

A War to Win

The first thing that must be said is this: The nation has reacted magnificently to the horrific events of September 11. True, there has been some of the usual hand-wringing, on editorial pages and in Congress. To listen to some commentators, you'd think the Bush administration was about to embark on a mad orgy of international bloodletting, spraying bombs in all directions without rhyme or reason, save the lust for vengeance. Retired general Charles G. Boyd, for example, expressed his concern that the desire to "strike out in revenge" could "put us on the same moral footing" as the men who killed several thousand Americans this past Tuesday. Some in Congress were reluctant this week to give President Bush full authority for the use of force, lest he abuse the privilege and do something unthinkable.

In fact, such fears are entirely misplaced. The danger that the United States will lose its soul in the coming fight against terrorism is virtually nonexistent. But there is another, far more real danger: that we will return to complacency, that with the passage of time, and perhaps after a few, bloody skirmishes in this new war, the nation and its political leaders will gradually lose interest.

This may seem inconceivable at the moment. Right now, Americans and their political leaders seem prepared for the difficult struggle ahead. The administration appears to be embarking on a long, intensive, and purposeful offensive against terrorism. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz emphasized this past week, the administration is planning "a campaign, not a single action." The campaign will consist of "removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, ending states who sponsor terrorism." That will mean diplomatic pressure, and military action, against states found to be supporting terrorism—and perhaps sooner rather than later.

All this is encouraging. Right now, the United States appears to be girding itself for a protracted, dangerous, costly but unavoidable conflict. But what about a month from now, when the networks have gone back to regular programming, the baseball playoff season begins, and the inevitable and appropriate partisanship returns? What about if some part of a military action goes wrong? What about a year from now? One of the great things about Americans is precisely how resilient we are. In time we will pick up the pieces and try to resume life as normal, and so we should. But the danger is that in returning to our nor-

mal lives, we may gradually forget this week's horrible lesson. Today Americans know we are at war. The question is, will we still remember why we must be at war—and why we must accept the price of war—tomorrow?

We raise this concern not because we believe America's present determination to make war on international terrorism must inevitably fade. The American people have in the past proven themselves capable of a sustained commitment. But the key to sustaining their commitment will be clear, steady, and vigorous political leadership, the kind provided by Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, by Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan during the difficult years of the Cold War, and by George Herbert Walker Bush during the Gulf War and, perhaps more important, during the long, difficult months leading up to the launching of Desert Storm. We trust George W. Bush will rise to the occasion. But he shouldn't have to do it alone. Members of Congress have a job to do, too. Whether they remain intently focused on the new war against terror will send a clear signal to the American people—not to mention America's bloody-minded enemies—of how serious we are about sustaining this war, and about paying the price for it.

The price will be substantial—not just in dollars, of course, but to start with, in dollars. If the administration intends seriously to pursue the strategy outlined this past week, we may soon find ourselves at war in one or more parts of the world. The possibility of engaging in some form of conflict in Afghanistan is now fairly high. Should evidence reveal some Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, or other state support for last week's attack, the president will be confronted with the choice of taking military action or backing down. And if he does decide to go to war in the Middle East, he will still have to preserve American interests and defend American allies in Asia. Remember the Two War Strategy the Pentagon just abandoned? Now it looks rather more realistic.

Given the serious shortfalls that are already plaguing our armed services, what this all adds up to is that we need to increase defense spending very substantially. Last week's \$40 billion (about half of which appears to be for defense) is a start—but only a start. Failure to boost the defense budget by the necessary amount—and to make the case for the additional tens of billions that will be needed—will unacceptably limit the president's military options in the months and years to come. It will be a sign

that we are not really serious about fighting this war.

There are other steps that should be taken immediately—some to prepare for the coming conflict, others to guard against any future attention-deficit syndrome. They require acting soon, while the national determination to respond is at its peak. And they require determined presidential and congressional leadership, not just at this moment of acute crisis but for the long term.

This brings us to a final point, about President Bush. He is not an inspirational leader, at least not yet. But contrary to what his political handlers seem to believe, this is not a fatal flaw. The nation is already inspired. The presi-

dent can lead by doing. What he needs to convey to the American people, he can convey by how he wields his command.

The American people know and respect the fact that the president has surrounded himself with impressive, confidence-inspiring individuals, men like Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and Don Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Armitage. Bush should unleash them and let them help in the important task of inspiring the American people over the coming months and years. His has now become a war presidency; what matters is to win the war.

—Robert Gagan and William Kristol

A Nation Mobilized

There was much talk in Washington last week of the need for the government to reassure the nation.

But it is not just reassurance the American public seek from its leaders. To talk to people on the street, to listen to friends and relatives across the nation is to hear something not heard in this country since Pearl Harbor. It sounds at times like the ancient pagan vengeance that would gladly slaughter its enemies and sow salt among their ruins. But that is, at last, only a weak and confused attempt to say something else—something we lack a vocabulary to express naturally these days. It has to do with honor, and it has to do with will. It is a national resolution to alter, redirect, and even surrender our lives to ensure that such evil should never again come against us.

Real war always has this effect. We have been called out of our trivial concerns. We have resigned our parts in the casual comedy of everyday existence. We live, for the first time since World War II, with a horizon once again. If only President Bush would issue the call, the recruiting offices of the armed services would be filled tomorrow. If only he would issue *some* call commensurate with our willingness, Americans would give freely—“The awful daring of a moment’s surrender” of ourselves to a purpose, as T.S. Eliot described it, “Which an age of prudence can never retract.”

No one imagines that the United States will do nothing. But a campaign merely of long-range attacks on terrorist camps and international sanctions—a campaign of missiles and lawyers—means the end of the America we love. Not only will it aggravate, as the truncated Gulf War aggravated, the evil it is meant to eliminate, but it will fritter away, perhaps forever, the potential of Americans to join in common purpose—the potential that is the definition of a nation.

There is a task to which President Bush should call us. It is the long, expensive, and arduous war to replace the government of each nation on earth that allows terrorists to live and operate within its borders.

The origin of the attacks on Washington and New York lies in the shadow world of men seemingly without countries. When members of the Irish Republican Army are discovered in Colombia advising a Communist revolutionary group after aiding Basque separatists trained in the camps of Islamic militants, we have mostly left behind a world of nation-states and intelligible geopolitics.

But we have not entirely left it behind, for this shadow world is finally parasitic on the real world of nations. Unwilling to attack their enemies directly, certain countries gain by allowing—and simultaneously denying responsibility for—independent forces striking from within their borders. It has been this way before. For two centuries, the Ottoman Empire let pirates sail from its North African ports to harass Europe’s Mediterranean cities. Elizabeth I used English and Dutch privateers in much the same way against the Spanish. And, in every case, the removal of the base—a change in the country from which these men without countries operate—was the only solution that could be attempted.

That solution, a war to topple and replace the governments that allow terrorism, is once again the only solution. It will prove long and difficult. American soldiers will lose their lives in the course of it, and American civilians will suffer hardships. But that, too, is what real war looks like. And in the days since the first plane smashed into the World Trade Center the American people have shown their willingness to fight it—if only our leaders will lead us there.

—J. Bottum, for the Editors