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Why the Peaceful Majority of Muslims Are Not Irrelevant **by Sheldon Richman**

A few years ago, FrontPageMag.com columnist Paul Marek wrote an article titled "[Why the Peaceful Majority Is Irrelevant](#)" His thesis was that even if the majority of Muslims abhor violence, it doesn't matter because "the fanatics rule Islam at this moment in history.... The hard quantifiable fact is, that the 'peaceful majority' is the 'silent majority' and it is cowed and extraneous."

For Marek, the upshot is this: "We must pay attention to the only group that counts: the fanatics who threaten our way of life."

He's wrong. No, he's worse than wrong, because his position could be used to justify mass murder.

Marek and those who have applauded his column point out that most Germans and Japanese during World War II were not warmongers, but warmongers controlled policy-making. The implication is that the United States was right to regard the peaceful majority as nonexistent. That's exactly what the Allies did. Under Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Winston Churchill hundreds of thousands of German and Japanese civilians were targeted and killed in bombings that had no direct relationship to military targets. Most people consider this morally defensible. But why isn't it mass murder? Marek's answer would be that, since the peaceful majority did nothing to stop the warmongering minority, the majority — men, women, and children — were fair game.

This dubious principle has been applied to the Middle East: If the majority are peaceful, why don't its members speak out — and act — against the radical minority? Since they don't, "we" have the right to ignore them when we devise strategy and tactics to defend "ourselves."

This is gravely mistaken on many levels. The peaceful majority cannot be irrelevant as long as ideas rule the world. That last phrase may startle some readers, but it's true. Contrary to what many people think, force does not rule the world. Ideas do, says historian and defense theorist Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, because ideas determine the direction in which people point their guns. If we want peaceful Muslims to prevail over those who use violence against innocents,

it would be helpful if their ideas about nonviolence were reinforced. But more than 50 years of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East have done the opposite. U.S. presidents have consistently supported despotisms (including that of Iraq's Saddam Hussein at one time) and "democratic" oppression (in the case of Israeli rule over the Palestinians). Peaceful efforts to change U.S. intervention in the region have gotten exactly nowhere. That is why the militants can ignore the voices of nonviolence. As long as the U.S. government pursues its neo-imperialist policy in the Middle East, the advocates of violence will hold sway and will become increasingly popular. Most Iraqis think it is good to attack U.S. forces. No surprise there. The United States is an occupying power.

It's hard to believe how many writers overlook this general point. In last Sunday's *New York Times* (March 23, 2008), [Paul Berman wrote](#), "Extremist movements have been growing bigger and wilder for more than three decades [now. During] that period, America has tried *pretty much everything* from a policy point of view. Our presidents have been satanic (Richard Nixon), angelic (Jimmy Carter), a sleepy idiot savant (Ronald Reagan), a cagey realist (George H.W. Bush), wonderfully charming (Bill Clinton), and famously otherwise (George W. Bush). And each president's Middle Eastern policy has conformed to his character" [emphasis added].

America has tried everything? Is he kidding? When was minding our own business — nonintervention — tried? Clearly, by "everything," Berman means every *style* of imperialism. But why should we imagine that *any* form of imperialism will discredit violent radicals? Such thinking is typical of the U.S.-centric ideas voiced by most pundits and politicians.

The principle that the United States may murder Muslim innocents because they have failed to stop the violent elements among them is the same principle Osama bin Laden used in the 9/11 attacks. Those who suffer at the hands of U.S. policy wonder why the American people don't rise up in protest. Does that give Muslims the right to kill innocent Americans? Beware double-edged policies.

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