two countries, killing and capturing many Al-Qaeda operatives, using every means of intelligence to get a bead on terrorist networks, with Homeland Security, and the rest in place, it would appear the country is an open and easy target that would result in some kind of crazed response. That is a fear.

The deeper question is, "has the divisions in the world come to this? Is the hatred for the technologically superior West so profound that bands of people would dedicate themselves to try and destroy it, using its own technology?"

And what happens to the crucial element of critique when such fears run

rampant?

America does not desire to be scorned and hated by the world. And a prudent observer of the world needs to separate the authentic feelings from the fabricated ones generated by religious and political leaders who see an excellent opportunity to deflect attention on their own short-comings. And you have to throw in a good deal of the global intellectual community into that pot; envious as they are of the success the U.S. has had in defeating totalitarian doctrine.

What would people have the U.S. do? And, if the U.S. were to vanish from the scene tomorrow, would the world be a better place? Would all its problems be solved? I doubt seriously whether they would be solved. In fact, when the U.S. disappears from the stage the world will descend into a dark age again and utterly new configurations will arise from the carnage and muck; perhaps several centuries worth.

What the American people need to fathom is that the Soviet Union, too, had a great military, a very sophisticated police and intelligence network, an impressive industrial base, a hearty population of many millions, huge natural resources in a larger land mass, and yet disappeared. It does no good to hide behind the power of your own nation. You need to continually express and manifest the best qualities of that nation. You must continually build as if a future counts.

Certainly, there are times when fear has the upperhand. When fear says, "this is the most dangerous period of time that America has faced." And it even empties out a scenario that would go along this direction: Several countries, who feel oppressed by the presence of American power, decide that it would be fitting if it were taken down a notch or two. And they would outfit a motley band of terrorists to carry out a series of devastating attacks on vital American interests. And the result would be a deep recession that would result in the shattering of American hegemony. Is not the world that treacherous? I think it can be.

We would survive but be diminished and never regain our footing at the pinnacle of world power. That would result in a wholesale change in history as wars would break out between alliances. The world would exhaust itself and, finally, this epoch, our epoch of science, democracy, technology, capitalism, would end.

Could a Roman citizen in the rule of Marcus Aurelius, see what was going to happen to the Empire in a century or two?

Obviously, these fears were present during the Cold War. But, again, perhaps the Cold War simply prepared the way for the major superpowers to be destroyed by the weapons they fashioned to scare off the other. These are fears. And they arise naturally in the types of hatreds that have been spewed of late. And the weapons that are on the fingertips of hatred. Fears. Not reality, but fears. We need to exercise wisdom in relation to our fears.

Posted June 18, 2003

The first question to ask is, "Is it worth the killing?" And that includes civilians as well as soldiers. If the killing did not take place, what would have happened? This was asked after the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. And reasonable people were certain that an invasion of Japan was going to take a million casualties. That doesn't lessen the horror but leads to the necessity to stop war. Or, more exactly, not let war get so monstrous that weapons like that are used. One would think that the power of the U.S. would prevent such horror. It certainly stopped it in the 1940's. But, it seems likely that another nuclear device will be used in the Middle or Far-East despite the power of the U.S. Only God knows what will happen in the 21st century and whether it will be the most wrathful in history. America is in the position where it matters what happens and it should think about it.

In the case of Iraq a case can be made that "many more civilians would have been killed at the hands of Hussein and his sons...." And that is a legitimate case if there is a record of abuse. The precedence for this was set by President Clinton in freeing Kosovo. During the bombing of Belgrade civilians were killed, foreigners were killed but the act was justified by the saving of thousands, even millions of ethnic people in Kosovo.

The problem with Iraq is the complexity of issues that are separate but entangled and mixed together just the same. That would include oil, terrorism, dictatorship, possible weapons of mass destruction, and an aggressive leader. If the invasion had been simply about freeing the population of the scourge that would be one thing. But, it was sold as an attempt to get rid of the weapons cache and part of the war on terrorism. Oil, however, was never out of the picture, nor was the revenge the President wanted for the assassination attempt on his own father.

Is it an improvement or a positive that the government is doing , out in the open, what the CIA used to do clandestine-style? That is, topple a leader.

If there is a war on terrorism then it has to be defined. Is it a war of unconditional surrender? Is it a war of attrition? The Bush Administration is very quiet about all of this because it doesn't know. When Al-Queda fighters were slipping into Iraq to be part of an underground resistance, the President said, "bring it on." From a military sense I think that was correct. Get them out of hiding and confronting U.S. troops and Iraqi policemen. From a military point of view one could say that the U.S. has established a front in Iraq, along the fabled Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, and will be able to smell out the terrorists with greater accuracy.

But, does it add to the security of the U.S.? And is the effort, in terms of money and lives, worth it?

The initial impression one has is that of an action made by brave-hearted types who, in their private moments, have grave doubts about the whole effort. And make no mistake about it: The future of American foreign policy, at least for a twenty year period, rests on the success or failure of this action.

To pull out too soon would invite the terrorists to take Iraq and then you'd have one bloody mess; as well as egg on the face of those who initiated the policy. But,

the American people have the right to know time-tables, what results the Administration wants, the overall policy goals in the region, and some hint that they understand the precipice that they stand on. That they are not reading the history book but writing it at this point.

The good citizen always cherishes the belief that America is a different, unique entity and exists for the well-being of the people. That it exists to liberate the energies and talents of all people and is very successful in many cases. And the citizen even peeks into the future of Iraq and would love to see that forlorn nation rise up in its potential and lead the region into a splendid future.

On this sits the Bush legacy if there is one. A nation like Iraq is as easily dismissed and left to fend for itself as it is conquered.

And does that make the U.S. an empire?

It could, if our presence there lasts longer than twenty years and there is no sovereign government in place.

But then, don't Empires have the privilege of naming themselves anyway they want?

I don't think Americans want Empire, even though America has been imperialistic from time to time. It really is in the position of a man who's suddenly won the lottery. What now? What do you do? How do you conserve all this gain? This is the effect of throwing off the bonds of the Cold War that defined world politics from 1945 to 1995 or so. And we have not a clue. And it's not a time to listen to ideologues from the Left or the Right. It is time for the freshest, clearest, cleanest thinking possible.

**Posted January 22, 2004**

Dissent is one thing that keeps free people honest. It's not that the dissenters are always honest. Many times their motives are suspect. But, the ability to contradict the official message and do so with intelligence and imagination ensures that the official message has to account for its own shadows. In the case with Iraq those shadows would include the bloody aftermath, the unclear picture of what our intention in Iraq truly is, the use of insider companies to build Iraq and their own bottom-lines through taxpayer money, among other shadows of the policy.

The dissent won't get too far as long as people are convinced the threat of terror is immanent. And who is to tell them that it is not? And who can be trusted with such information?

It appears an open-ended question with one bottom-line fact: People who hate, who are willing to sacrifice themselves, and who have access or want access to very dangerous weapons need to be paid attention to. And the mad among them visualize a total collapse to the global system. It would create the sort of vacuum that initiated the rise of Islam a few hundred years after the fall of Rome. And the fact that two fallen buildings could wreak the havoc it did on the economy is very

sobering. The new wars will be conducted against the economies of the world and not the military.

Whether rag-tag soldiers can pull it off is another question. The attack on New York and the Pentagon needed years of planning, utmost secrecy, and the element of surprise. The ability to do it again with the world watching is very difficult to imagine. Limited, even deadly attacks such as what is happening in Iraq now, may be more likely.

We need to revivify the notion of self-determination.

This is another way of saying that it's up to the American people to understand the world with a great deal more precision. An inexperienced and ignorant people have a caricatured view of another nation. In fact, the inexperienced and ignorant people of the world can come up with a very distorted view of the United States. We are strong enough to accept it and quickly pass it out of our lower extremities.

However, our views of the individual countries in Africa or the Middle-east or Asia can be just as distorted. And those views can make their way into policy or non-policy.

We have one successful model for the maintenance of a huge, nation-state system. It consists of a strong federalism, anchored by a Constitution that most people have respect and loyalty for. But, the strength of the U.S. is the distinctive regions that have access to the strength of all other regions. Silicon Valley may be in northern California and help define that region but it is a boon to Nebraska, Florida, and South Carolina as well.

Is it fair, then, to expect other countries that are less resourceful, to come up to the level of the United States? I believe it is not fair and we need to account for a lot of the differences before making judgements about other parts of the world. We live in a privileged nation that is always balanced by its shadows like poverty. It is not a perfect nation but one that advances on its own leverages in ways that are astounding. It's true that some of the obsessions of the free Americans seem very paltry, even evidence of a corrupted spirit and the acts and celebrations of other parts of the world seem utterly rooted to actual human experience through the ages. The American model is a structural one in which the people, generally, have not caught up with the advancement. Blubbery self-congratulations and drunken grins in sweet-smelling city streets aren't much of an advance in the cause of freedom.

