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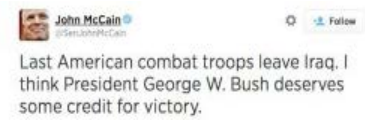
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What Americans Get That the Foreign Policy Elite Doesn't

Posted: 05/30/2014 4:55 pm EDT | Updated: 06/01/2014 8:59 pm EDT

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Over the last dozen years, American foreign policy has, in its most dynamic aspects, been an abject, and highly destructive, failure. But our self-perpetuating foreign policy establishment seems substantially incapable of fully appreciating the extent of the disaster.

Two misguided wars of aggression and occupation have been waged by the United States in the Middle East, in which trillions of dollars have been squandered and well over 100,000 people have been killed, including more than twice as many Americans as perished on 9/11.

There has also been a third war -- the spillover war in Pakistan -- that the United States has avidly promoted. Even though Pakistan receives \$2 to \$3 billion in U.S. aid a year, large majorities of Pakistanis (74 percent in the most recent tally) have come to view the United States as an enemy. As negative achievements go, that foreign policy development is a strong gold medal contender.

Going after Osama bin Laden's tiny band of squirrely fanatics scarcely required the waging of three lengthy wars, two of them of enervating occupation.

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The closest to success was the intervention in Libya. And Americans have now been advised to leave that country because it has become too dangerous for its liberators.

But, much of the foreign policy establishment seems to be unmoved by debacle. Thus, foreign policy columnist David Ignatius voices dismay in the Washington Post that only 46 percent of Americans currently consider it "very desirable" for the United States to "exert strong leadership in world affairs." He also seems concerned that a majority now regard the American ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan to have "mostly failed."

And in a long article in the current New Republic, Robert Kagan bemoans the fact that Americans have "grown weary of exercising power." Still, he acknowledges that their worries that intervention in Syria could lead to a military confrontation are "not entirely wrong" and graciously suggests that that they "can be forgiven" for feeling "tempted" to stop "carrying the world on their shoulders."

In his speech at West Point on Wednesday, President Barack Obama is perhaps a bit more subdued, but he still manages to tout "American exceptionalism" and use the phrase "American leadership" eight times while recycling the fatuous (and embarrassing) proclamation that the United States is "the one indispensable nation." Foreigners don't quite see it that way. In the same poll, in which 46 percent of Americans consider it "very desirable" for the United States to exert strong leadership, only 11 percent of Europeans do.

Missing from the establishment perspective is any sense that the American people have it right. Ignatius seems to be unable to bring himself to suggest that America's "strong leadership in world affairs" is the problem, instead of the solution. He acknowledges in passing that unspecified "mistakes" may have been made even as Kagan rather patronizingly informs us that "there is no perfect ending to any war." But this scarcely begins to embrace the scope of the debacle.

Barack Obama did oppose the Iraq War before it began but, as far as I can see, he has appointed to notable foreign policy office no one who clearly and publicly, in article, interview, or speech, opposed the disastrous war in Iraq before it started. With that perfect record of error, these are the people who will now be called upon to exert the "strong leadership in world affairs" our foreign policy pundits think is required.

Some members of the establishment say they supported the war only because they were convinced by other members that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Had he actually had WMD, they continue to say to this day, their support would have been justified.

This is even more damning than their initial enthusiasm. They now know how the American war in Iraq came out -- with the consequent violent deaths (and counting) of as many or more people than died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. Yet, even now they consider that to be an acceptable price to pay to keep Saddam's pathetic and fully containable and deterrable regime in line.

Spinning onward, Ignatius, like others, worries that the American people may be on the "slippery slope to isolation," noting aptly that "disconnecting from the global grid isn't really an option." But as he has also pointed out, there is little problem here: Fully two-thirds of Americans continue to favor greater U.S. involvement in the global economy.

The American people don't want to be "disconnected." They are simply fully able to contain their enthusiasm for being drawn into costly foreign disasters by a foreign



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policy establishment determined to look like it is exerting "strong leadership in world affairs" while remaining blissfully incapable of frankly examining the full scope of the disasters it has already perpetrated.


In his speech, Obama arrestingly quotes Dwight Eisenhower's 1947 conclusion that "war is mankind's most tragic and stupid folly." But Obama then goes on to contend that the question we face "is not whether America will lead but how we will lead." Perhaps the American people "can be forgiven," in Kagan's formulation, for worrying about the results.


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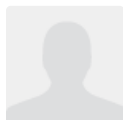
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