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Whither the War on Terror

If the Turtle Could Run  
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**THEY SAID IT**

One thing is abundantly evident from the preceding chapters: Revolutionary anarchism, the movement founded by Proudhon and Bakunin in the nineteenth century, is a failure...Not once in any country did it come close to fulfilling its avowed aim of destroying the existing social order and building paradise on the ruins.

--By *Bullet, Bomb and Dagger*, Richard Suskind,  
The Macmillan Company, 1971.

**WHITHER THE "WAR ON TERROR?"**

Last September, in an article entitled "A Dose Of Optimism Concerning The War On Terror," I maintained that the United States is making progress in protecting itself against the horrors of terrorism. I acknowledged that no one can say with any degree of certainty that this is true. But I argued that the fact that no such attack has occurred in the three years since that fateful day strongly indicates that the Bush administration must be doing something right and that it follows from this that the odds against another such attack happening have improved considerably on Bush's watch and are likely to continue to improve.

This week I would like to return to the theme of forecasting the unknowable by using the time-honored method of studying the past in hopes of catching a glimpse of the future, with a specific focus on the fate of the scourge we call Islamic terrorism.

I will begin this process with an examination of a movement called revolutionary anarchism, which was founded in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by Pierre Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin. I won't dwell on these men and their activities because I discussed both at some length in an article entitled "The Anarchists Are Coming," which I wrote for Lehman Brothers and which I suspect few people read at the time because it was dated September 10, 2001. A year or so ago, I sent it out as a "From the Archives" offering. Clients can find it at [www.thepoliticalforum.com](http://www.thepoliticalforum.com).

Suffice it to say that it was not Marx's ideas but those of the French intellectual Proudhon that dominated the early days of the European working class movement. Among these was the revolutionary concept that "property is theft." And it was the almost superhuman courage and energy of the giant, black-bearded Russian, Bakunin, that gave the nascent left-wing movement life and kept it going.

The anarchist movement is an historic artifact today. But it was a big deal worldwide for over a half century, spanning the period from its founding until shortly after the end of World War I. In America, during the final two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the opening two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>, it had much the same impact as Islamic terrorism is having today.

While not as earth shaking to the American public as 9/11 was, the events at Haymarket Square in Chicago on May 4, 1886 were nevertheless momentous, and mark the beginning of several decades of genuine fear and loathing directed at the anarchist movement, which in turn prompted some startling changes in the public attitude toward certain long-honored constitutional rights and shifted quite dramatically the traditional balance between freedom and security. This period was also marked by what can only be described as some dubious court decisions, highly questionable police actions, and some problematic changes in the laws.

Briefly stated, on that rainy Chicago day, a crowd was gathered to listen to a group of well-known anarchists denounce the killing of a man and the wounding of several others in a clash the day before between police and strikers outside the McCormick Harvester plant. The speakers included August Spies, editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Worker's Journal), a German-language anarchist daily; Albert Parsons, editor of *Alarm*, another anarchist periodical; and Samuel Fielden, an executive, along with Spies and Parsons, of an anarchist organization called the International Working People's Association.

According to a favorite little book of mine entitled *By Bullet, Bomb and Dagger*, written by Richard Suskind and published by Macmillan in 1971, while Fielden was preaching that workers "have nothing more to do with the law except to lay hands on it and throttle it until it makes its last kick," about 200 policemen appeared on the scene, at which time "from somewhere on the edge of the crowd, a round, sputtering object hurtled through the air, and landed near the first rank of police, and went off with a flash and a roar." One officer was killed instantly, six others were fatally

wounded, and about sixty received injuries. The police reacted by firing their revolvers point-blank into the fleeing crowd, killing several people and wounding dozens more.

Now, as I said earlier, the national reaction to this event was not as severe as that following 9/11. But it was similar, as can be seen from Suskind's description.

Chicago was immediately gripped by mass hysteria. The bombing was the culmination of weeks of rising tension, during which workers throughout the country had agitated, sometimes violently, for an eight-hour day to replace the ten- to twelve-hour day then usual. There had been numerous clashes with the police, not only in Chicago but in Pittsburgh, New York, Philadelphia, and other industrial centers, and now it was widely believed that the "Reds" – the term under which all radicals, whether socialists, communists, Marxists, or anarchists, were lumped – had launched their long-threatened revolution and that other acts of violence would soon follow.