And one question lingers in the air, very general but one close to a thinking man's heart: Has America exhausted its freedoms? Is this all there is? Where are the new, authentic freedoms? That is the place the real American spirit heads for, not the simple keeping of the status quo which belongs to the old world.

**Posted January 12, 2004**

We are neither fear-mongers or prophets. We have fears and insights. The fears

come about because we have both experience and knowledge. The mind, in its supple days, is able to cruise over a few thousand years with all the sight and sound beneath it like a grand Disney ride. So, it's quite easy to say, "well, in two hundred years America will go the way of the Roman Empire, break-down, break-up, be reclaimed by the barbarians and then begin an upward struggle toward a new type of civilization." It may happen and if we leave our bodies at death perhaps we see it. Our only fear would be if the process were to start on our watch, in our time, right now or in a few years. That is something we'd find disturbing. The very young and the very old seem to have this fear the most.

And it wouldn't shock us if two hundred years from now we have a vital, free, exciting nation that still adheres to the Constitution and shows any number of wonderful projects that were seeded in our own stubborn brains.

It occurs to us that wars exist because each side has its reasons to do what it does. And the one entity that relents out of a transcendent sense of humanity is crushed and rolled over.

Our fears for the 21st century are very stark and simple:

The wrathful weapons will get more efficient, easier to produce, more portable.

America will have to take over or control the Middle-East to keep complete tabs on the terrorists that arise in that region.

That China will emerge as the new super-power and we will return to a bipolar world that replaces Russia with China.

That America will get increasingly divided between a critical mass of superstitious, ignorant people who believe in themselves and tightly organized elite's who run things and believe in themselves.

That America will become like the brittle but powerful corporation that resists change rather than embracing and using change to keep its dynamis going.

**Posted November 12, 2003**

We are patriots and for the good that America can produce. In that spirit we hope President Bush made a good decision in going into Iraq and that the policy will win out. We hope to see a very stable government in Iraq and the happy people joyful in their freedom, and the riches of the nation coming back to help raise all the boats, men and women and children. We hope the terrorists see that this way is better than their way. We hope that the Islamic fundamentalist will recognize the power of a multi-cultural, constitution-driven nation where freedom is the shaper and not old, primitive beliefs. We hope the soldiers who have sacrificed much come back healthy and with honor and find their place in their own society. We hope for all of this and will not only be happy for the President but will praise him when it happens.

We have some nagging doubts; doubts many others raised before the invasion one

year ago. We can summarize them as:

The effect of the invasion, at this time, has been the removal of one man and his party. However, it's clear now that Hussein was a neutered quality because he was never going to put his own personal power in jeopardy. All it took was a bit of serious attention on him and he was a little puppy dog.

The disgrace of the intelligence and WMD: A government losing its credibility so early in the contest is doomed to failure. This was one of the biggest intelligence blunders in memory and does not allow this administration to make any dramatic claims about any nation, anywhere.

The invasion has made all those interests that surround Iraq heave with deep desire; Iraq is up for grabs. Every terrorist, every Islamic cleric, every Arab businessman, everyone with a stake in that region must now see Iraq as a country that can be gotten. All they have to do is wait out the United States and its impatient people.

If America pulls out too quickly Iraq could explode in conflict that will endanger the region and put the flow of cheap oil at risk; something the United States would have to fight for in a very earnest manner.

Time will tell and the election this year will hinge on the presentation of these arguments. Kerry and the Democrats will have to present a very precise, thought-out plan for Iraq that is sensible to have a chance against the sitting President. Time will tell.

President Bush, whatever other qualities he may have, is not a "war President." Lincoln was a war President. Roosevelt was a war President. LBJ, even, was a war President. And look what a toll it took on those great men as they wrestled with life and death on a daily basis. I don't see President Bush moved one way or the other by this "war." I don't see the mark of woe on him that would signal that he is conscious of what is at stake. He was not the type of person to run a war against terrorism; he was the type of person to run a "time of ease and comfort." John Kerry will have to bring a lot of savvy to the table to convince the American people that he can, indeed, be the war President. And after the events in Madrid we know the war is not over.

The genius of the American system is that a new man or woman comes into office and can change policy and attitudes without the change losing face or credibility with the rest of the world. It matters who is in power; it is not an inhuman thing at all. And a new President could negotiate the U.S. back into the community of nations and take a real leadership role in the 21st century.

**Posted March 25, 2004**

We have two perspectives. One comes from the media since a camera is stationed along every visceral latitude known today. We get to see the bombs drop and the people wail in the streets. Had the Roman citizens been able to witness what was

happening along the periphery of the Mediterranean Sea, would they have had different thoughts about Rome? Perhaps. Perhaps it would have proven to be greater entertainment than the gladiator games. We won't jump to the conclusion that a people who witnesses, through mass media, massive death will ipso facto, become corrupt. That would initiate a terrible pessimism we can't bear at this stage of things.

On the other hand we have history. And history is a kind of TV with a fairly large camera, as large as a good and generous mind. The camera is an inhuman thing that is meaningless in and of itself. The mind is the difference between peace and war; between barbarism and culture. And many times it is razor-thin.

The camera in our day has made things slow and dense since it utterly absorbs the mind blinking uncritically before it and presents a thousand conundrums that wouldn't be there otherwise. Text belongs to a man or woman of the world who knows a few things. The camera belongs to the Manchurian Candidate type of brain-wash so valuable in a market-driven political economy such as this.

**Posted February 19, 2004**

If you are a poet, a madman even, certainly a thinking person, the last place you want to be is in the backwaters of history. America has become, not an empire in the negative Star Wars sense, but the inheritor of the center of world history and culture. And, for better or worse, the world moves through these entities one at a time.

Rome, which is always raised in relation to America, is an excellent place to begin because Rome, like America, absorbed everything that came before it. And when Rome began to disintegrate the power shifted to the middle-east and the rise of Islam. And Islam absorbed the great Hellenistic culture centered in Aristotle to produce a flourishing culture as well as military empire. And then the remnants of the barbaric tribes that had overrun Rome began to organize against Islam over the question of Jerusalem. And in the conflict that took place, Europe began to understand that it was a backwater, was stimulated in many ways to progress. It rediscovered the ancient world, it applied science and produced advances in sailing, navigation, weapons and, over time, became the center of history. That ended in 1945.

America does what every other of these entities has done; put military outposts to protect its interests and incurred the worlds wrath. And it could very likely be that the temperament of the world vis a vis the United States will be the dominate issue of the 21st century.

The good thing is that, now, America will have to fulfill its potential as a culture. The bad news is that it will have many enemies and many conflicts will break out here and the experience will be unnerving for the citizens.

It is more an intuition than anything else but there is a kind of logic to it that transcends whether one wants it to be that way or not. It's too late for that. The

deed has been done.

Posted March 27, 2004

Most reasonable accounts and analysis see Iraq, now, as a slogging, painful, impossible sort of conflict in which the U.S. can't possibly win. It has changed so starkly that one has to step back a bit and try to understand why things could have changed so quickly.

We aren't quite sure that is the long-term prospect but we do know a few things.

We are convinced, for instance, that George W. Bush is not the leader needed in this war. As we said on the day of his inauguration we weren't sure whether he was Herbert Hoover or James Buchanan but he was one of them. That is, a President who can't deal with the crisis in front of him and must be succeeded by a superior leader. And we are fast reaching a point of crisis which will result in either a very large-scale war in the Middle-East region or the complete isolation of the United States, creating the infamous vacuum that nature abhors.

There is no doubt this is a crisis period made even more stark by the apparent complacency of the people

If we call on history a bit to give us that perspective we note two things. First, the trouble the North got into when it believed it would easily defeat the rebels at Bull Run. And, secondly, the painful defeats at Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, up to the decisive battle of Midway. As Condi Rice said yesterday, America is never prepared for war, never prepared for the worst scenario but it can respond under the right leadership.

The Bush Administration has, on the one hand, a disengaged President and on the other a kind of Ahab like mentality on the part of the senior staff who argue and bicker between themselves but who never saw the difficulties of dealing with the scenarios that are developing in Iraq today.

The one interesting figure in all of this is Saddam Hussein who is still alive, in the hands of the Americans, and who could be used any number of imaginative ways to help stabilize things.

As we said on the first day of fighting one year ago, we know of no nation or people who welcomes a foreign occupation, under a different religious belief and language.

And the rightness of invading Iraq could be argued many times over but one thing is abundantly clear. Unless you have authentic leadership the policy will fail.

How difficult is it to build a constitutional government with bullets flying? Would the Constitutional Convention been held in 1787 if bands of English sympathizers burnt towns and shot at the framers coming into Philadelphia? It is not likely. And the bullets will fly for years because you are dealing with people who had the patience and self-discipline to plan the New York attacks for years, keeping the

whole thing secret, and executing the plan flawlessly. The presence of American military does not demoralize them, it enflames them. This has all been said before but it is the truth that the Bush Administration is failing to grasp.

