



"Hastiness and superficiality are the psychic disease of the twentieth century"

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

07-Sep-07

Lost Perspective

We are just days away from the sixth anniversary of the attacks on Manhattan's World Trade Center Towers by Muslim extremists. As everyone recalls, the dual 737 crashes into the buildings caused massive damage, and within just a few hours, both towers and a few of the surrounding buildings lay in rubble on the plaza below. Nearly 3,000 lives were lost that day, in the related disasters in New York City, Washington, and rural Pennsylvania. The finger of blame quickly pointed at Islamic terrorists, specifically Osama bin Laden and his organization, al Qaeda.

The U.S. response was swift. President George W. Bush and his administration concocted the War on Terror, and American Army and Marine troops, supported by the Air Force and Navy, made quick work of the Taliban in Afghanistan, forcing what has become known as al Qaeda Prime deep into the rugged mountain fastnesses of the northern border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Along with his chief lieutenants, bin Laden went to ground, and though al Qaeda has released several tapes of his pep talks to his jihadist followers, we have seen little more than a few digital images of him since.

In the spring of 2003, U.S. troops, along with those of its staunchest allies, invaded Iraq, and in a wink, Saddam Hussein, his sons, and the Baathist regime were on the run. Saddam's statue fell in Baghdad, and Saddam himself was soon pulled from a rat hole to stand trial and ultimately to die justly for his many atrocities. The Iraqis, when they were not killing each other, tried and only partially succeeded in forming a new government.

And there coalition forces have remained, mostly Americans but complemented by small contingents from other nations. It soon became known as an occupying force, accused of imperialism, torture, sexual assault, murder, and a host of other crimes and misdemeanors. The press began to use such ridiculous terms as "bogged down" and "quagmire" (can an army be bogged down or mired in a desert?), "insurgency" (can international terrorists be called "insurgents"?), and "exit strategy" (like the exit strategies from the Philippines, Cuba, Korea, Germany, and Japan, where American troops are still stationed after similar invasions?). In the eyes of many Americans—and frankly, many around [the world](#), too—"mission accomplished" morphed into "more Middle East mess."

Almost before the dust had settled in Manhattan, the ugly head of political self-interest took over the country's perception of the War on Terror. Hawks debated doves. Patriots battled with globalists. Pragmatists fought idealists. Spenders disputed budgeters. The religious sparred with the secular. Of course, Republicans wrangled with Democrats, conservatives with liberals, and strict constructionists with revisionists. Everyone took sides for or against the government's actions. By the time the 2006 mid-term elections rolled around, the War on Terror and the Iraq War in particular had become the determining issue in many contested races.

Now we are in the midst of the Iraq "surge," an infusion of thousands of extra troops to quell hotspots and to give the fledgling Iraqi government a chance to get its footing. A successful surge would also set the stage for a drawdown of troops to more acceptable levels. Every pundit's breath is bated, it seems, awaiting the report on the surge by Commanding General David Patraeus on Monday, September 10, 2007. Will he give the surge a "thumbs up" and recommend troop withdrawals? More people are asking, "Will his report help the Commander-in-Chief or his detractors?"

In many ways, however, we have lost our perspective since those moments of clarity in the weeks following September 11, 2001. America, whether it wants it or not, is at war. Its enemies are clearly radical Muslims who have chosen to use terrorism against Western interests in the United States and around the world. These jihadists, most of whom claim some sort of connection to al Qaeda, are willing to sacrifice their lives in the cause of their religious fanaticism, to conquer the world for Islam. They will take any means necessary—including using nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, should they get their hands on some and figure out how to deliver them—to crush the Crusaders, as they call Westerners, and enforce the worship of Allah upon all humanity.

Under these terms, the squabbling over the War on Terror and the Iraq War seem trite and childish. In addition, these arguments often ignore what has been accomplished. Al Qaeda Prime, trapped like a mouse in a corner, can only screech out feeble threats and warnings from its wilderness cave. Mainland America has not suffered another terrorist incident since the World Trade Center disaster, while several plots have been foiled. Citizens may scream about lax border security, lax port security, and pointless, politically correct airport screening, but the fact remains that Americans have not suffered terrorism at home since September 2001. Finally, in terms of the Axis of Evil, Saddam Hussein and his bloodthirsty regime no longer exist; Iran, despite all its bluster, has turned down the wick on its nuclear program and is "negotiating" with the U.S.; and North Korea, though still ruled by the certifiable Kim Jong Il, is for now meekly knuckling under the demands made of it in the Six-Party Talks.

Sure, not all is peaches and cream in America. This nation has its problems, problems that it desperately needs to face and fix. Nevertheless, these concerns should not make us so jaundiced that we cannot appreciate the few glimpses of silver lining that appear every now and again. These little bits of hope for ultimate success should encourage and motivate Americans to press on with the fight in the can-do spirit our forefathers showed as they carved out a nation for themselves on this continent.

And for Christians, let it be a lesson that we can apply in our own spiritual battles. Though things seem to be spiraling downward around us, we can use our little victories as motivation to put more effort into overcoming and growing, turning seeming defeat into victory ([I Corinthians 15:57-58](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Elements of Motivation \(Part Three\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In the familiar triumvirate (faith, hope, and love), faith serves as the foundation, love serves as the goal, and hope serves as the great motivator or energizer. Unique among the religions, Christianity, with its expectation of a Messiah and the promise of a resurrection, looks expectantly to the future, embracing hope. Motivated by their calling into the new covenant, Christians anticipating a magnificent future glorification are energized by this God-inspired hope to overcome the impossible and rejoice in temporary trials.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Why Worship God?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Worship is ingrained into human beings; it is almost as if we must worship something. So, why should we worship the God of the Bible rather than some other person or thing? What benefits does worship of the true God of Creation bring to those who worship Him? John Ritenbaugh provides three fundamental reasons why worship of the God of heaven and earth is necessary and beneficial to those who seek Him.

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