Newspaper accounts of the incident only fanned the hysteria. It was reported that three bombs had been thrown, that the workers and the police had fought a pitched battle lasting half an hour, that the square had been filled with dead and dying men. The press, with hardly an exception, blamed the workers. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, called them "the offscourings of Europe...vipers, ungrateful hyenas, serpents," and said that "unless Anarchism and Communism are quickly and thoroughly crushed, the people of Chicago must expect an era of anarchy and the loss of their property, if not their lives."

Normally law-abiding and responsible citizens were heard to say that the "Reds should be hanged first and tried afterward." Prosperous businessmen formed armed

bands of vigilantes and prepared for house-to-house combat. Mayor Carter T. Harrison had special squads of men ready to break up all meetings and processions as soon as they began. The First Infantry Regiment was alerted. And the police, hunting frantically for the man who had thrown the bomb, filled the jails with more than two hundred known radicals, most of whom had not even attended the meeting.

Suskind notes that during the subsequent trial the state had a difficult time finding 12 unbiased jurors, and even then most of those chosen admitted that they were prejudiced against anarchism, communism, and socialism. Later, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that this did not disqualify them, for it was “merely a prejudice against crime.” The prosecutor in the case advised the jury that they should “convict these men, make an example of them, hang them, and you save our institutions.”

Although the bomber himself was never found, Spies, Parsons, and two other self-described anarchists were hanged for the crime. A fifth condemned man had committed suicide earlier. Fielden went to jail and was pardoned six years later by Illinois Governor John Altgeld, who reviewed the case and asserted that not only had Fielden been “railroaded” but that all of the other men, including those who were hanged, had suffered the same injustice.

Space does not permit a compilation of subsequent anarchist-related events, but they included many years of violent labor strife, terrorist bombings, and assassinations, including the spectacular, attempted assassination of industrialist Henry Clay Frick by the anarchist Alexander Berkman (Emma Goldman’s lover) on July 23, 1892; the assassination of President McKinley on September 26, 1901 by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz; and the sensational trial and subsequent executions of the anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for a robbery and murder that took place April 15, 1920.

It is worth noting here that the McKinley death prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to declare in a message to Congress on December 3, 1901 that “Anarchism is a crime against the whole human race and all mankind should band against the Anarchist.” He then urged Congress to pass legislation excluding “absolutely all persons who are known to be believers in anarchistic principles or members of anarchistic societies.” At his behest, Congress passed the Immigration Act in 1903, forbidding entry to individuals “teaching disbelief in or opposition to all organized government.” Suskind’s observation on this event is as follows.

And so it came about, in one of history’s more exquisite ironies, that Leon Czolgosz, a self-confessed anarchist and radical, helped abrogate one of America’s traditional freedoms and brought into being a law which delighted the most isolationist and reactionary element in the nation.

Now I began my look into the future of Islamic terrorism with this brief review of anarchism in the United States because I think there are some parallels between the two movements, which may provide some clues as to what may lie ahead for militant Islam.

- Like the Islamists today, the anarchists represented a relatively small, radical, murderous faction of a vastly larger, more powerful, and faster growing worldwide movement that commanded considerably more legitimacy, had more elaborate goals than simply killing people with bombs, and an arguably better plan for achieving its goals.

In the early days of the anarchist violence, one can assume that Marxists, communists, socialists, and assorted other leftist groups welcomed the presence of a violent, high profile faction on their side of the fight. Later however, in the United States and across Europe, leftist groups began to realize that the anarchists were giving them all a bad name and were interfering with their plans to become a legitimate force in local labor movements and eventually in high level politics. Here’s Suskind’s observation on the effect of the McKinley assassination.

As had happened in France, Spain, and Italy after their heads of state were assassinated, so it happened in the United States.

Propaganda of the deed was discredited (even Berkman, still in prison, wrote Emma Goldman that it served no useful purpose – a letter which caused her to burst into tears and take to her bed with a nervous breakdown) and many leading anarchists turned their attention to the newly arrived syndicalist movement by helping to form, in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), often referred to as the Wobblies.