And now, the leader has thrown things over to the U.N. And with that the pretense of leadership falls. The President wants to cut and run and claim as his legacy the ousting of Hussein. He doesn't grasp the implications of anything that he has done in this area.

It is likely that Iraq will become an Islamic state with no official ties to the terrorists but a lot of hatred for Israel. And beyond that is something fearful to contemplate because the U.S. does have one obligation in the area and that is to keep the oil flowing out of the Persian Gulf. How is it going to do if the policy in Iraq is a complete failure?

**Posted April 17, 2004**

What is unfathomable, when looking at Iraq, is that no one in the Bush Administration took seriously how those states fabricated by empire would disintegrate once the cold war was over. This was predicted in the old Yugoslavia and we know the results there. It seems that it could be the same way in Iraq. The irony may be, in the end, that Hussein was the only figure who could hold "Iraq" together.

Doesn't it mean something to those in the Bush Administration, that the only way a nation can be held together is by the strong-arm of one man? Doesn't that clue them as to the entity they are dealing with?

All they had to do was look at [this interactive piece by the Associated Press on the Tribes of Iraq](#).

And looking at the eyes of the people, they are not prepared for democracy, they are not prepared for self-rule. We may want them to have it, to savor it and transform their misbegotten state into something rich and strange. We would if we could. But, the only way to have a real democracy is by having a secular state where religion is balanced by the independent fact-finding of other institutions.

Therefore, they will have caretakers in the form of a small group of people, war lords, religious leaders who seem to be itching for a fight. Any constitution they sign will be worth less than the paper it is written on.

I can't believe that an average American citizen can figure this out but all the ivy league types running behind the beltway can not. It tells me they, not we the normal Americans, live in a fantasy world of incredible shallowness.

The group that got us involved in this mess need to leave the stage in disgrace.

Thomas Friedman had a pretty good assessment in the NY Times today. Politics

won out over a lot of soul-searching about what to do in Iraq. His criticism was that the Bush team is more interested in defeating liberal democrats than terrorists.

The reality of war exposes the fatal flaw everytime. It can't be done. Either you have a good plan, with good leadership or you don't. And if you don't, you're screwed.

What does not change is the threat of terrorism and the nature of this being a war. We have to continually assess the nature of this war and the nature of the threat. And, personally, I don't trust the group in power who run up different colored flags occasionally to alert me that I should, do what? Spy on my neighbor? Jump out of my skin when I see a middle-eastern type coming my way?

And despite all the false intelligence when I read that Al-Queda has 18,000 operatives around the world ready to pounce on some order by Bin-Laden I tend to believe it. And 18,000 madmen with weapons of mass destruction could hurt this Earth in a bad way. So, the threat is still the problem. But, another problem is getting the leadership necessary to solve the dilemma. And Bush, as was stated from the very beginning, alienated world leadership and so others have balked in what is assuredly their best interest and duty.

President Bush showed some leadership in the aftermath of the attacks. But, ever since that time he has hidden away, has not engaged himself, is a weak president and not fit for troubles that lay ahead.

When you are in a war, declare that it is a war, the judgment should be that cruel and unforgiving.

May God bless America.

Posted May 13, 2004

What then, for the future? What then, for the first half of the 21 st century? We are not for those who want the United States to lose its stature, lose its powers in the mistaken belief that the world will be better. We know better, thank you. It's true that always a dynamic is playing itself out between those who have power and those who have none.

We don't think the U.S. acted wisely or prudently with regard to Iraq; however, had Iraq possessed the wrathful weapons in a concerted effort to give them away to any and all terrorists, then it would have been the prudent and wise thing to do. The key, then, is the intelligence in the area and how effective it is and how effective, in the long run, it will be in the "war on terrorism."

Do the people have the guts to see how awful American intelligence has been over the years?

We believe the greatest danger to the U.S. is arrogance and self-complacency. Followed by a scenario that would have the U.S. leave the world stage in a hurt

pride sort of way, and creating a vacuum filled with the next great threat to humanity. And no one can predict where that would come from but it will arise.

The terrorists are a threat without question but a threat that can be contained. A new super power like China, for instance, would be harder to contain and would invariably confront of the U.S. on a number of fronts.

Posted June 16, 2004

There's a very interesting interview [with an intelligence guy who calls himself "anonymous" for the benefit of his employer, the CIA](#) Some things stand out in this very candid interview. One is that while bin-Laden hates the U.S. for what he thinks it is, his intention is to change U.S. policy and drive America out of the middle-east. He also indicated his belief that bin-Laden will use any weapon at his disposal to hit the U.S. And that includes nukes. Some attention should be paid to the seven policy problems that need to be solved before you can tuck Al-Queda away.

Would the U.S. be in the middle-east if it wasn't for cheap oil? And we emphasize cheap, not simply plentiful oil. We would because of Israel but our involvement would not be as profound, we wouldn't be as hopelessly entangled as we seem to be. And coincidentally, I saw an interesting program last night on a local TV news show about the [old steamcar](#). Believe it or not, many excellent automobiles were steam-driven in the good old days, all the way into the depression-era. They were powerful, could go fast, were cheap to run. What happened? A Mr. Henry Ford introduced a cheap, mass- produced product and choose the internal combustion engine to drive it. And, as they say, the rest is history.

One of the key questions that the American people must address in the coming months is this: Is the U.S. creating chaos in the world or is it creating order?

Whatever happens in November, Iraq will be with us for awhile. It is amazing, uncanny, and even a bit mysterious how everything conspired to get President Bush trapped in this thing. It's no good to take a holier-than-thou attitude however. And it is very false to assume that President Bush is the problem or that America is the problem. President Bush simply demonstrated that he is not a war-time president and will be a problem if he has four more years on the job.

I think there is a general concern that the Bush Administration views the middle-east as a kind of post-world war II Japan or Germany: States that slipped backward, have to be restructured and fit closer to the global system. Iraq has shown however that we are not capable of waging a long and involved war in this region.

Generally speaking, a freedom-loving democracy is not capable of waging any war unless there are compelling reasons to do so. Vietnam is the number one example of fighting a war without compelling reasons. In Iraq there was too much ambiguity in the intelligence information and without weapons of mass destruction, no compelling reason. Each candidate should be forced to outline

what compelling reasons would bring them to unleash the dogs of war.

Posted July 19, 2004

[Niall Ferguson has an interesting and speculative piece in Foreign Policy, "A World Without Powers,"](#) and in it he tries to imagine America losing its hegemony and what it would mean in terms of the dear world we live in. His view is a very pessimistic one but nearer to the truth of the matter I believe. The world appears to be doing two things simultaneously, "fragmenting and globalizing."

What the Terrorists Have Thought and May Be Thinking:

They certainly have an intelligence like a virus that has instinct and intuition about the host they are attacking. For one thing they did not confront U.S. military directly but pulled back, let American forces take Baghdad and then conducted a guerilla war in strategic areas. This does several crucial things. For one, it thinned out American response. Two, it was able to effect American public opinion, which is very important to the terrorists. And three, it got these more religious factions in the fight to prevent any sort of government from arising out of the mess.

They knew that they did not have to defeat the American military; only American public opinion. And you defeat American public opinion by killing soldiers every day, bombing every day, and giving the impression that it will go on forever. That said, they know they have a role to play in the upcoming election. Terrorists discovered the power they have in 1980 when they defeated Jimmy Carter by holding the hostages and then releasing them the day he was replaced by President Reagan. So, the terrorists have to be thinking to themselves, "who do we want for President?" "Do we want to keep Bush in there? Is Bush good for us? Or, would Kerry be better for us?" And I think the answer is that Bush is a lot better for the terrorists for these reasons. The President is disliked, viscerally, around the world. This plays into the hands of the terrorists. Along these lines, President Bush has alienated many allies and, in fact, the coalition he has created is very weak. And that is unlike the coalition his father created which was brilliant and led to the success in Desert Storm.

The terrorists also understand that a key to their success is keeping Arab leaders from putting the kibosh on local terrorism networks or recruiting. For that to happen, they need a President who identifies very closely with Israel and Sharon. In fact, both President Bush and Sharon are just red flags for most people in the Middle-east. And that plays into the hands of the terrorists.

So, the chances of something happening is lessened, if this is actually the case and how they are thinking. Who can know that? We can't even figure how coordinated they are. It appears as though each cell has autonomy. However, if there is any strategic meeting of the terrorist minds they will probably pull back in Iraq, let things settle down, get Bush re-elected and then open a new terrorist front.

The one thing they can't afford is a strong, new Iraqi government. They will do

everything they can to disrupt the formation of that. I think, ultimately, what they seek is a piece of territory, carved out of Iraq, which will give them a staging area. Obviously, America would never permit such a thing but if America is forced to pullout for one reason or another, it may come to pass.

