

# *Letter from Washington / A Shallow State of War: Reflections From An Un-Serious Nation*

Lawrence J. Haas

In mid-April, Rep. Sue Myrick, a soft-spoken Republican from Charlotte, North Carolina, sought to shake her nation from its slumbers, announcing a 10-point ‘Wake Up America’ agenda ‘to alert, and educate, Americans to terrorist threats here at home posed by radical Islamic extremists.’ Save a few conservative newspapers and blogs, barely anyone noticed.

Welcome to America, 2008, a land of ignorance and frivolity, engaged abroad in wars of weapons and ideas but, at home, distracted by a slumping economy, an angry presidential race, and a silly pop culture. With some 200,000 of our men and women in Afghanistan and Iraq, we don’t agree on who or what we’re fighting or what’s at stake. So, not surprisingly, we don’t recognize the requirements of victory, both in those theatres and in the larger struggle.

You know the adage: ‘The first step to solving a problem is recognizing you have one.’ We’re not even at the recognition stage. Rather, we’re suffering from multiple levels of confusion about the enemy – radical Islam – and the best ways to defeat it. We have no bipartisan commitment to win the wars of today, to ensure that we have the economic vitality to support those of tomorrow, or to tackle the growing domestic infiltration by the forces of radical Islam. Bitterly divided over national security, over economics, and, it seems, over everything else, we are profoundly un-serious about the challenges that lie ahead.

## **Where’s the next George Kennan?**

We have not witnessed a comparable situation since the 1930s, when broad segments of America preached isolation from, or appeasement toward, the mounting dangers. After Pearl Harbor, we made the sacrifices necessary to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Then, after World War II, we organized foreign policy around the frightening new challenge of Soviet Communism, pursuing ‘containment’ on a bipartisan basis for four decades. After the U.S.S.R. disintegrated, we spent the 1990s confident that competition between ideologies was a thing of the past, that

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by converting more nations to free-market capitalism, we could ensure the advance of democracy to more places around the globe.

We were jolted from our complacency by 9/11, by what Robert Kagan calls the ‘return of history,’ by a world once more divided by competing ideologies. But, seven years later, we still don’t know what to make of radical Islam, what it represents, and where to rank it on our list of foreign policy worries. Our elites are split between those who (rightfully, in my view) see radical Islam – a.k.a. militant Islam, political Islam, or radical ‘Islamism’ – as the next great ‘ism’ to confront, after fascism, nazism, and communism, and those who see a rising China, a resurgent Russia, global warming, or pandemic disease as our greatest challenge.

We have no galvanizing explanation for radical Islam like George Kennan’s July 1947 ‘X’ article in *Foreign Affairs* that explained Soviet communism, no theory like ‘containment’ that Kennan articulated for it, no national security document around which to focus our activities like the NSC-68 of 1950. We lack a shared understanding of what makes radical Islam the overriding national security challenge of our time – the ideology that honours death over life and encourages the murder of infidels of any kind; the global radicalizing of Muslims through mosques, madrassas, textbooks, and the Internet; the organized effort to topple moderate Islamic regimes while creating beachheads of domestic infiltration in Europe and the United States; the frightening possibility that state sponsors of radicalism and terror will obtain nuclear weaponry; and, most maddeningly, the oil-based economy through which the Western world finances the very war that radical Islam is waging against it.

President Bush has propounded a ‘national security strategy’ that focuses on terrorism and the ideologies that drive it, advocates pre-emption to defuse the threat of terror-sponsoring states, and promotes the spread of freedom as a long-term antidote to radicalism and terror. Not long after he articulated it, however, Bush’s strategy was less the nation’s than his own, less a doctrine to rally around than one to score political points over.

