



Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam After Iraq

By Michael Scheuer

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Michael Scheuer is the author of *Imperial Hubris*, which was a New York Times hardcover bestseller for fifteen weeks and stirred up attention in every national and local media outlet. He is a veteran CIA counterterrorism analyst who for many years headed the Osama bin Laden unit. In *Marching Toward Hell*, Scheuer offers a scathing and frightening look at how the Iraq war has contributed to the enemy's strength and fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape in a way that is harmful to U.S. interests and security concerns. Scheuer will examine the ways in which the war has widened the conflict by almost every measure, made America less secure, and left us all increasingly vulnerable to attack.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Scheuer, former CIA analyst and trenchant critic of U.S. terrorism policies (*Imperial Hubris*) develops his argument that America suffers from a collective insistence on sustaining Cold War paradigms in a fundamentally altered world. For all its culpable errors, the current administration is merely the present-day incorporation of willful historical ignorance, a paucity of common sense, and... a disastrous degree of intellectual hubris. These fundamental shortcomings are exacerbated by a pattern of making policy decisions on the basis of how a liberal-pacifist media and intelligentsia will react, rather than objectively considering the national interest. That interest, Scheuer argues, requires prioritizing the Islamic threat in security considerations and understanding that it does not manifest intractable, theologically based hostility to American values and lifestyles. The Islamic challenge instead reflects a series of concrete U.S. policy decisions, beginning in 1973, committing the U.S. to supporting an endless war to the death between Arabs and Israelis. An increasingly desperate effort to sustain a fundamental regional imbalance—and Scheuer does not spare the Clinton administration—has led to direct military involvement, culminating in the debacles of Iraq and Afghanistan. These defeats, Scheuer declares, are the inevitable result of seeking to change the Middle East's dynamics by exporting the unique American patterns of democracy and republicanism. Controversial in its details, Scheuer's analysis suffers fundamentally from Occidentalism. Interpreting Islamic behavior as a consequence of American actions keeps the U.S. at the center of events in precisely the Cold War model Scheuer excoriates. (*Feb. 12*)

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About the Author

Michael Scheuer is a twenty-plus-year CIA veteran. From 1996 to 1999, he

served as the Chief of the bin Laden unit (aka Alec Station), the Osama bin

Laden tracking unit at the Counterterrorism Center. He then worked as Special

Adviser to the Chief of the bin Laden unit from September 2001 to November 2004.

He resigned from the CIA in 2004. He is currently an Adjunct Professor of

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Introduction

[E]vents started by human folly link themselves in a sequence which no sagacity can foresee and no courage can break through.

Joseph Conrad, 1911

It is painful enough to discover with what unconcern they speak of war and threaten it. I have seen enough of it to make me look upon it as the sum of all evils.

Major General T. J. Jackson, 1862

In two previous books and numerous articles, I have tried to explain and defend my conclusion that U.S. political leaders from both parties and American citizens generally have misunderstood the motivation of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and their steadily increasing number of Islamist allies. My argument, simply stated, was and is that Islamist militants are attacking America because of what it does in the Islamic world and not because of the way America's people think, vote, behave, and believe or not believe in God. I readily acknowledge that many of the Islamists confronting us detest our society and lifestyle and would never duplicate them in any country they would govern. Clearly, there would be nothing akin to MTV, gender equality, or quadrennial presidential elections in an al-Qaeda-run Saudi Arabia.

But granting that reality, I argued that it was a profound and unnecessary mistake, an instance of what Conrad called "human folly," to believe that the Islamist militants' animosities for the accoutrements of our society were the main motivating and unifying factors behind their hatred and willingness to wage war against the United States. Such an error, moreover, would cause U.S. leaders and citizens to grossly underestimate the threat they faced from the Islamists, lead them to deploy insufficient military force, and stand pat on untenable foreign policies, thereby leading to America's defeat. It would be better, I argued, to face the unpleasant reality head on and recognize that the forces led and personified by Osama bin Laden are motivated and united by an ever-deepening hatred for the impact of U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world. Unqualified support for Israel, a half-century of protecting and nurturing Muslim police states, and a military presence in Muslim lands -- these were the tangible, physical manifestations of U.S. foreign policy that are perceived by most -- yes, definitively, most -- Muslims as a concerted and deliberate attempt to destroy Islam and its followers. This formulation was meant to alert Americans to what I saw as an existential threat to the United States that was in some ways greater than that which had been posed by the Soviet Union. It was more dangerous because it came from an opponent that was far less easy to define, one who, unlike the USSR, had virtues and a thoroughly human and egalitarian theology, and one that was all but impossible to contain and deter.

My arguments were not meant to be a condemnation of U.S. leaders, policymakers, and their foreign policy as mad, evil, or imperialistic. My goal was simply to suggest that our foreign policies toward the Muslim world had been in place for a very long time, some for more than thirty years, and had run out of gas; that they were not doing the only thing U.S. foreign policies must do: ensure the protection and promote the expansion of liberty and freedom at home, keep America as safe as possible from external attack, and serve as a model of responsible and humane self-government for those abroad who might choose to emulate it.