It's becoming very evident, as well, that a great blunder was made when American troops did not go after Al-Queda and Bin-Laden in Afghanistan and resources diverted to Iraq. It's much easier to see in retrospect but clearly a mistake.

And that is, frankly, a failure of leadership on the part of President Bush. He couldn't do anything about the false intelligence. But, he could have looked at the false intelligence and extrapolated the worst case scenario and given that a time-frame in which to further weaken Hussein and build alliance. Meanwhile, going after the very people who, allegedly, were going to receive WMD from Iraq.

**Posted August 20, 2004**

The question arises, "how should the U.S. deal with the rest of the world?" This is a central question in the absence of the bipolar world that characterized the cold war. For one thing, as a people, we need to know when to be proud and when to be humble. We are justly proud of our system of governance which has stood against crisis after crisis and common assault after common assault. That system of governance recognizes that "what is the people, emerges from the people, becomes the authority." This is why any form of public arrogance or corruption is quickly seized on as a threat to the integrity of the whole. And why the most bitter experience is the feeling of utter separation between what we are and what authority is.

On the other hand we need to continually be humbled by our mistakes, by our need for more knowledge and wisdom, by our loss of connections which create a barbaric sort of culture, by our understanding that we will not disappear quickly into time but travel onward for many generations.

**Posted July 23, 2004**

Why are we in the Middle-east? I've been reading a wonderful book by the famed Islamic scholar, Bernard Lewis. In one of his essays he remarks that the United States got involved in the Middle-east for two main reasons. One was the presence of cheap oil. The other was the cold war and fear of Soviet expansion. The second reason is the one that seems to have been forgotten. According to Lewis, soon after the end of W.W.II the Soviets carved out a piece of Iran for itself and in response the US formed the CENTO pact. Few people today can remember the Suez Crisis that could have led to World War III. The commitment the US had for Israel was rather slow in coming. It was not the main reason for our presence in that region except as a check against Soviet expansion. And it's Professor Lewis' contention that, "without American involvement the Middle-east would have fallen under Soviet domination..."

And it is rather interesting to speculate that the Middle-east will diminish in significance for the future as the world runs out of cheap oil and, obviously, the end of Soviet expansion.

The oil question remains a good one to try and get a foothold in. Those interested might read this [short article by Professor Heskett of Harvard, \*How Do We Prepare for a World Without Cheap Oil?\*](#) The key point is that the two most populous nations, India and China, will start producing ravenous middle-classes who will want the kind of life Americans, generally, enjoy. And that will take cheap oil. Of course, as the demand rises and the supply declines that usually means the price rises. And it's a price new, surging societies are willing to pay but a price that can be devastating for older nations like the US or Europe.

The American citizen is in the odd dilemma of having to know the world as never before and confronting possible dire scenarios at every step. And yet, of keeping a kind of optimistic, even idealistic cast of mind. If the citizen simply relegates the thinking about the world to the experts then America will go the way of the British Empire or, even, Rome. The amount of people actually involved in thinking about the world and knowing it in some profound way will shrink and they will ascribe to themselves a special insignia that will rationalize their use of any power for their own ends.

We don't claim that that will happen; only that we hope it doesn't and spend a few precious hours a week thinking about these things.

Our last terrible thought: bin Laden has won the first part of this war against George W. Bush. And President Bush must stand accountable for this loss. There is no other way to look at it at this point; the defenders and apologists for President Bush have a nose and lips securely pressed against his backside. One lone nut running around in the Middle-east has defeated the mighty American army. Is anyone brave enough to admit this? It is only the first salvo and not the last but the President of the United States better be held accountable.

**Posted September 13, 2004**

We live in the present; it comes us at with an array of problems and structures. Disembodied voices speak to us. Our loyalties are tested at every moment. We try to understand it while pursuing our goals. The nation-state system may be repellent as a structure but it exists, it is real and will be for the foreseeable future. So, we look to see what it is up to.

Oh, it is challenging a terrorist network. Ok. We have orientated where we are. We are here, not watching the Chancellor Herr Hitler cheering on the goose-stepping soldiers or watching a pensive Lincoln as reports come in from Bull Run, or seeing massive demonstrations in Washington D.C. on behalf of a cause. We are looking at the state response to terrorism and its awful possibilities.

And why should we have any concern or notice it at all? Answer: Because no man or woman who wants to be real to themselves can afford to ignore the reality of

the state. It may not determine our life but it is a shape and form that we can't escape. And the good one always calls for the need to intelligently assess what it does and not let it evade the responsibility it has to the institutions, to the people, to the world.

So, we watch and listen.

Intelligence tests itself by leaping against the steel jaws of power. The brave person even allows himself to get devoured and passed through once or twice just to see what the experience is like.

We live in the present but know the past. And know it and know it as well as we can; from the first generations two thousand years before Christ, to the present. And each generation is comprehensible to itself, as a complete and self-sufficient entity. I doubt, for instance, that the Romans of Aurelius' day gave a thought to nuclear weapons but, a good one would have known about starvation and given some thought about it. And they lived quite willing to know their own time but not caring a whit about the future except as a vague projection of their own times forward. And for most of history they were correct. It's only been the jarring of the past several generations that has tipped history in a different direction.

We are in the zones of the unprecedented.

Nothing we believe or know has any certainty of a future. Nonetheless, we live and believe it will and perhaps it saves our sanity; without such a belief would we not enter that terrible polarity that seems so apparent today? That is, between non-belief and nihilism on one side, and bone-chilling fear on the other? Paralysis, in other words, because it literally doesn't matter what we do or believe. Or, so it seems. And so the planes fly, the tanks roll, the bombs explode, the women wail, the men die.

And our grand gesture is sitting in front of the television, half-asleep, waiting for ballgames or sex ads.

We have a nation-state system that makes sense to those who are protected by it. I, for one, wouldn't want it to go away anytime soon. I seriously doubt whether the world would be a "better" place if it were to disappear tomorrow. I seriously believe it would drown in a nightmare centuries in duration. So, there is that at stake. And I am conscious of this because, on some level, I have felt the sting of power. I have been helped by power. And I can perceive a region connected by networks of power that are like little systems inside vaster systems. And these systems bring me everything but peace of mind. They bring me worlds. They bring me comfort. They bring me taxes and problems I scarcely know how to deal with. And on top of it all are the national governments that seem to collect vast power and dispense it well or poorly.

I may think that the "greatest good for the greatest number," is a boring concept but there it is. What would one replace it with? And what is the greatest good? My great good may not be your great good. So, who is to decide this? The majority is

fine, as long as that majority doesn't stomp me out because I disagree with it.

If the nation-state means anything it means that human beings are able to exercise their abilities at the highest level, with the widest circumference, at the very depths. At that point, the nation-state makes sense as an entity. "Ah, it is not a fear-driving entity but a protective one that allows me to enjoy my freedom and to exercise my potentials. Ah good, I support it then."

And that then permits us to think on reality at a level that the nation-state itself can not afford to. If the nation-state is a barrier to thought because it is formed out of the systems of governance and economy that the daily wheel grinds on, then it is a false entity. If it does not permit the impossible thought from occurring then it is a repressive system; just as much as the old king tyranny of former ages.

So, there is a lot at stake when one thinks about the present and what is going on. One assumes the nation-state is a reality; perhaps not the ultimate reality but a large one. And that the nation-state is ruled by a person or persons who have either been elected, appointed, or bullies his way like Hussein. So, we pay attention to what these folk say and do between each other.

And because the nation is in a physical place we can locate other nations in a physical place and taken together they form an Earth. So, there is a physical place, the Earth, on which all of this takes place. Therefore, we look at the physical place and it appears significant to us.

Often it doesn't please us but then the world is here to be suffered.

**Posted October 6, 2004**

The old man and the son watched the news together. Increasingly the old man looked at the son and laughed half-heartily. "I won't be around to see it but you or your kids are going to see the end of this civilization..." When the son first heard this thought he shrugged it off. "Ah, the old man is thinking of his own death, has denied it, and now projects death everywhere, even on the civilization!" The son thought.

The old man had seen and done much. He had flown patrol planes and B-26 bombers in the South Pacific. He had traveled the world. He had been in Beirut right before its disintegration and had taken a taxi cab ride into the Bekka Valley. He had seen the massive poverty in India and the endless sex shops in Thailand and the Philippines. The son had been overshadowed by the great deeds of the father and while admiring him, always wanted to prove him wrong.

The one thing they did have in common was a love of history. They did not love what had happened in history but they shared a sense that all life is rooted in the past and must be used as a resource to build a present and future. Most things, good and bad, came from a perception of the past.

