



Beyond Complacency. The anti-anti-terrorists push for unilateral disarmament

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It's often said that the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 were a "wake-up call" - that they forced both the political class and the public to seriously (if belatedly) address a peril that for years had been minimized and marginalized.

But as Andrew McCarthy makes clear in his masterful memoir, "Willful Blindness," slumber persists; too many people still do not recognize that "in an age when weapons of mass destruction have become more accessible than ever before, militant Islam may actually pose an existential threat to the United States . At a minimum, it constitutes a formidable strategic threat."

Advocates of a strong defense have been opposed at every turn by leftists who blame America first ("chickens coming home to roost"),

paleo-conservatives who believe that Americans venturing abroad inevitably stir up hornets' nests, and libertarians who see threats to civil liberties behind every counterterrorist initiative.

The fact that there has not been a catastrophic attack on American soil for nearly seven years has emboldened this anti-anti-terrorist coalition. They are certain that the reason we have not been hit recently - as have London, Madrid, Bali, Baghdad, Kabul etc. -- has nothing to do with any actions taken by the Bush administration.

In fact, a new book, "The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals" by the New Yorker's Jane Mayer, claims that in the aftermath of 9/11 President Bush and

Vice President Cheney “panicked,” implementing policies that have fueled anti-American terrorism and violated both domestic and international laws.

According to this narrative, the administration created “an American gulag” in which hundreds of innocent Muslims have been subjected to abuse, humiliation and torture. Ms. Mayer goes so far as to charge that Bush and Cheney made “torture the official law of the land in all but name.”

The purpose of this cruelty – the use of “KGB methods” – was not to elicit life-saving information about terrorist schemes, Ms. Mayer asserts. It was to obtain “false confessions.” For what purpose is mysterious since another indictment is that Bush has acted as though the U.S. has the legal authority to detain unlawful combatants for the duration of hostilities. (It does not appear to have dawned on Ms. Mayer that every president in every past war has had the same authority.)

The liberal media are eating this up. On a public radio program last week I appeared with Ms. Mayer. The moderator was not much interested in whether her narrative was truthful. Instead, he wanted to know if I agreed that the clear implication of her book is that we need a “truth commission,” similar to that established in South Africa after Apartheid, to reveal whether the Bush administration committed “war crimes.”

Taking a short cut from indictment to conviction, Washington Post “White House Watch” columnist Dan Froomkin described “The Dark Side” as “another major book chronicling the descent into lawlessness.”

And a Post review by Boston University professor (and Barack Obama supporter) Andrew J. Bacevich asserts that Ms. Mayer has established once and for all that “in George W. Bush's Washington, the decisions that matter are made in secret by a handful of presidential appointees committed to the proposition that nothing should inhibit the exercise of executive power.”

One might ask: In William J. Clinton's Washington, was the decision to bomb the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan – suspected of manufacturing chemical weapons under a deal struck between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden – made at a town hall meeting?

More to the point: Does anyone seriously believe that a war against shadowy terrorist groups can be prosecuted with no more secrecy than that which surrounds health care policy-making? (And, come to think of it, wasn't Hillary Clinton's health care task force shrouded in secrecy?)

The New York Times' Frank Rich knows what went wrong: Bush and Cheney watched too much TV. “Possessed by the ticking-bomb scenarios of television's '24,' all they want to do,” he says, “is protect

America from further terrorist strikes.”

One might argue that the federal government’s primary obligation is to protect America . But that cuts no mustard with those who, as Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow Max Boot writes, insist “we pull out of Iraq, repeal the Patriot Act, roll back the executive branch’s surveillance authority, force the release of Guantanamo’s detainees or remand

them to the normal criminal-justice system, impose even greater restrictions on interrogations of terrorist suspects, and generally dissipate the sense of urgency that has animated American counterterrorism efforts since 9/11.”

What would follow such unilateral disarmament is not difficult to predict. Even then, what are the chances that any anti-anti-terrorists would then finally awaken?

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