- Like the Islamists today, the anarchists were basically cultists, inspired by a host of charismatic leaders, both alive and dead, whose writings and speeches spurred them on to murderous actions on behalf of a “cause” that had no chance of ultimate success but offered instead the award of martyrdom.

One can't help thinking of Osama bin Laden when reading of one of the most important and most murderous figures in the anarchist's hagiography, one Prince Peter Kropotkin, who was imprisoned in Russia in 1876 for anarchist activities, escaped, ended up in a French prison, and finally made his way to England, where he spent the next thirty years writing anarchist books and pamphlets inciting working men around the world to violence against the established order. George Bernard Shaw once called Kropotkin “amiable to the point of saintliness.” Here's how Suskind describes him.

But for all his personal gentleness and nobility of soul, Kropotkin was one of the most dangerous men who ever lived, for he had an apocalyptic vision of the revolution that was rivaled only by that of Bakunin himself. “To hurl mankind out of its ruts into new roads,” he wrote, “revolution becomes a peremptory necessity.” The spirit of revolt in the masses must be awakened by “propaganda of the deed” - a phrase which had first been used by Italian anarchists a few years earlier but which

gained worldwide currency when it was used by Kropotkin, the acknowledged spokesman for the anarchist cause. There must be propaganda by “speech and written word, by dagger, gun, and dynamite.” There are “men of courage willing . . . to act, pure characters who prefer prison, exile and death to a life that contradicts their principles, bold natures who know that in order to win they must dare.”

Kropotkin's exhortations to violence were heard not only by anarchist intellectuals, who repeated and embellished them, but by those in the depths of the industrial slums. Men of the working class, hungry, beaten down, filled with frustrated rage and hatred for the bosses, tormented beyond endurance, with little or no knowledge of, or interest in, theoretical anarchism, heard Kropotkin's words and rose up to kill and be killed.

Now it was all well and good to have a “great man” like Kropotkin on your side, and a gallery of noble founders at your back, but as time went on, the old cultic figures began to lose their appeal to the younger set, and no new, comparable ones surfaced, largely because conditions were no longer as favorable for creating such star-like characters as they were during the heady, tumultuous days of the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which were rife with revolution and social change.

Furthermore, while Kropotkin was widely admired, he was clearly not interested, despite his exhortations to others, in endangering his easy life in London and his celebrity status by, for example, taking a shot at Queen Victoria. And slowly but surely potential new recruits began to find less dangerous ways to advance the cause, which were more attractive than prison, exile, or death.

- And finally, like the Islamists today, anarchists were ultimately doomed by the fact that their movement was deeply flawed ideologically.

Marx had predicted that violent revolution would eventually bring down capitalism. But by the turn of the century it had become clear to anyone paying attention that Eduard Bernstein was correct when he stated that this was simply not going to happen, that the best way to introduce socialism into an industrialized nation was through trade union activity and parliamentary politics.

Thus, it slowly became clear to a great many anarchists and anarchists-in-waiting that dying for a cause wasn't as productive or as much fun as living for one, especially in light of the fact that the "dying" thing didn't seem to be working and might have been a bad idea from the start.

So the answer to the question as to how Islamic terrorism will eventually die, if one is to use anarchism as a model, is comprised of the following.

The larger, more powerful, and better-funded movement to spread Islam throughout the world will eventually push the terrorists off the stage. It is important to understand here that this will not happen, as some observers have suggested, because Islamic leaders find terrorism to be morally objectionable, but because they find it detrimental to the greater goal of advancing the cause of Islam.

Anyone who doubts this possibility need only interview University of South Florida Professor Sami al-Arian, who is in jail on charges of being the leader of Islamic Jihad's U.S. operations, and Abdul Rahman al-Amoudi, a well-known founder of the American Muslim Council, who is also in jail, having been caught up in a broad, post-9/11 investigation of Muslim charities that support terrorism abroad.

Although I don't know this, I am quite sure that both would argue that the long-term goal of creating a politically powerful Islamic base in the United States from which to aid the cause of militant Islam globally and eventually to gain overwhelming power in the U.S. government was severely damaged by the September 11 attacks.