Days after the conversation the son was suddenly struck with an awful thought. He had been on his daily walk through the orchards of his town. He was thinking

on the centuries and what they had looked like to him as he struggled to learn the past. He had discovered one common feature that ran through all centuries, including the late, lamented 20th century. At some point there is great disintegration. It is as if a climax is reached and everything unravels to unleash every possible horror an era is capable of. In the 18th century it was the American revolution and the French revolutions that created a new epoch. In the 19th century it was the Napoleonic Wars and the American Civil War, among other items. In the 20th century it was World War I and World War II, between which an earth altering depression. Now, we were in the new century. And not only did each period of disintegration end but a new era emerged from it. The legacy of each period of disintegration was the new generation of weapons, usually bigger and more powerful than the previous generation.

It was this seeming fact that begin to corrode the son's optimism and "things all work out ok..." It suddenly appeared very possible that the 21st century would disintegrate precisely when the new and awful, wrathful weapons were in the hands of crazed people with nothing to lose. After all, the Cold War was waged between countries and leaders who had everything to lose. But, now emerging was a world where millions of people had nothing to lose from the destruction of those who had much more than they had.

"You have played too fast and loose with the genie to escape its inhuman wrath." A voice had entered the son's mind but he chased it out with argument.

There was no solution, only mitigation. One was, certainly, uniting the world against the weapons, that was the role of leadership. Two was to plan for the worst case scenario to make sure something existed after the deed. Three was to finally use modern technology to start and decentralize huge metropolitan areas; a task that would take more than one century.

**Posted November 23, 2004**

"And what good is all of your doom-saying?"

"You believe I'm a doom-sayer?"

"Certainly, you have no faith in anything good happening in the future."

"It's quite probable that many good things will happen in the future. Will not good red wines be produced in the future? Will not there be singing and baseball and good women?"

"Well, why don't you extol these things? Why don't you celebrate the unique good then?"

He had been chastised and knew it. The mind must be honest, he thought. Never lie to the deepest aspect of your nature. The pessimism was a warning to get past a few of the convenient prophylactics, to the heart of our fears, and beyond out into the undiscovered places. The route is through the darkest fears. The darkest fears are not the final destination.

He could say these things but they scarcely understood what he was saying. "Keep your damn fear away from me!" That's what he got most of the time.

He had listened to the scholar speak about the future and the scholar had raised the specter of China. And China will be this and China will be that. He had heard it said about Japan 15 years earlier. Won't China have to pass through a long period of bust, a deep recession before it understands what "capitalism" means? The biggest test for China will come in two related areas. One will be "recovery" out of a deep recession. In the West this is usually led by entrepreneurs. China leadership will be tested as to how well they know this fact. As China becomes richer and more powerful it will not be able to look to its communist past or classic past for models on how to act and be. It will look to the United States and West. And Chinese leadership, like Islamic leadership, fears that model more than anything. To adopt that model will mean the end to many structures and privileges in China. So, when the deep recession occurs and the economic plaything taken away and the people subdued isn't it more likely that the Chinese government will clamp down harder than ever? And won't that, then, destroy its ability to grow as an economy?

The other interesting thesis by the scholar was that the United States and Western Europe had much more common than difference. For this reason there would be a renewal of the Atlantic Alliance to fight off Asia and the growing rift between North and South.

What then is the shape of the world? What is the reality firmly on the surface? What sort of dense history is blowing through at this time? We are certainly in the middle of something noticeable through the 20th Century and noted in more than one place. The convergence of global cultures; and this convergence is doing good, bad, and ugly things to the population of the Earth. For one thing it is making people much more aware of difference and the tolerance of difference. But, it also makes them more skittish and paranoid as new values are scattered like seeds across the face of the globe. More people are developing a supple mind able to deal with all the things thrust in front of it. But, many more people are running scared under the protection of religion, state, party and so forth.

And instinct, if not intuition says that it means more conflict in the future, not less. That human beings will have to learn to live with each other, happily and bountifully, and it will take centuries.

**Posted January 15, 2005**

"Why do you even think along these lines? Don't you have a life? Is this all it is? Rather boring, objective comments on the world? A world, by the way, that is passing quickly and will soon be totally out of whatever shape you put it in.....you and your high and mighty words."

"It seems like we must choose the characters we will be in this life. This is one of them I suppose. I enjoy the benefits of freedom. I love being my own man. I love, even, many of the obligations I have. And I must, to be free or even to act as though I'm free, have some orientation. Isn't culture about orientation? That's mainly what it's about. So I am a man, in this body, surrounded by this region which I have lived in and traveled in. And that region is connected to many other

regions grown up, let us say, from the founding document. I am connected then to all of it as a free man. I must orientate myself. I don't agree or hate or believe in everything I see. But, I do see and listen. And at the pinnacle of this Constitution is the government. Now, that government can do many things I can't do. I call that power. And when the government acts on the world stage I must, again, orientate myself. What is it doing? Why is it doing it?"

"Fine, fine I get all of this. I watch the media too. For you, though, it is something personal, something you have taken on as a cause."

"Let me explain. I was influenced by three events when I was a young man. One of those was the World War my father and uncles had fought in. The second was the cold war and nuclear threat, and the third was the catastrophe of Vietnam that would have done a lesser nation in. All of those things orientated me to the world as a staging area for powerful entities, good and evil. The world as a potential and real holocaust. The world as a colliding beast. What my power did, the power I had loyalty to was uppermost. And when I started to be aware of it I understood that the world had known power from the beginning of time. Ah, a kind of orientation takes place! And I began to understand that the power I had loyalty to was more powerful than any other entity on the Earth. For every move France could make, America could make 100 moves. For every move that Italy made, America could make 150 moves. Is that not power?"

"Of course that is power and it's beyond you or I to know. It is, it will succeed us, it will go along its pathway regardless of your tiring thoughts about it."

"But it is us and we move with it as it moves along the pathways it does. So now it is at the center of world power, even the center of world history. Isn't that a rare place? Isn't that a brief shadow that makes its way across the planet in fits and starts? It's not something to be complacent about I don't think. And so for orientation we need to study the others who have been there before; Rome, dynasties of China, Islamic empire, Aztec and Inca, Spain, England, among others.

They are the mothers of us now."

"And you know all about these things? About Rome, Islam, Aztecs and all the rest?"

"I know some but much should be rediscovered."

"We are Americans, a happy and sloppy breed! We have no need of all this past, this stupid history."

"We are there, we are there, we are there..."

**Posted January 27, 2005**

No one who loves democracy can be unmoved by the sight and sound of the vote in Iraq. It is dramatic, it is impressive, it is heart-warming. It always reminds me

of conversations with people from other countries who have chastised Americans. "You guys don't know how lucky you have it here." And we take it all for granted.

Whether it justifies the war effort; cost to civilian Iraqi and American lives, taxpayer money, prestige, etc. time will tell. As we've said before, we want the policy to be successful. There would be nothing better than a sterling democracy in place in the Middle-East. We have always been of the opinion that regardless of the intention, the decisive factor is the quality of leadership. And that includes what will pop up in Iraq to form its Parliament, as well as American and allied leadership.

There is talk of the vote making Iraq much more secure, giving the insurgents notice that the people are not with them. And it is the hearts and minds of the people that make the difference. I don't believe the insurgents will go away anytime soon. The reasons are multiplied many ways. For one thing, the argument is now being sounded through Middle-Eastern media that any government in Iraq will simply be a puppet regime put in by the U.S. so America can have a staging area and oil. That will fuel the sense among the dissident groups that the government has no legitimacy and needs to be overthrown. Plus, the terrorists, the Israeli/American-hating factions in the middle-east see Iraq as "up for grabs." They must wait out the American phase. I'm certain that is in their thinking.

Now will come a long period of education; the learning curves will be steep and painful and, in the final analysis, determine whether the war in Iraq was successful or not.

Attention will soon turn to Iran. The New York Times of January 31st had a detailed report on the types of scenarios being developed with Iran. The overwhelming consensus is that both Europe and America will play large roles, there will be no unilateralism, and that negotiation and incentives will be far superior to military action. There is always the wild card of Israel who, as many might remember, bombed the Iraqi nuclear plant in the early 80's.

It's too early to call Iraq a success or failure. The pictures yesterday of women voting and old men proudly holding up their purple-inked finger is the most positive thing to come out of Iraq in years and years. Far more real, for instance, and uplifting than the President of the United States landing on the carrier and declaring victory.

**Posted February 1, 2005**

President Bush has every right to glow in the recent news that seems, in some circles, to vindicate his Mid-East policy; his jihad on behalf of American style democracy. It appears to us somewhat hollow for these reasons. One is that a democracy is more than people in the street. People came out into the street during the ascension of the Ayatollah. I'll never forget the scene in Berkeley when the Shah fell and out of this house along Telegraph Avenue came Iranian nationals, all piling out of this house like the keystone cops from a car, and leaping into the

back of a flatbed truck to go to a demonstration in San Francisco. So, people demonstrate for all kinds of reasons.

