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## **Polarization Needed** **by Sheldon Richman**

When Sen. Joseph Lieberman lost his Connecticut Democratic primary to an anti-war candidate, he used his concession speech to decry the politics of polarization. This was hypocritical because the war hawks, Lieberman included, have gone far in suggesting that criticism of the war policy is tantamount to assisting terrorists.

But even if no hypocrisy were involved, the abhorrence of polarization would be absurd. The Bush administration, with Lieberman's vigorous support, occupies Iraq and has facilitated Israel's assault on Lebanon. If that doesn't call for a politics of polarization, what would?

This is hardly the time for mild disagreement. On the contrary, anyone who sees U.S. policy for what it is must speak out vigorously and clearly. War hawks always try to inhibit dissent by portraying their opponents as unpatriotic or squeamish. Often the tactic works, forcing war critics to water down their positions so that they barely qualify as opposition. Criticism is prefaced and qualified with "support for the troops," endorsement of war aims, and paeans to the good intentions of policymakers. The only "criticism" that survives is disagreement about tactics and the lack of an exit strategy. This puts the critics right where the hawks want them.

We can't afford such weak dissent today. The Bush administration is perpetrating horrors in the Middle East, and not to say so is to make oneself complicit. Iraq is engulfed in a civil war. People may quibble over definitions, but the level of violence in Baghdad and other parts of the country have all the signs of a civil war. Iraqis and Americans die every day. The country is a mess, thanks to "conservatives" who think they can construct a society from blueprints drawn up in Washington. Even if one is not convinced that Iraq is in civil war, is it really more comforting to think that the United States is merely trying to prevent one? This is a distinction without a difference.

As we've seen, all the U.S.-inspired bloodshed in Iraq has done nothing to discourage terrorism. Quite the contrary. The occupation of Iraq is a recruiting program and training ground for those who wish to wreak vengeance on America. The Bush administration has betrayed the

American people by endangering them. Yet it insists it is keeping them safe. This truly adds insult to injury.

Meanwhile, the administration's Iraq policy has strengthened Iran, which is now presented as the new grave threat to American security. Iraq used to be a counterweight to Iran, but no more because Iran's Shi'ite allies run Iraq. Perhaps Americans do not know that the United States gave the Iranians a brutal dictator in 1953, but the Iranians haven't forgotten.

As if it had not created enough danger, the administration then made itself a party to Israel's unconscionable attack on the Lebanese and the very foundation of their fragile society. (Hezbollah's clash with Israeli soldiers cannot justify what Israel did.) The administration undoubtedly signaled its approval of Israel's intentions and then sealed that approval with an expedited shipment of precision bombs, all the while stalling the ceasefire that would have saved many innocent lives.

Are we to believe that the young witnesses to that atrocity won't grow up seeking revenge against Israelis and Americans? Is this President Bush's idea of how to keep the American people safe? And if that revenge is visited on innocents, will American politicians again explain that they hate us because we are free?

If so, most Americans will believe it because they do not let themselves grasp the nature and implications of the U.S. government's imperial policies. That is why we need a polarizing politics. Opponents of war and occupation must clearly point out the evil of current policies so that Americans will be confronted — in gory detail — with what “their” government does to others and to our own. Anything less is acquiescence.

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