Indeed, it was this lack of consensus, this absence of a modern-day George Kennan, that prompted a bipartisan group of former top national security officials, business leaders, and scholars – meeting as the Princeton Project on National Security – to work for three years ‘to develop a sustainable and effective national security strategy for the United States of America.’ Their doctrine, which they released in late 2006,

focuses not on one central threat but seven of them, from the Middle East, terror networks, and nuclear proliferation, to China and East Asia, global pandemics, energy, and the need for a 'protective infrastructure' for the United States and the world. That these experts sought to write 'a collective "X article"' tells you all you need to know about our national security disarray.

Even when we focus on radical Islam, we are woefully ignorant about it. Unlike communism, which we broadly understood was shaped by Marx and applied by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and others, we don't know from whence radical Islam came. With few exceptions among elites and the public, we don't recognize that terrorist attacks on the United States and the West over the last 30 years are the latest phase of a 1,400-year struggle by radical Islam to defeat the forces of modernity and return society to the time of Mohammed. We don't know the interconnected ideologies and roles of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wahhabis, and the Khomeinists in reviving this struggle in the 20th Century.

Blissfully ignorant of the beliefs, the outlook, the goals, and the methods of our adversaries, we are profoundly un-serious about the dangers that they represent. We are un-serious about the military commitment, the resources, and the measures required to defeat radical Islam both abroad and at home. Democrat, Republican, and independent – we are all un-serious. But our political affiliation determines just what it is we are un-serious about. To put it another way, Democrats are un-serious about some aspects of the challenge ahead while Republicans are un-serious about others.

### **Democratic un-seriousness**

Democrats are increasingly un-serious about how to promote and sustain U.S. leadership around the world. They are, for instance, re-thinking the benefits of free trade, bottling up bilateral agreements even with countries like Colombia, a key hemispheric ally that is promoting free markets and the rule of law while fighting terrorist groups backed by Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's anti-American strongman. They also are refusing to give our intelligence services the necessary electronic surveillance tools to monitor terrorists in today's world of global communications. But it is on military matters where Democrats are most un-serious.

To be fair, Democrats seem to think we must win in Afghanistan – 'the right war' – where we retaliated against the perpetrators of September 11th by uprooting al-

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Qaeda. On Iraq, however, they are focused on ending the war, not winning it. As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put it, '[Iraq is] not a war to be won but a problem to be solved.' From there, Democrats say, we must bring the troops home under set timetables to force political reconciliation among Sunni, Shia, and Kurds, even though our premature departure could open the floodgates to chaos and genocide. That we are fighting strains of the same disease – radical Islam – in Afghanistan and Iraq, that victory in each is crucial for the larger struggle, that defeat or retreat in either would be devastating to our cause, does not seem to trouble them.

That al-Qaeda has made Iraq the most important front in its war against the West and said so repeatedly (Ayman al-Zawahiri on April 18: 'Iraq today is now the most important arena in which our Muslim nation is waging the battle against the forces of the Crusader-Zionist campaign') matters not to Democrats who view Iraq as less a war than a political opportunity (Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid last year: 'We are going to pick up Senate seats as a result of this war'). Nor does it matter that Iran is testing our staying power in Iraq by arming its militias there, that al-Qaeda and Iran would benefit greatly by our leaving before achieving our goal (a stable Iraq that's a U.S. ally in the war on terror), that our allies in the region strongly oppose such a withdrawal, and that our friends and enemies the world over are watching whether we've got the staying power to confront radical Islam for as long as it takes.

Soon after the 2003 U.S. invasion, as quick victory turned to messy aftermath, Democrats adopted a narrative of defeat, proclaiming the Bush-led venture a repeat of the quagmire of Vietnam. They urged a change in strategy. Bush finally faced reality, ordered up that change, put General David Petraeus in charge, and sent a 'surge' of troops to turn things around. But, when the strategy worked, sending violence plummeting and putting al-Qaeda on the run, Democrats refused to recognize any change at all. Sticking with their narrative, they continued to call for a change in strategy even as one was clearly under way.