Democracy is more than the simple vote. It is nothing if there is no mutual respect between antagonists. It is nothing if the people do not put law above men; even religious men. It is nothing if the press can not print anything that it sees fit to print, in relation to a fledgling democracy. Personally, I see none of this going on. What President Bush projects as "democracy" could very well be mob rule by people who have known nothing but deprivation and oppression.

Obviously, any good-willed person wants democracy to flourish in all lands, among all people. And we'll leave it to the scholars to explain why it flourishes one place and not another. History teaches us that this region is the most treacherous in the world. Motives are suspect. Loyalties, outside of ones tribe, are questionable. The people are inured to the brutality of government. The people, themselves, must be free and have that beautiful sense of "self-reliance" so evident in America and other places. This takes generations.

Since the deed has been done we say, "good speed and fair sailing," and hope for the best. A good democratic people is taught how to deal with the complexity of state and society while maintaining a simple spirit able to tell truth from lies. The people have to be as knowledgeable as those who rule them to prevent corruption from occurring. It simply pays to have a knowledgeable people who know the systems running through them and are not afraid or paranoid or angry at the fact.

What democracy needs more than anything is an idea of progress. It is necessary to say, "we will be better in the future." The people must view it that way and the institutions must view it that way. The totalitarians want stasis. Progress governed by intelligent husbandry of resources we should add. In fact, a good deal of politics comes out of the struggle with competing visions of progress.

The one victim to progress is fundamentalist belief.

It still seems insane to us that a person could believe that the Middle-East will simply embrace democracy and restructure itself without any deep fight or deep division within its spirit.

The one huge obstacle the Bush Administration is going to face is that the cry will go up, "this is a ploy on the part of the imperialist west to gain control over our resources and our nations!" And that would spark a enormous and dangerous rise of nationalism in this area.

We hope not. It will play itself out and President Bush will be given all the credit in the world if it works out OK. It's not a political issue at all.

If you study the statements of the President carefully you see that his intention has nothing to do with the Middle-East. The motive for getting democracy in that region is to "decrease the threat of terrorism." Democracy, then, not as a philosophy of being that jets from the spirit of the people, upward, to structure the

form of government but an expedient form to enlist young people in democratic pursuits rather than terrorist ones. But terrorism will last as long as the United States has any presence in the region. And it appears to me that President Bush is quite willing to leave the region at the first sign it's OK and safe to do so.

Terrorism is an irrationality that grasps at any excuse to break out. It is a condition of poverty, rage, cultural deprivation or the belief that one's innate culture has been robbed from him or decimated by some other power. The lead terrorists may not come from poverty but the followers certainly do. The lead terrorists are fighting for a place in history, something that wouldn't be permitted through normal channels.

Certainly, when we revisit 9/11 we feel that all terrorists must be brought to account and destroyed. We want revenge for the act. We want someone or some group to be accountable. We don't want to make our own group, our President, accountable. But that is a mistake. If the goal is to rid ourselves of terrorists we are going about it the wrong way. In fact, we will have to support regimes that practice a good deal of repression to hold down the terrorists who, in all likelihood, will migrate to another region. And then what?

I totally agree that President Bush had a very difficult decision to make about Iraq. I still, at this late date, hope he's right. But, the worst thing an American can do is bury his or her head in the sand and pretend that all is right. He will have four years to make it right. Let us hope that he does.

**Posted March 24, 2005**

The citizen is faced with a two-pronged responsibility. On the one hand he or she must fully support men and women in uniform who are sacrificing and putting themselves in harms way. There's no doubt that is a necessity. Therefore we are against those who would do them harm. On the other hand, the citizen has to have a bit of intelligence and conscience in relation to geo-politics and try to get a fix on whether a conflict, never a good thing for a free democracy, must be fought.

That is a test of leadership and we believe President Bush has failed. He failed at some distinctive points. One, certainly, the two main reasons for attacking Iraq were false. Had those reasons proven out, the president and the people would have been connected to the conflict and supported it. Once those reasons were gone he went down the list and there was, "Hussein is a bad guy," and "Let's make Iraq a sterling democracy." He didn't believe it and disconnected at that point. And the American people have disconnected and it's eerily like Vietnam. At least in this one fact: Everyone wants it to go away as quickly as possible.

Leadership is always the key. Not the people ignoring facts in the belief that it's patriotic to do so. Not the right-wing commentators. Not the eternal critics for that matter. But leadership.

Lincoln was successful because he connected the people to the cause. FDR was successful for the same reason. LBJ, Nixon, and now George Bush have failed

because they did not.

Free people naturally resist war. War is not something a good, free, liberal, democratic people should want to engage in. War is for the losers. War is for the discontented and lost. It's for the devils. And, as I have remarked, America is in this special place where it can afford to be wise and prudent, inasmuch as you can be in a geo-political world.

There is a time when a country must defend itself, no question. But then if it rushes into dubious battle, what then? How does it regain its stature? How does it undo the damage?

And what confidence has been extended to the terrorists and others seeing that a great superpower can not subdue the uprising?

Sometimes the threat of force is more useful than the use of force.

**Posted May 30, 2005**

The problem in Iraq and generally, the "war on terrorism," comes down to one central point: Leadership. President Bush said a lot of things in his speech but he didn't say the one very obvious thing that is becoming more and more apparent. The terrorists are winning this war. And they are winning because of the complete lack of leadership on the part of the president, his office, his party, and all those people who benefit most from living in a great country like this. Yet, when you look at the terrorists, the Vietnamese, the Afghans against the Soviet, you find a very well-defined group who are fully committed and are fighting as they did in the old days; all or nothing. Even the leaders have to get out there and put their rear-ends on the line.

As we've noted before, how many of the elite's in this country: NBA players, NFL players, actors, actresses, wealthy entrepreneurs, NHL players, baseball players, these sniveling conservative types who edit their journals and lick every powerful asshole they can, have joined in the fight? After all, if this country is really under threat they have the most to lose. One brave and honorable football player who gave his life; that's all I see.

Leadership. If the people who benefit the most from a society won't fight for it, why should anyone else? And by the way, you are being led by a president who didn't want to put his rear on the line in Vietnam.

So, what we have today is a society disconnected with what is going on in Iraq. Against a foe fully connected to what is going on.

It doesn't matter what your intentions are or what your rationale is; it only matters the quality of leadership that connects the society to the effort. And even though September 11th is still a powerful reminder of the threat, it is not enough to engage the interest of the people.

By doing so the people have effectively wrecked President Bush's second term.

Bad leadership always pays a heavy price.

Posted June 30, 2005

Eventually, the terrorists will be defeated. They can strike, as they did in London, but every strike divides people between good and evil. And while human nature may be a mixture of the two, people of all regions, all religions, want to do the right thing. The terrorists are like the pirates of old who did a good deal of damage, sometimes for ideological reasons but mostly for selfish reasons. Bandits always exist. If not the roads, the sea. If not the sea, the airplanes.

The terrorists are not even a quarter a threat that the communists were or the nazi's or Japanese militarists. However, there is one terrible caveat in that judgement. The weapons that are available to any group determined enough to get them. Ten lonely, dedicated men assembling a nuclear device in mid-town Manhattan could forever change the history of this planet. This is the horrific chapter in human history we are now facing. And we will face it through the 21st century without question.

What all good-willed people must address is the question, "how can democracy, freedom, dignity of the individual, et" survive the development of science, technology, and collective craziness? This still appears the central theme of our time, sounded as it has for many decades. The qualities necessary for a good society vanish when the future vanishes in probable scenarios that are destructive. The average citizen will be so blocked, psychologically, that he or she will think any new idea or change in the culture a kind of madness and absolutely shut it down.

And the people shutting down thoughts of the future is tantamount to bringing in a new age of barbarism where the hope is that one can get all they need NOW and not worry for the future. And, by the by, we will destroy the past too. Who needs it? We are the past and future! The barbarian, like the terrorists, see it that way and see the past as leading to their acts of terror and the future leading out to their eventual triumph.

Posted July 9, 2005

The majority of American citizens now believe that the war in Iraq was a mistake and has not led to further security at home. This is according to a [story in the Washington Post that reviews the book](#) "America the Vulnerable: How Our Government Is Failing to Protect Us From Terrorism," by Stephen Flynn.

Flynn's major theme is that the war in Iraq continues to squander precious resources that prevent the U.S. from protecting its vulnerable borders, especially seaports. The article says that Al-Qaeda has moved from being a mid-eastern terrorist organization to being a world-wide movement. And as we learned in London, three or four people with an agenda, know-how, and fanatical zeal can shut down a city.

The Bush Administration tries to convince the people that by confronting terrorists in the streets of Iraq, Americans will not have to confront them here at home. This is old world thinking if ever there was one. For one thing we know that the authentic terrorists in Iraq move around when the fighting gets fierce, ala Fallujah. It wouldn't shock me if terrorists are routinely cycled out of Iraq and put with cells in other countries, making Iraq a kind of training ground. The Americans are killing off, if that's the word, remnants of forces loyal to Saddam who most assuredly hate America but are not Al-Queda.

