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UNDERNEWS

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WORD

The man who can face vilification and disgrace, who can stand up against the popular current, even against his friends and his country when he knows he is right, who can defy those in authority over him, who can take punishment and prison and remain steadfast -- that is a man of courage. The fellow whom you taunt as a "slacker" because he refuses to turn murderer -- he needs courage. But do you need much courage just to obey orders, to do as you are told and to fall in line with thousands of others to the tune of general approval and the 'Star Spangled Banner?' --*Alexander Berkman*

OPERATION CYA

CAREFULLY CONCEALED in the theatrics of war, the bombast of propaganda, and the lights and sirens of new security measures is the simple fact that America has suffered an unprecedented defeat at the hands of those armed with the most meager of weapons. It was a defeat not only deeply humiliating in its character but totally unnecessary in its origins.

These facts are not erased by the moral failures of our foe. We have not been the victims of the unpredictable, spontaneous combustion of evil, but rather of a long series of missteps and misjudgments of which the angry, bitter, and deranged simply took advantage.

Neither can these facts be mitigated by a continued loyalty to the very leadership that so endangered the country by its disastrous policies, inadequate preparation, and taunting arrogance. What happened on September 11 did not have to happen and until we face that truth, and deal with its implications, we will leave in fear and danger.

Those in power -- in government, media, corporations, and academia -- have made terrible mistakes. If they had true capacity for shame, most of the membership of the Council on Foreign Relations would go into monasteries to repent, the editorial boards of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* would resign en masse, and most members of Congress would have the good grace not to run again.

These after all, are the people who have assured us that if we were merely loyal enough to Israel, if we merely spent enough on the military, and merely gave up enough rights in the name of security, everything would be fine. These are the people who said it was okay to build the largest buildings in the world without observing the city fire code.

These are not new mistakes. Our unbalanced Middle East policy has a half century provenance, backed by the best and the brightest that the American establishment could produce. They were dead wrong. To this day, for example, the elite rhetoric on the subject presumes an irreversible dichotomy in the Middle East, as though it is impossible to be simultaneously as fair and decent to Arabs as it is to Israelis.

And it's far from just a matter of intellectual error. For decades a sane military policy has been subverted by a voraciously greedy defense industry with its Vichy enclaves in the

Pentagon where tens of billions of dollars are misspent, misdirected, or just plain missing. For decades, criminal or corrupt combinations have infested our politics -- including Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Arkansas Mafia -- badly distorting direction, destroying integrity, and damaging programs, including those designed to protect the citizen in times of emergency. For decades a corporate coup against democracy has been underway subverting both our domestic and foreign policies. Throughout this period a culture of impunity has arisen among our leaders that permits them to function outside the constraints of our constitution, ideals, or traditions. And throughout this period, the major media have preferred to share in the power rather than to speak the truth.

America, under this tawdry, corrupt, intellectually vacuous, and morally decadent leadership, became an extraordinarily easy mark. Easy to hate, easy to target, and easy to attack.

Blaming bin Laden for taking advantage of this does not add one iota to either our sanity or our safety. Neither does applauding those whose arrogance, ignorance and carelessness led us to this disaster. They should not be cheered but accused, called to account, and judged severely. Only when we start to understand how we got in this mess will we start to find the way out.