When individual Democrats began to acknowledge progress, they were shunned by their colleagues and pressured to change their story. When progress proved undeniable, Democrats shifted the narrative to argue that progress was meaningless if political reconciliation in Baghdad remained elusive. As Michael O'Hanlon, a defense expert at the left-leaning Brookings Institution, has written, 'Rarely in U.S. history has a political party diagnosed a major failure in the country's approach to a critical issue of the day, led a national referendum on the failing policy, forced a change in that policy that led to major substantive benefits for the nation – and

then categorically refused to take any credit whatsoever for doing so.’

Democrats do not recognize success because they debate Iraq through the rear-view mirror. Those who voted to authorize Bush to use force in Iraq – like Hillary Clinton – say they just wanted to give him more leverage for diplomacy. Those who voted no or who – like Barack Obama – spoke against the war while not yet serving in Congress, brag about their foresight or, in this year’s political vernacular, their ‘judgment.’ What almost no Democrat does is make the case for victory.

Though some Republicans grew tired of Iraq, most stuck with Bush and the surge and have happily noted the progress under Petraeus. That has set the political parties ever-more starkly against one another – on one side, the party of victory; on the other, the party of retreat. But the challenge of radical Islam will extend far beyond one theatre of battle, in fact far beyond military matters. Any comprehensive approach to the challenge must rest on an economic strategy that ensures American vitality. And it is on economics that we see that un-seriousness is no one-party phenomenon.

### **Republican un-seriousness**

Ever since humans began forming nations and nations began taking up arms, the outcome of war has been determined at least as much by economic strength as military doctrine. The Japanese sought a quick knock-out at Pearl Harbor because they knew America’s economic might would guarantee its victory in a long war. The Soviet Union collapsed because its dysfunctional economic system could no longer support the arms race. Today, the United States remains the world’s most powerful nation because it’s the world’s wealthiest. Were we to lose our economic pre-eminence, we would sacrifice our military pre-eminence.

With a strong economy, we can build the planes and tanks, supply the guns and ammunition, and feed and transport the troops without starving our people. During the Battle of the Bulge, a German general knew his side would lose when he saw American soldiers eating chocolate cake. As Walter Russell Mead writes in *God and Gold*, ‘With Germany desperate for every ounce of fuel, every bit of food, the Americans had enough food and enough shipping capacity to send birthday cakes across the ocean to ordinary soldiers.’

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At first blush, all still seems fine. The economy rolls on, notwithstanding an occasional downturn. But even the strongest economy cannot serve a free lunch. Even the strongest economy forces choices. Today, America faces a fiscal tsunami that will force choices and, if we decline to make them, threaten economic ruin. This year, the first 'baby boomers' will start to retire and become eligible for federal pension benefits under Social Security and federal health benefits under Medicare and Medicaid. That will cause two problems.

First, those programs are already absorbing growing shares of the federal budget – especially as health care costs rise far faster than inflation – and their shares will expand rapidly in the coming years. That will leave less room for everything else, including defense. Second, those programs will transform our relatively modest budget deficits of today into truly frightening deficits in the coming years – long-term, built-in deficits of unprecedented size. That will weaken our economy over time by shrinking the pool of capital available for investment, keeping interest rates higher than otherwise, and making us ever-more vulnerable to the predilections of foreign central banks and others who buy our federal securities.

That's where Republican un-seriousness comes in. If the first rule of doctoring is to 'do no harm,' today's Republicans are guilty of fiscal malpractice. As budget surpluses of the late 1990s, produced under a Democratic President, morphed into growing deficits due to the 2001 recession, Bush's defense build-up and war costs, and his 2001 tax cuts, the President and Congress enacted even more tax cuts – individual tax cuts in 2003, business tax cuts in 2002 and 2004, a hodge-podge of additional tax cuts since then, and a vow to make the huge tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, which are due to expire by 2010, all permanent. That is, as the deficit grew and the fiscal tsunami approached, they kept cutting taxes.

