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Casual Talk of War **by Sheldon Richman**

The opponents of the Bush wars and the accompanying expansion of government power have been disappointed countless times before. Just the other day the Democrats in Congress acquiesced in the Bush administration's heavy-handed bid for the power to conduct warrantless eavesdropping on American citizens and residents in the name of fighting terrorism.

We've come to expect Democratic cave-ins by now, but I confess I was disheartened to hear the presidential aspirant Sen. Barack Obama say he would invade Pakistan if he knew Osama bin Laden was there and President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan did nothing. Although Obama opposed the invasion of Iraq from the start, he evidently missed a key argument against that folly, for it would apply to the invasion of Pakistan too, namely: the U.S. government cannot throw its military might around the Muslim world without making things far worse than they are. Obama might respond that he simply wants to get justice for the 9/11 attacks, but all that means is that he has no clue why the attacks occurred. As his Republican counterpart Ron Paul has pointed out, the attacks, unjustified as they were, climaxed 50 years of U.S. interference in the affairs of Muslim nations. More interference would hardly improve matters. Rather, it would simply set the stage for more terrorism against Americans. Not only that, it would kill many innocents. Adding Pakistanis to the death roll would hardly be a way to stop terrorists. On the contrary, it would be a new recruitment program for al-Qaeda.

My disappointment in Obama was hardly getting started when Sen. Hillary Clinton deflected attention to herself by knocking Obama for ruling out the use of nuclear weapons in the hunt for bin Laden. If I was disappointed in Obama, I was disgusted by Clinton. I suppose it's considered a sign of political maturity to take nothing "off the table," but the threat to use nuclear weapons is not merely a threat to commit mass murder. It is a signal that nothing is beyond the pale. The kind of people who fly airplanes into buildings won't miss that signal.

We so blithely talk about war in this country. The possible invasion of Pakistan — and let's not forget Iran — is discussed as though it were a Boy Scout project. We never were very good at remembering that in war innocents die. "These things happen in war" is not a defense. Murder is

murder. Let's bear in mind that American society is not in danger of destruction. No one is going to invade us. What could possibly justify threatening masses of innocent lives?

Most critics of the Bush wars fault the occupation of Iraq for diverting the "war on terror" from bin Laden and al-Qaeda. But those critics are more like George W. Bush than they think — because if the point is to prevent another 9/11, there's something more important than finding bin Laden. What's more important is a complete reassessment of U.S. foreign policy and a rediscovery of the wisdom of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who warned us against an activist foreign policy. They and their philosophical descendants such as William Graham Sumner understood that America cannot keep government limited at home while expanding it abroad. And bombing people and supporting dictators are not effective ways to win admirers. This is not rocket science. Anyone should be able to see the truth of Randolph Bourne's adage, "War is the health of the state."

Sixty-two years ago last week another president, Harry Truman, dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese cities, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children. Americans may not see the significance of this, but you can bet that the rest of the world does. Let's stop the bullying and get our own house in order.

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