The majority of people don't believe in Iraq. Even Karl Rove will have to eat that one and realize, perhaps in the wee hours of the morning, that they made a horrific mistake. They will never own up to it, blame everyone but themselves, pull as many dirty tricks to stay in power, and go down as one of the most inept, inexperienced administrations in history. The historians will have the last word on that one. And even at this late date we want a successful policy. It is not good that the president fails. It doesn't help in any way, shape, or form. It is simply very troubling that this administration ignored so many signs and plunged the country is a very costly adventure.

It is like Vietnam in that we can't "get out," at least with a quick retreat. So we slog it out with the attendant problems that come with a protracted war; and who can forget the inflation that wrecked the sterling 60's economy as military spending washed through in the 70's? Or, the terrible dissension that is just below the surface here?

One can always hope for the quick turn-around; that the insurgents have been weakened, that the Iraqi effort to govern and police itself will win out and America can deal with this terrorist threat in a more substantial manner. We hope for that because the alternative is not good to think on.

**Posted July 19, 2005**

The most dangerous statement I've heard yet comes from the House Chair of the Armed Services Committee, Duncan Hunter, who said today on a national news program, "America must change the world, or the world will change America." And I think this statement goes a long way to explaining the Bush Administration.

It's one of these moral statements that has always gotten this country into hot water. It's the typical American ignorance of the world and history, generally. It's the grandiose statement that always comes back to haunt the nation. It says, in a frightening way, that the world is now our enemy. It is "us" against the rest of "them."

You would have thought that the difficulty in Iraq would have sobered the administration in seeing how difficult it is to change anything, or do anything on the scale that this statement implies.

It's dangerous because the fix America could get into is that classic one of "overreach," where the arrogant power thinks it can do anything, gets entangled

beyond belief, and then can't respond when it's deepest interests are threatened. And instead of going down this terrible road you'd think we would start producing that wisdom and prudence that can only come from a nation as strong, free, and powerful as this one.

"Bombs go off, they will always go off in Iraq..." So said Chairman Hunter. Again, this is tantamount to saying, "we have saved the village by destroying it." If the final legacy of Iraq is that it is worse off, in every measure possible, than it was previous to American intervention, then what? I could see the isolationist strain starting to emerge again.

Every realistic post out of Iraq tells of a variety of people maneuvering their way into power through killing, threats, manipulation, and everything that would defeat a democracy from the get-go. A freelance writer was recently slain by police in Basra who didn't like his reports on infiltration of the Iraqi police by insurgents.

It is not "America against the rest of the world." If it is we are finished as a nation-state. It is adapting to a world that has produced terrorists ready to give up their lives to achieve some sick and ill-advised end. If they succeed, however, in isolating America from the rest of the world, then they will have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

**Posted August 17, 2005**

The American citizen comes face to face

with an interesting dilemma. Am I the citizen of an Empire or just a big, nation-state that is, now, the leading edge of history?

Do I have to be conscious of the manipulations of power in all the nooks and crannies of the world or can I simply do my job, pay my taxes, enjoy my life, and prepare for the worst? Am I condemned to get pessimistic to the core as I age? Am I in the middle of the end of the Roman Empire and will Atilla, then, sweep through sometime in the 21st or early 22nd century? Sometimes it is easy to see why people watch football games.

It serves no purpose to call America an empire. What does that mean? It does serve to understand how large and powerful she is and how hated and resented she is throughout the world. The world now knows that it's past is behind it; there is no going back. Even the terrorists understand this and are a kind of last ditch effort to make the past influence the present and future. It is forever gone. It is all a remnant of what we ventured through as peoples, what habits we had, how we were conditioned by low levels of technology and economy. Gone. And if not gone, soon to be gone or to be pitied and changed.

America is what its citizens make it to be. It can be a nightmare or a kind of pleasant dream. It is no better or worse than the summation of its people.

Posted September 9, 2005

Victor Hansen, [a commentator for the conservative magazine National Review](#), has an interesting "summing up" of the war on terrorism since 9/11. And he rightly reminds readers that in the period from that awful day to the present is the same number of years the U.S. was involved in World War II. And at the end of that period were 400,000 American dead and millions of others extinguished by the conflict. I'm not sure if he's using this as a way to say, "we have hardly started," in the war on terrorism or that the response to Iraq and terrorism should be more measured; at least the criticism. I hardly believe that the terrorists haven't attacked here since 9/11 because they are terrified of a "populace (that) has become a collective powder keg ready to go off at the next attack." It's more likely that the terrorists attacked New York and D.C. for the same reason the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor: To get the U.S. out of a specific region. The Japanese did not attack the U.S. in order to destroy her. The Japanese had no intention of invading the west coast and bring America or that part of America into its imperial domain. Japan wanted to cripple American response to its expansion through the far east, with the goal of capturing Australia and controlling all the sea lanes into that region.

His analysis of the role of oil, especially the fact that oil money filters back to the parasitical terrorist groups is true. The problem with that is that the United States could stop getting oil from that region tomorrow and it wouldn't change much of the dynamic, considering the way China and India are pouring billions into the region.

It's hard to gauge whether the momentum for terrorism is waning in that region. My impression is that the [Wahhabis strain of Islam](#) is growing just as fundamentalism is growing here in free America right under our noses and is a demanding, pietistic, undemocratic, ignorant form of a great religion. And that from the [Wahhabis schools](#) will come kids indoctrinated with hatred for America and Israel, with the missionary zeal to do anything to get rid of them; or, at least, get rid of their influence in the region. It's more likely that a new form of bin-Laden will emerge that is far more dangerous, far more deadly than the present model. That is only an intuition.

### **Democracy in Iraq.**

There are people who want democracy or some form of it. There are responsible voices in Iraq and the Middle-East concerned about "power to the people." The people, even those under the heel of a dictatorship, are wiser and more resourceful than we think. They simply can't express the wisdom or resource.

However, it's apparent that those who want the power the most are the least democratic. And that a vacuum was created when Hussein was toppled, creating an inflammation of power fantasies for every thug, criminal, politico, drug-dealer, religious leader in the region; those, in other words, who will fight most aggressively for power, with or without a Constitution. And it is likely that at the end of this process Iraq will look like Russia after the fall of communism. It will be

run by criminal gangs, the country will start to disintegrate, and a big, strong military guy will step up; perhaps a veteran of the Iraq-Iranian conflict and say, "I'm in control now." He will gather Parliament and tell which members he can work with and the others will disappear. It is much more likely this will happen, then some form of democracy. Any good-hearted, right thinking person wants democracy but it ain't easy if there is no habit for it.

And what is disturbing is that for all intents and purposes, the Iraqi people did not fight for their freedom. Fighting together for a cause allows for a transcendent sense of community that would permit a document to be built that all had allegiance to.

On thing Dr. Hansen does not bring up. Success in war is determined by leadership. President Bush felt that the U.S. was going to continue with that wonderful mid-90's feeling of "all is right with the world." It was so steeped in confidence that it didn't ding President Clinton one point during and after the sex scandal and impeachment. It boggles the mind but it was because the economy was booming, companies were giving out fancy cars to graduates to come work for them, you had the stimulating new communications medium, there were no conflicts, no wars that America cared about. President Bush fully expected this to continue and that would be the backdrop for his conservative agenda; most of which the people, so satiated in good times, would ignore. But that ended in September of 2001. He showed flashes of leadership after that event. In Iraq it's been abysmal for every reason imaginable. And with bad leadership comes failure not success.

A better analysis than Hansen's comes from [Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr. writing in this month's Foreign Affairs](#). In his article Mr. Krepinevich identifies three centers of gravity that the war is being waged over: The Iraqi people, the American people, and the American soldier. That each of these centers of gravity need to be won or the insurgents will prevail with catastrophic results. His proposal is to stop fighting the insurgents and instead deploy a strategy of protecting the people. His analysis gets very long and technical and is the type of idea that works on paper but in reality there is resistance along every step. The American people are practically lost and the Iraqi people want the U.S. out of there as soon as possible. The author points out that the Iraqi people do not want the insurgents or another repressive regime. So, the dilemma is convincing the American people, the American volunteer force, and the Iraqi people to stay for at least a decade. What Mr. Krepinevich fails to note is that the insurgents are like a virus and simply adapt to what is thrown their way. The problem is that the borders with Syria and Iran are very porous and a whole new generation of insurgents could come in over the decade and become a more confrontational army than a rag-tag of guerilla fighters.

At any rate, it's well worth reading this article to understand some of the essential dynamics of the conflict.