At stake, in the effort to make the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts permanent, is trillions of dollars in additional costs. But Republicans do not worry. Their policy is *tax cuts uber alles*. They cut taxes when the economy is strong to reward big and small businesses, entrepreneurs and workers. They cut taxes when the economy is weak to give it a boost. And they justify it all with a radical theory of mathematics: from Bush to their congressional leaders to more and more of their rank-and-file members, they insist that – notwithstanding... well... common sense – the lower the tax rates, the more revenue will flow to the federal Treasury. Free lunch-ism is now the reigning economic orthodoxy of the Republican Party.

Tax-cutting is such a Republican article of faith that presidential candidate John McCain – who calls radical Islam the ‘transcendent issue’ of our time, who opposed the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts as obscene in war-time (due to their cost and their disproportionate flow of benefits to the wealthy) and who understands sacrifice from his five years as a POW in Vietnam – now makes tax cut permanence the central plank in his economic platform. Even McCain, who has challenged party orthodoxy on a host of other issues over the years, came to recognize he could not win the Republican presidential nomination unless he fell in line on taxes.

In Washington, Republicans would tell you that they have a way to square the fiscal circle – cut spending. Don’t believe ‘em. In 2003, hoping to build their support among the elderly, Bush and a Republican Congress added drug coverage to Medicare without offsetting the costs, making Medicare’s financial burden even less sustainable. As they cut taxes repeatedly this decade, they made little effort to find compensating savings on the spending side. Notwithstanding their rhetoric, Republicans are as addicted to government spending as Democrats.

### **Bipartisan un-seriousness**

There you have it – Democratic un-seriousness on the military, Republican un-seriousness on the budget and economy. We should not be surprised, then, by our bipartisan un-seriousness on a host of related matters, each of which deserves a separate article.

‘The Capitalists,’ Lenin said, ‘will sell us the rope with which we will hang them.’ Rather than selling rope, we’re buying more and more oil from the very nations that fund terrorism, build mosques and madrassas that radicalize Muslims, and hire lobbyists to represent them before Congress. What’s lacking is a national commitment to create an alternative to the oil economy, one rooted in methanol or other sources, so Americans can stop funding both sides of our war with radical Islam and can start confronting the oil-rich states on the other side.

Also lacking is a national effort to expose the radical Islam that’s infecting key sectors of our society – our universities, where oil-sponsored endowed chairs and programs put radical Islam in the mainstream of higher education; in our prisons, where radical Islamic chaplains poison the minds of prisoners who will one day be free; and in our common culture, where trade groups such as the Council of American-Islamic Relations serve as apologists for terrorism and radical ideology.

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From war to the economy, energy to domestic infiltration, these are all... well... serious issues. All they lack is a nation to give them the seriousness they deserve.

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# *Global Labour Notes / There's a battle outside ragin': Unions take centre stage in the fight for democracy*

Eric Lee

For those of us who support the growth of democracy in the world, it almost goes without saying that we support workers' rights and trade unions. But sometimes that support is only perfunctory.

After all, when we think about dictatorships in the world today and the struggle for democracy, we usually think of political and spiritual leaders, writers, intellectuals and others before we think of the workers. Aung San Suu Kyi and the Dalai Lama have become household names. For some of the larger and better known human rights organisations, workers' rights have long been seen as a bit of a footnote – though there is some evidence that this is now changing.

While most of us will be vaguely familiar with key international human rights documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), most human rights campaigners will have difficulty naming the eight core conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which lay out what are universally recognised workers' rights – such as the right to form and join a trade union and to bargain collectively.

Everyone remembers the central role played by independent trade unions in bringing down Communist rule in Poland and triggering the collapse of the entire Soviet empire in the process. But my guess is that few are aware of the key role being played by trade unions today – unions which find themselves on the front lines of what amounts to a fight to the death with dictatorships. Those dictatorships are often far more severe in their repression than the Polish Stalinists ever were.

Take for example, Zimbabwe. As I write these words, most democrats and human rights supporters will be aware that Robert Mugabe's brutal dictatorial rule has faced its most serious challenge at the hands of a man who formerly led the country's trade union movement – Morgan Tsvangirai. But how many know that unions today came under severe pressure in the aftermath of the 2008 elections? In