Prior to that incident, militant Islam was raising vast amounts of money in the United States and making significant inroads into both the cultural and political power structure of the nation. Leaders of the movement had become accustomed to White House invitations, and had no trouble getting known terrorists in an out of the country to give fiery speeches to conferences at which phrases like "Kill the Jews" and "Kill Steve Emerson" inflamed Muslim audiences coast to coast.

At that time, the opposition consisted of a few private citizens like Emerson and a few hardliners in the CIA and the FBI, none of whom was very successful in promoting his belief that militant Islam was a growing threat to the nation, even in the aftermath of the first World Trade Center bombing. Today, as a direct result of 9/11 there is a cabinet level agency dedicated to Homeland Security, dozens of "experts" on terrorism talking daily of "the threat," and a nation that is frightened and angry at Muslims of all stripes and anxious to do anything possible to see that the threat of terrorism is diminished, even if the trade-off between liberty and security must once again be shifted dramatically.

Concomitantly, over a period time, the romance of belonging to a murderous cult will lose some of its appeal as nations around the world make it more difficult for terrorists to be successful, and as the heroes of prior times become historic figures rather than real life mentors.

And lastly, the ideology that underlies militant Islam will grow stale as it becomes apparent that there is no connection between aggressive acts of terrorism and progressive gains in the millenarian goal of creating a global utopia that is modeled on a fantasy vision of a medieval Islamic society that never existed and never will.

Before closing, I should point out that anarchism was defeated because it was strenuously opposed both in the United States in Europe. So the usefulness of this model for providing an insight into the future of Islamic terrorism depends on a similar battle being

waged against this scourge. And secondly, readers should keep in mind when considering that the past may be prologue that the fight against anarchism lasted many decades, which, I suspect, will be case with militant Islam.

## IF THE TURTLE COULD RUN LIKE THE RABBIT. (PART II)

Since the election five weeks ago, nearly every pundit, analyst, columnist, and blogger on the political left has offered the leaders of the Democratic party advice as to how the party might become more competitive in future elections and thus halt its slide into irrelevance.

Most of this counsel has, in my considered opinion, been truly dreadful. Some has been less so. And some has been quite good. But none had been what I would call excellent until last Monday, when Democrats were offered both a plan of action, as well as an illustration of how a similar plan had been implemented successfully in other, similar circumstances, that was so compelling that even critics on the right had to concede that it was enormously insightful and potentially important.

Those of you who are familiar with the political journals of the center-left will hardly be surprised that this sage advice came from Peter Beinart, Editor of *The New Republic* and author of that magazine's TRB column (also published in *The New York Post*). Those who are not familiar with these journals and are thus unfamiliar with Beinart should know that it is no mere coincidence that he and *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg are good friends and frequent "sparring partners" on CNN. Beinart is, for all intents and purposes, the left's Goldberg: (relatively) young, well versed in the intellectual history and argumentation of his ideology, an engaging writer, and modestly influential, particularly among younger partisans.

Now, if the leaders and members of the Democratic Party were to follow the advice given them by Beinart in the cover story of the latest edition of his magazine,

they would almost certainly do better in 2006 and 2008 than they did in 2002 and 2004. And they might even reestablish themselves as the nation's majority party. Fortunately for those of us on the right, that's not going to happen, not simply because Democratic partisans will not *want* to follow Beinart's counsel, but because they are, in fact, incapable of doing so. Why? Because, while his plan of action is simple, sensible, and based on historical precedent, it would, I believe, lead any Democrat who follows it, including the author himself, to a far, far different destination than he envisions.

Beinart begins his piece with the story of a handful of liberals who gathered at the Willard Hotel here in Washington in early 1947 to "save American liberalism" by acknowledging the dire threat posed both to their ideology and to the West in general by the expansion of Soviet Communism. According to Beinart, at that time, the Union for Democratic Action (later Americans for Democratic Action) was the only explicitly anti-Communist liberal organization in the nation, and it sought to expand its appeal and to raise the alarm among other liberals to the menace of Communism, a mission which Beinart argues it largely accomplished. To wit:

[O]ver the next two years, in bitter political combat across the institutions of American liberalism, anti-communism gained strength. With the ADA's help, Truman crushed [Former Vice President Henry] Wallace's third-party challenge en route to reelection. The formerly leftist Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) expelled its communist affiliates and THE NEW REPUBLIC broke with Wallace, its former editor. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) denounced communism, as did the NAACP. By 1949, three years after Winston Churchill warned that an "iron curtain" had descended across Europe, [Historian Arthur] Schlesinger could write in *The Vital Center*: "Mid-twentieth century liberalism, I believe, has thus been fundamentally reshaped . . . by the exposure of the Soviet

Union, and by the deepening of our knowledge of man. The consequence of this historical re-education has been an unconditional rejection of totalitarianism.”

