

announced their withdrawal from Afghanistan back in 1989, the CIA station chief in Pakistan sent Washington a two-word cable: "We won." By September 2001, events were calling that verdict into question.

So at the behest of President George W. Bush, the Carter Doctrine once again underwent a subtle transformation. No longer did the waters of the Persian Gulf define its scope. U.S. ambitions after 9/11 widened to encompass the Greater Middle East, a newly invented geographic expression that included the very place the Soviet empire had run aground. As the wheel of history turned, Afghanistan once again found itself positioned to determine the fate of empires.

As if responding to some cosmic imperative, the best minds in Washington proceeded to devise policies incorporating all the worst features of the Soviet policies that had hurtled the Soviet Union toward self-destruction. The Bush administration committed U.S. troops to what quickly became a costly, open-ended war, beginning in Afghanistan, then shifting to Iraq, then reverting in the Obama era back to Afghanistan. Like the Politburo of olden days, our political elites remain oblivious to the possibility that the real threats to the American empire might be internal: an economy in shambles and basic institutions wallowing in dysfunction. The conviction that "victory" in Afghanistan will make things right grips Washington with the same intensity that once gripped Moscow—and with as little justification.

Spooked by a nonexistent Soviet threat to Persian Gulf oil back in 1980, the United States committed itself to a course that in the years since has metastasized into a gargantuan enterprise that vaguely aims at remaking the entire Greater Middle East. In a supreme irony,

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It is not a good time to be working in intelligence. CIA lawyers have advised that many officers should avoid traveling through Europe as pending court cases in Italy, Spain, and Germany could mean they are detained at airports and prosecuted for war crimes. Back at home, the Agency is bracing for a purge that could make the Frank Church hearings of 1973 look like a walk in the park. Some officers involved in "enhanced interrogations" have now decided to stay in government rather than retire to protect themselves against lawsuits, as government employees cannot be sued. There is a consensus that the Obama administration and the Pelosi Congress will use the Agency as a punching bag to keep the memory of Bush administration malfeasance fresh. The recent transfer of control over naming chiefs of station to the office of the director of national intelligence is being seen as a major blow, stripping the Agency of its *raison d'être*. A bizarre column, "What the CIA Hid From Congress," by Congresswoman Jane Harman, which appeared in the *LA Times* on July 25, is regarded as a harbinger of things to come. The article claims that the CIA concealed aspects of the so-called "Terrorist Surveillance Program." Harman, who blames the intelligence community for outing her connections to an Israeli spy, knows that the program was run by the National Security Agency, not the CIA, but her opinion piece leaves no doubt that a rogue CIA has been running around lying to everyone in sight. She describes how crafty Agency briefers misled her and other gullible representatives over the legal status of programs. If she had not been deceived, apparently she would have done the right thing and demanded an end to the illegal activity.



Metrics run the war in Afghanistan. The State Department has teams in every province in Afghanistan that is safe to travel in, all wildly compiling data to demonstrate what is happening and why. But the mass of numbers may have little relationship to what is taking place on the ground. Metrics cannot, for example, easily determine how much of the countryside is under Taliban control after dark. Such reports can predict that victory is just around the corner even when it is not. And while metrics appeal to audiences used to PowerPoint presentations, the intelligence community is seeing something different. A picture is emerging of creeping Taliban control, including inside the major cities, combined with growing popular hostility toward eight years of American occupation. Analysts note that little is known about the situation in neighboring Pakistan, a safe haven and recruiting ground for insurgents. Gen. Stanley McChrystal's clear, hold, and build strategy is only viable if the clearing is based on good intelligence to root out insurgents and does not involve killing the rest of the population. Analysts know that such intelligence does not exist, and they believe that it probably cannot be developed.

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Every Man a God-King

The danger of popular sovereignty

By Daniel McCarthy

THE LIBERAL BLOGOSPHERE had a ready explanation when Scott Roeder, a Christian of Old Testament convictions, murdered Kansas abortionist George Tiller. Roeder was what Andrew Sullivan calls a “Christianist,” someone who believes “that religion dictates politics and that politics should dictate the laws for everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike.” The term echoes the description of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda as “Islamist,” though Sullivan allows that “only a tiny few” Christian or Muslim extremists are violent.

In the West as in the Middle East, the story goes, fanatical believers in medieval moral codes want to impose their views on others, either by force of law or terror. But the trouble with this account is that Roeder’s actions cannot be reconciled with traditional Christianity—and what’s more, those Islamists may be less religiously motivated than most Americans believe.

One man who should know is Michael Scheuer, former chief of the CIA’s bin Laden unit. In *Marching Toward Hell*, he highlights al-Qaeda’s stated motives, which have more to do with Israel, U.S. foreign policy, and the domestic politics of Arab countries than with Mohammad and the Koran. Scheuer also reveals a surprisingly modern side to al-Qaeda: the group draws much of its strength from “the desire of Muslims to attain what Jefferson called the ‘inalienable rights’ that the Founders believed to be hard-wired into human beings simply because they are human beings.” Bin Laden, a would-be tyrant in the eyes of

the West, “is urging Muslims to liberate themselves from tyranny in order to attain life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in terms that are compatible with their Islamic faith.”

Shocking though it may seem, Islamists are not opposed to rights or popular rule, but their understanding of those terms is very different from ours. Then again, maybe they aren’t so different: Scott Roeder also killed in the name of rights—the right to life. But religion is only a secondary dimension in rights-driven terror. The primary one is political: the belief that the state must uphold the values of the people (rightly understood), and should it fail to do so, ordinary men may take action. What underpins this belief is not a creed but an ideology—republicanism. Its roots lie not in the Middle Ages or Middle East, but in modern Europe.

Political theorists have long recognized the dangers inherent in republicanism’s near cousin, democracy. James Burnham likened democracy’s potential for abuse to the doctrine of the Divine Right of kings—at an extreme, “the law [becomes] the expression of, or rather identical to, the popular will. There is no independent law, human or divine; or, if there is, there is no source other than popular will that can proclaim, interpret and judge it.” Whatever the people desire becomes licit; whatever they dislike becomes criminal.

Yet the evil that Burnham described is not limited to democracy. It afflicts every kind of popular government, where political right is understood as emanating from the bottom up rather

than the top down. In a republic—literally *res publica*, the public’s affair—the government’s business (legislating, judging, and enforcing law) is the people’s business, and the people’s business (the passions, interests, and values of individuals) always threatens to become the government’s. The Divine Right of the public thus goes farther than the Divine Right of kings. An absolute monarch might say, “*V’État, c’est moi*,” but he could never pretend, as popular government does, to embody all of society.

Over the past 400 years, the idea that government rests on the consent of the governed has come to dominate Western thinking—and indeed thinking all over the world—to such an extent that it seems less a proposition than a natural fact. Yet there is nothing natural about it. Indeed, even after four centuries, popular government remains a revolutionary idea that often drives its adherents to assume for themselves the prerogatives of the state. *Vox populi, vox dei*, the assertion that the voice of the people is the voice of God, has led to terror as well as representative government.

Ideologies can have real-world consequences even when they distort reality. Popular sovereignty and the consent of the governed can hardly be taken as literally true—thousands, let alone millions, of human beings cannot jointly exercise power, nor is it realistic to think such multitudes can long consent to exactly the same thing. In practice it doesn’t matter: “the people” is a concept more than a reality, and in various permutations on republican theory even the