

## Nationalism and Patriotism

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As the Bush Administration, led by Vice-President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, prepares to lead the United States to war against Iraq, citizens should proclaim their patriotism. Notice that I use the word patriotism rather than nationalism.

Through our nation's history one can find two opposing views of the country. In the United States one finds a secular tradition embodied in the Constitution with its checks and balances and commitment to fundamental civil liberties. In this tradition secular rationalism is the foundation of the state. In the "United States" citizens understand that the key to democracy is to be found in defense of political liberty, that is, the amount of unorthodoxy tolerated in society. Citizens defending the secular constitutional tradition are true patriots. Retired General David M. Shoup, U.S. Marine Corps, stated it well:

"The courage of one's convictions and the willingness to speak the truth as one sees it for the good of the country is what patriotism really means- far more than flags, bands and the national anthem."

The second view of U.S. history is found in the image of "America." In "America" citizens rely on a misinterpretation of the nation's Judeo-Christian tradition to

create an evangelistic civic culture. This view emphasizes the notion of American exceptionalism, that is, the idea of America as a redeemer nation, a people charged with a divine mission in the world. While the United States is a secular constitutional republic, America is the organic mythic moral land. Defenders of the United States are patriots, while defenders of America are nationalists. The latter follow a "my nation right or wrong" philosophy. The emphasis is on conforming to willingly limit political liberty in order to "save" democracy. Nationalists believe that citizens of the United States are God's chosen people. Political demagoguery of nationalists attempts to capitalize on the emotionalism found in "America." This is an essential part of building support for war.

What the United States needs today is more patriotic citizens. This public voice would not say war is never justified, but would demand that a war be fought for a just cause and a just peace. Patriots would ask tough questions and demand truthful answers. Patriots would remember that in the Vietnam War President Johnson mislead citizens in the Gulf of Tonkin incident and subsequent Congressional Resolution; President Nixon mislead citizens regarding the



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bombing campaign of Cambodia and Laos; President Reagan mislead citizens in the Iran-Contra scandal; and, President Bush 1 mislead citizens by not exposing the fact that the Kuwaiti girl who testified before Congress that Iraqi soldiers had entered a Kuwaiti hospital and slaughtered innocent babies was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador whose government had paid a U.S. public relations firm \$10 million to build support for the Gulf War. A war can never be just if truth is the first victim.

Patriots today would question the timing and urgency of the Administration's war campaign. With one seat determining which political party controls the U.S. Senate and a gain of six seats changing party control of the House of Representatives, Republican strategists understand that polls show Democrats winning on domestic issues, Republicans on the war on terrorism and campaign to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The strategy has paralyzed Democratic party leadership. Simply put, it is easier to campaign as a nationalist than as a patriot.

Patriotic citizens would demand a debate over the most fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy since George Kennan defined the containment strategy to deter Soviet aggression. The Bush II Administration has moved from a policy of deterrence, to one of permanent dominance. U.S. policy now justifies pre-emptive strikes against any leader, nation, group defined as a threat. The "you are either for us or against us in the war on terrorism" has led the U.S. to befriend dictators and authoritarian

rulers in Central, South, East Asia, and Africa.

America is seeking to establish a major naval base in Sri Lanka, not for the war on terrorism, but to "contain" India; the Administration hopes to convince the Philippine government to allow America to re-establish a major naval base to prevent a future Chinese navy from controlling East Asian shipping lanes; America wants a major facility in Kenya to enable it to militarily stabilize nations where large oil fields are being discovered; and America already has taken over former Soviet bases in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Georgia that can be used to stabilize oil fields and pipelines as well as contain Russia and China. Nationalists look at the world and see only enemies. Patriots work to turn enemies into adversaries. All nation states will not be friends, but adversaries resolve conflict through international organizations and law.

Patriots would question an open-ended war on terrorism. America has a longstanding war on poverty, war on drugs and war on cancer. As several patriots have pointed out, America has not and will not win metaphor wars. A narrowly defined war against al-Qaeda would be more pragmatic than a broadly defined war on terrorism.

At this critical period of U.S. history the voice of patriotic citizens must be loud and clear. The United States must triumph over America. Citizens must understand that if it is patriotic to die for one's country, it stands to reason it is equally patriotic to mobilize to prevent your country from dying.