This course plotted by the ADA and much of the rest of the liberal establishment in the late 1940s is, in Beinart’s estimation, the model that the Democratic Party should use to rehabilitate itself today. As in the immediate postwar period, the free world today faces a ruthless, totalitarian enemy whose ultimate goal is the destruction of freedom and free societies. So, Beinart argues, the course of the Democratic Party should be the same today as it was then, namely to get on the right side of the issue and become anti-terrorist hawks, equal in fervor to any hawks on the right.

Beinart argues that, in fact, the leadership of the Democratic Party is actually pretty uniformly opposed to totalitarianism and willing to use the military force of the nation to rid the world of the menace and thereby to make the world safe for liberalism again. The problem with the party, he suggests, is rank-and-file Democrats, who are solidly anti-war, and the activist groups (e.g. MoveOn.org), which are not merely anti-war, but are downright pro-terrorist, if not in word then certainly in deed. He puts it thusly:

When liberals talk about America’s new era, the discussion is largely negative--against the Iraq war, against restrictions on civil liberties, against America’s worsening reputation in the world. In sharp contrast to the first years of the cold war, post-September 11 liberalism has produced leaders and institutions--most notably Michael Moore and MoveOn--that do not put the struggle against America’s new totalitarian foe at the center of their hopes for a better world. As a result, the Democratic Party boasts a fairly hawkish foreign policy establishment and a cadre of politicians and strategists eager to look tough. But, below this small elite sits a Wallacite grassroots that views America’s new struggle as a distraction, if not a mirage.

According to Peter Beinart, then, the key to making the Democratic Party not only more competitive, but a greater force for good in the world is to turn it into a “fighting party,” willing to defend not only the United States, but the values for which the nation stands; to convince the rank-and-file Democrats to follow the examples given in 1947 by the Americans for Democratic Action and currently by many in the leadership of the party and to stand up to the terrorists.

As I wrote above, I believe that this is excellent advice. I also believe that if the Democrats were to follow it, they would not only do themselves a world of good, but would do the nation and the President currently waging the war on terror considerable good as well. But as Mark put it three weeks ago in his piece on “moral values” and the election: “If the turtle could run like a rabbit, he wouldn’t be a turtle. He’d be a rabbit.”

You see, the problem with Beinart’s advice to Democrats is that it presumes something about Democrats that is simply not true and, moreover, almost certainly never can be true. Democrats cannot be the “fighting party” that stands up to the terrorists because fighting – at least on behalf of the national interest – is by and large incompatible with principles the party has come to espouse.

That is not to say that individual Democrats can’t hate terrorism and want with all their hearts to unleash the full force of the American military to destroy the Islamofascists. Certainly there are many, many Democrats who feel precisely the way Beinart does about the threat from the Islamists and the responsibility of enlightened nations to wage war against them. In reality, however, Democrats such as these almost certainly voted for George W. Bush. Like Ed Koch, Dennis Miller, Zell Miller, Ron Silver, and at least a dozen other high-profile erstwhile liberals, I suspect the vast majority of uncompromising anti-terror Democrats voted as Republicans.

In other words, these Democrats are not Democrats who can affect the position of the party. By Beinart's own admission:

When *The New York Times* asked delegates to this summer's Democratic and Republican conventions which issues were most important, only 2 percent of Democrats mentioned terrorism, compared with 15 percent of Republicans. One percent of Democrats mentioned defense, compared with 15 percent of Republicans. And 1 percent of Democrats mentioned homeland security, compared with 8 percent of Republicans.