Posted September 16, 2005

Read this article from the Middle East Times that conveys [a letter sent from Ayman Al Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's number two, to Abu Mussab Al Zarqawi, its chief in Iraq](#). It reveals several important things, especially in light of the on-going elections. Al Zawahiri is either a deluded nutcase or the kind of revolutionary guerilla that the left used to admire in the 60's. There's no question that Al Qaeda has a grand strategy and Iraq is at the core of it. They are very confident that America will leave and wash their hands of the whole mess. The U.S., however, will not leave this area.

And if I read the statement by [Saudi King Abdullah correctly](#), there will be a continual alliance between his country and the U.S. He is described as a moderate and appears a kind of middle-eastern Gorbachev. Time will tell.

The question is not the rightness of a war against terrorism but the risks and rewards in fighting it in this particular way.

We know where good intentions lead. It is a road that would attempt to democratize a nation that has never known it. It would fight a war fully underestimating the dynamics at play when the tyrant is roused. Yay, the tyrant is dead! Yet, thousands of new tyrannical lusts are unleashed and are simply learning the nuance of democracy to secure their own tyrannical fiefdom.

Al Zawahiri is very conscious of the role of the media and chastises Al Zarqawi for the videotaped beheadings that horrified so many people around the world. He is addressing a post-American presence in Iraq and has a delusion of a vast Caliphate throughout the region. Is this the same impulse as Nazism? Didn't the Nazi's want to return to some "glorious" moment in the past; the years of Frederick the Great? But what does history show? Every great empire, including Islam, that is lost in time can never be resurrected.

The worst mistake Al Zawahiri made was to directly attack the U.S. Yes, the people are tired of Iraq and tired of the lack of leadership in the Bush Administration. It looks like the gang that couldn't shoot straight. But, the vast number of people both in the U.S. and world fear terrorism and want it squashed for good. That is something Al Qaeda has never faced before and, eventually, it will be smashed. And even though we disagree about the invasion of Iraq, we think valuable lessons will be learned in the aftermath.

That will happen as long as there is no major conflict the erupts between the U.S. and some other major power. Or, a nuclear war breaks out between India and Pakistan. These are unlikely.

Now, a cynic may come along and say that the letter was obviously written by the CIA and placed in the media to make the enemy more real to the folks back home. Time will tell but even if it is a fake, the fakers were pretty good at fabricating what number two Terrorist is probably thinking.

Posted October 16, 2005

## **ODDS**

It's hard to come to some easy and fast conclusion

about what the "reality of the world" is. It is many things; good, bad, and ugly. It is mostly good when people leave each other alone to pursue their goals. It is good when there is laughter and the building of good things. One is always cautious about the trends that seem to sweep through the globe and destroy it or, at least, our portion of it. It's not terribly likely but it's not terribly improbable either. I'm astonished at the fear and loathing the world will bring the mind at any given time.

Yes, the Earth can be destroyed by physical nature. But until that time let us be the very best we can be. That was the first instinct that ruled me when I first confronted the nature of nuclear war. "Well," I thought to myself, "there's nothing I can do to stop it. Therefore I will defy the weapons by living as I wish, as I see fit, as I believe life should be lived and thought." After all, a planet threatened with its extinction would make a leap in the dark, correct?

The globe, at any given time, is defined by the wonderful motion of its people, day after day, month after month, year after year. We are amazed at some of the gadgets and new ways of doing things. In fact, we are sacrificed for their benefit, having fun in being the ones who use the gadgets for the first time. We participate in the future. Our minds are literally absorbed by the present and its things since so many livelihoods depend on it. It makes for a buzzing world and we fly in its midst amused and horrified at turns.

## **AND ENDS**

The privileged nation of the United States of America can afford to look at conflict as the focal point of modern history and figure out how to solve the conflict or get out of its way. After brief exposure to American opinion it is quite evident that the American people need to take stock of themselves as sentient citizens of a putative free democracy. On the one hand are cries for isolationism. "Oh, American foreign policy causes so much pain for other people. Oh, we are a monster nation not knowing why others hate us so." This crock has been around for at least forty years, if not more. It is meaningless. It actually is a strain of American isolationism that is obsolete, given the facts of the world. America will never go back on the other side of the Rubicund. It exists this way or not at all.

And on the other extreme, "we must conquer the world because it is so ruthless and unforgiving and so forth." Between the two is a truth, perhaps not the truth but something that approximates it given the reality of the modern world.

And here we must say that one of the great problems is the inability to form a clear and real view of the world. No matter how much there is denial in the matter, the world is divided up into sovereign nation states with their own administrative

units and economies; its own identities and currency. We would love to fly free from San Francisco to Santiago, Chile and explore that old town. But, the fact is we must enter Chile on its terms, with its laws and rulers. Therefore, Chile preserves its integrity and sovereignty.

The "idealists" are full of the false assumption that doesn't take into account the reality of the world. It is a nasty place. But, it believes in itself.

It is very apparent that America is poised between the utter ideal and a profound disillusionment because the U.S. is such a huge nation, with enormous responsibilities and self-interest. It's no use to protest against. It is this way and no other.

On the one hand is democratic conscience that doesn't want any harm to come to anyone. And on the other is the reality of actions on the world-scale that alerts the citizen that, perhaps, this world doesn't belong to him after all.

**Posted June 4, 2006**

It may very well be true that every generation, as it ages a bit and sees the world in terms of the harm it can do, believes it lives in the most dangerous period of time in history. We are unique because we can see everything that has gone before.

We've hardly seen a time, however, when 19 men can stop the world for a few days. I suppose one man did in 1963 and 3 men did in 1969 but this is different. It is different because it is apparent we are at the beginning of something and not the end. So we fear.

We fear and express the fear and get free of the fear in order to overcome the fear. I know when I was a young writer wanting to be a novelist I was stopped in my tracks by the nuclear Armageddon that appeared clearly probable. There were some simple variables at play: physical weapons that had been demonstrated to lay waste cities, physical delivery systems, software programs ready to execute the deed, a classic geopolitical confrontation between great powers who said, in effect, they couldn't live with the other one, a generation that had been dehumanized by the most ghastly war in history, in the middle of a hot war that could only be described as a mad machine rolling over all opinion and thought in the matter.

The pressure of fear often leads to interesting places.

This fear dissipated with time because of Gorbachev and the rapid decline of the Soviet Union. But it sprung up alive again on 9/11. And this time the scenario was a reverse image. Not huge nation-states with ponderous armies on the ground, gunfire, air and sea power but groups of angry men ready to sacrifice themselves while either carrying small nukes, or allowing themselves to get infected with biological weapons, or any number of hateful scenarios.

Once again we find ourselves in the lala land of "perfect logic creates perfect fear."

- Weapons of mass destruction becoming etherialized.

- Porous borders.
- Dedicated hatred among millions of people.
- Complicit emerging nations hiring terrorists to weaken America.
- Capital migrating from West to East because huge populations are producing intelligent, skilled, hungry workers as part of the globalization of talent.
- With decline in economy, decline in military
- The delivery of some coup d'grace event that cripples America.
- Newly emerging nation such as China making an alliance with Mexico, gaining a staging area and convincing Mexico that the southwest and California were unfairly taken from them.
- Invasion.
- The native population pushed past the Mississippi River toward the east coast.

While that scenario is purely a fear, this statement is not: America is facing its most challenging century.

Well, fear is an excellent expression of something we need to be alerted to. We must steer between fear, even panic, and stupid complacency.

There is a provocative essay in the [London Times Online by David Selborne](#) on why Islam could very well defeat the West. Some of his conclusions don't ring true but some of his critique of the West certainly do, especially when it comes to the woeful lack of leadership on the part of the Bush Administration. Off the bat there seems to be too much division within Islam itself to "defeat the West." Sunni's and Shiites are much more likely to try and defeat themselves as the West.

The hatred of the West on moral grounds amounts to the same thing as our self-hatred as a culture. The truth of the matter is that any square foot of latitude and longitude is going to see it's fair amount of sleaze, ghastly barbarisms, and quiet undermining of the purity of a religious creed. The old world must learn that freedom is a wonderful sort of dysfunction. It is not communal piety. It is not absolutes.

The one huge problem when confronting terrorism is the demonstration five years ago that a few dedicated people willing to give up their lives can wreak enormous havoc. That is rightfully, the first consideration. He's quite right in lambasting the Bush Administration attempt to impose anything on the Middle-East. Islam has, generally, a stereotypical view of the United States and West. That is to their disadvantage. We should learn as much of this region as we can; the peoples, the histories and so on. And there does seem to be a general cultural effort to do that

sort of thing.

No one can expect a country to adapt to these new war tactics right away. The West will eventually catch on about keeping the terrorists a limited threat but it won't be easy. The West is, once more, fighting an old world that can not tolerate freedom, differentiation, lack of self-discipline, and the rest of it. Nazism and Communism had the same basic complaint against the West.

The one conclusion to be met is this: The world is mutating in a sinister way. And it is unclear to me what role the United States is to play except that it must protect itself.

**Posted October 11, 2006**