More often than not my writings were used by pundits as prime examples of raw America-hating, cowardly appeasement, anachronistic isolationism, and fierce anti-Semitism. Well, so be it. If putting forward a belief that holds U.S. national security interests to be a limited and narrowly defined set of life-and-death issues wins for me such ugly and meant-to-be debate-halting monikers so prized by the U.S. governing elites, I will listen, dismiss them, and press on.

In deciding to research and write a third book that falls into the category of the United States versus the forces led and inspired by Osama bin Laden, I became increasingly interested in and finally fixed on a single question: "Is the protection of U.S. interests and American citizens, and the maintenance of American

sovereignty, independence, and freedom of action, any longer the primary, overriding concern of the U.S. federal government?" The answer should obviously be an emphatic yes, at all times and on every issue. And yet the more I read, researched, and encountered the discrepancy between the words and deeds of U.S. leaders, and especially the vast gulf between their description of the world and the world as I perceived it, the more I became doubtful that the answer to the pivotal question above could be even a timid yes.

In the obsession with national security that has consumed Americans and their leaders since the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, we seem to have fallen into the belief not only that the world changed forever on that date but also that nothing before that date contributed to the events of 9/11 or those that have ensued. In part this is because, as I noted above, we have refused to frankly assess whether the cumulative impact of thirty-plus years of U.S. foreign policies in the Muslim world may have helped to motivate the Islamists who attacked on 9/11 in the name of defending their faith and brethren. In this regard, and to paraphrase the venerable Satchel Paige, our elites seem afraid to look over their shoulders because the truth might be gaining on them. Also contributing to this situation is the fact that most Americans have a difficult time imagining they are anything but good-hearted and benign, or that their impact on the world is anything but generous and uplifting. Cynically, our governing elites use this ingrained predisposition to condemn and defame those who suggest that U.S. policies helped to encourage our enemies on their path to 9/11 and beyond. Our elites, after all, have been the craftsmen, purveyors, and defenders of these policies for three-plus decades, and it is much less dicey in terms of unpleasant domestic political repercussions to savage those critical of their policies by dismissing them as blame-America-firsters.

Still, even accepting that our national self-esteem and our political leaders' political fortunes are most easily protected by maintaining the foreign-policy status quo, this did not seem a satisfactory excuse for what my research suggested was a deepening reluctance to make the protection of U.S. interests and citizens the federal government's top priority, and an almost blasé acceptance of war for purposes unconnected to America's national interests. And *reluctance* is not even the right word to use; it seems rather a combination of shame, embarrassment, and fear of employing American resources to protect Americans. The more I read and reflected on my own two-plus decades of service at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the more likely it seemed that the answer to the question, "Does protecting Americans come first?" is very plainly no. The organizing concept of the federal government is no longer, as the Founders intended, the protection and expansion of freedom, liberty, and the rule of law at home, with a foreign policy, backed when necessary by military force, designed to ensure the maintenance of that domestic environment. "The Founding Fathers," the brilliant historian Walter A. McDougall has reminded his fellow citizens, "flatly denied that the United States ought to be in the business of changing the world, lest it only change itself -- for the worse.... [T]hey saw foreign policy as an instrument for the preservation and expansion of American freedom and warned that crusades would belie our ideals, violate our true interests, and sully our freedom." Today, however, the federal government's organizing principle flows directly from the country's pop culture; namely, the federal government, under Republican or Democratic control, does what is easiest, most expedient, least risky, politically correct and opportune, and most sellable. In the present case, these actions are anchored in neither the Founders' intent nor any significant knowledge of American history or the history of the Muslim world.

In essence, U.S. independence and safety are now threatened by our elites consistently asking the wrong question about national-security policy. Instead of asking what could happen if we do not respond in a timely manner and eliminate a particular threat to the United States -- that is, what will the failure to act cost America in lives and treasure? -- U.S. governing elites ask what will happen if they do act to defend America. The answer to the first question is very substantive and specific. For example, if President Bill Clinton fails to kill Osama bin Laden in the late 1990s, and if President George W. Bush fails to kill Abu Musab al-Zarqawi before March, 2003, both will live to have the chance to execute the deadly actions against the United States they repeatedly promised. Thus, it seems to be only common sense to say that it is better to try to kill bin Laden and al-Zarqawi and fail than not to try at all. The answer to the second question

is usually another set of questions from U.S. political leaders and senior bureaucrats that stress the negative political costs that could accrue to U.S. leaders who authorize such actions when the actions subsequently fail to achieve their aim. Using the case of bin Laden, these questions include: "What will the world think of us if we attack and miss? Won't the Europeans view us as hip-shooters? If innocents get killed, won't we alienate Europeans, Muslims, or fill-in-the-blank others around the world?" Summing the answers to such questions usually yields paralysis or an action that is ineffective and that allows -- and sometimes encourages -- those behind the danger at hand to become more confident, bolder, and increasingly lethal.

I refer here to the bin Laden and al-Zarqawi cases because I am familiar with them on a direct, first-hand basis, but it is easy to see what inaction or ineffective action h...

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Judith Cole:

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Carolyn Ziolkowski:

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