Beinart is no doubt correct that the liberals at the ADA provided an invaluable service to the nation in fighting Soviet Communism in the early days of the Cold War, in ridding the labor movement of Soviet influence and standing up for liberty and justice. Some of the names he mentions – Reinhold Niebuhr, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, Walter Reuther, and Eleanor Roosevelt – are folks who certainly helped form the foundation of a Democratic anti-totalitarian foreign policy.

But some of the names Beinart doesn't mention – Whittaker Chambers, James Burnham, Ronald Reagan – are folks who would eventually become the truly great, important, and successful anti-Communists. And they continued their migration from left to right and carried their war against Communism beyond the Democratic Party. They too were erstwhile liberals (or even Communists) who voted and behaved as and eventually became Republicans.

And it was thus for successive generations of anti-Communists. In the '60s, Irving Kristol led the intellectual migration from left to right, thereby establishing the "neocon" influence on GOP politics. In the '70s, Norman Podhoretz followed suit, bringing new life to the neoconservative movement. Last week, in his commentary on his friend Beinart's piece, Jonah Goldberg also noted the shift from left to right in the '70s, writing:

In the 1970s, the sainted Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson led a coalition of intellectuals and activists who wanted to beat back the blame-America-first pacifists taking control of the Democratic Party. They failed, and most of them are now "neocon" Republicans, like Jeane Kirkpatrick and Richard Perle.

Even the great labor bosses who fought against communism eventually supported Republicans in this endeavor. Note that just months before he destroyed it, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) endorsed Ronald Reagan, and even the Teamsters, under the infamous Jackie Presser, endorsed Reagan twice and Bush the elder in 1988. As Goldberg wrote last week, "[T]he remaining 1940s-style union Democrats Beinart wishes to reincarnate left [the Democrats] too. We called them Reagan Democrats." Today, we just call them "Republicans" and thank them for handing the new "solid South" to the perpetually anti-totalitarian GOP.

Thus, it seems to me that the major problem with Beinart's historical example and therefore with the precedent he hopes it provides is that it was ultimately short-lived, lasting less than two decades, though the Cold War raged on for more than two decades after that. Yes, at the time of the snapshot he provides in 1947, the Democratic Party was aggressively pro-American and aggressively anti-totalitarian. But for the party, that was the exception rather than the rule.

Beinart argues, for example, that the anti-totalitarian spirit demonstrated by the Democratic leaders in 1947 was demonstrably alive and well in the Democratic leaders of the 1990s and is therefore alive and well yet today, waiting to be harnessed. He writes:

The Democratic foreign policy establishment that counseled the leading presidential candidates during the primaries – and coalesced behind Kerry after he won the nomination – was the product of a decade-long evolution. Bill Clinton had come into office with little passion for

foreign policy, except as it affected the U.S. economy. But, over time, his administration grew more concerned with international affairs and more hawkish. In August 1995, Clinton finally sent NATO warplanes into action in Bosnia. And, four years later, the United States, again working through NATO, launched a humanitarian war in Kosovo, preventing another ethnic cleansing and setting the stage for a democratic revolution in Belgrade. It was an air war, to be sure, and it put few American lives at risk. But it was a war nonetheless, initiated without U.N. backing by a Democratic president in response to internal events in a sovereign country.

For top Kerry foreign policy advisers, such as Richard Holbrooke and Joseph Biden, Bosnia and Kosovo seemed like models for a new post-Vietnam liberalism that embraced U.S. power.

I think this is a misreading of history. What Beinart either doesn't understand or doesn't say is that while these "wars" were, indeed, anti-totalitarian (waged as they were against Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic), they were not pro-American. In any but the vaguest sense of "nation building" or global policing, these wars had precious little to do with American national interest. American involvement was, in part, a sop to our weak European allies and, in part, an exercise in self-indulgent humanitarianism.

It is possible that the leaders of the left would actually defend American interests by aggressively waging war on the enemies of those interests, but to offer Bosnia and Kosovo as definitive proof that they would do so, is suspect at best, particularly in light of nearly four decades of other evidence that suggests otherwise. Since Vietnam, the left has been embarrassed by American power when it is used to advance American interests, and the examples of the Balkan wars managed by the Democratic establishment in the 1990s hardly provide convincing evidence that this has changed.

In order to make the kind of commitment to fight terrorism on behalf of America and American values, liberals today would have to believe two things: first, that America and American values are worth defending; and second, that if necessary that defense must entail "fighting." Though Beinart and a small minority of others on the left undoubtedly believe both, such believers are, as far as I can tell, few in number.

I have used nearly every issue of this newsletter since the election to make the case that many liberals simply do not accept the first condition noted above, i.e., that American values are worth defending. So I won't waste a lot of time rehashing that thought today. The following couple of paragraphs from the November 15 issue give the gist of the argument.

Though a great many Americans disagreed with the Vietnam War and a great many of those did so for honorable reasons, the predominant voices on the left opposed the war because they believed it was immoral; that America's tactics and even its aims exposed the United States as a bully and oppressor. From Noam Chomsky to Seymour Hersh to Jane Fonda to John Kerry, the leading lights of the left insisted that the Americans were the war criminals, the butchers, the impenitent murderers. Even today, after thirty-plus years of brutal Communist autocracy in Vietnam; after more than a million boat people; after more than two million slaughtered by the ideologically sympathetic Khmer Rouge in neighboring Cambodia, the left cannot bring itself even to entertain the thought that perhaps the Americans were the good guys and the indigenous Communists were not.

And this storyline has changed precious little in the three-and-a-half decades since. Throughout the Cold War, on the battlefields of Grenada, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the left always presumed the United States to be the aggressor and the

oppressor. When Kuwait was invaded and occupied by a hostile army, the leftist elites, again supported by John Kerry, refused to condone American efforts to liberate our tiny, defenseless ally. Even in the current wars – both in Iraq and against the broader threat from radical Islam – wars in which one would presume that even the left would be convinced of America’s uprightness, their instinctive reaction has been to “blame America first” and to presume the worst about American aims.

I should note as well that a great many liberals also fail on the second condition, believing that anything at all is worth “fighting” for. Like their fellow leftists/liberals in Europe, many American Democrats believe the simple-minded hippy platitude that “war never solved anything” and that the best way to resolve disagreements is through negotiation and diplomacy. Beinart laments the fact that while John Kerry’s attacks on President Bush’s foreign policy were “trenchant,” “the only alternative principle he clearly articulated was multilateralism . . .” And in the modern liberal lexicon, “multilateralism” is synonymous with the U.N., which is synonymous with diplomacy, which, of course, is synonymous with doing everything possible to avoid a fight.

In fairness to Beinart, he argues that regardless of how Kerry and other party leaders might actually have felt about advocating increased reliance on multinational institutions, they really had no choice. Had Kerry done any differently, Beinart suggests; if, for example, he had “urged a national mobilization for safety and freedom,” then “he wouldn’t have been the Democratic nominee.”

But what Beinart doesn’t explain is how anyone knows that these leaders didn’t actually believe this

multilateral cant themselves, particularly since it is perfectly in line with the public pronouncements of many throughout their public careers. More to the point, Beinart also doesn’t explain how the allegedly more hawkish leaders would impose their beliefs on the party’s base, given the base’s near uniformity of opinion and the leaders’ apparent universal fear at contradicting that opinion.

And that, I guess, is the heart of the problem with Peter Beinart’s recommendations to the Democratic Party. He advocates things – aggressive foreign policy backed by real military force – that are largely incompatible with the composition and temperament of the party. Again, as Mark put it three weeks ago, “if the turtle could run like a rabbit, he wouldn’t be a turtle. He’d be a rabbit.” And if Democrats believed in aggressively using American military force to root out totalitarianism throughout the world, they wouldn’t be Democrats. They’d be Republicans. Just ask any of the neocons or erstwhile Southern Democrats in whose footsteps Beinart walks, exhorting his fellow Democrats to get serious about foreign policy and the defense of freedom.

Beinart’s advice, as I wrote at the top of this piece, is very good. It will also be almost entirely ignored by those for whose eyes it was written. Maybe someday Beinart will get the hint and will follow the scores of disillusioned erstwhile liberals even further down the path to the right. Certainly with the late, great Michael Kelly serving as an example, Beinart wouldn’t be the first editor of *The New Republic* and author of TRB to follow that course.

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