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Following a Couple Wannabes

by Bill Thompson

In case you missed it, America has been at war in Iraq for four years, as of tomorrow [March 19, 2007]. And despite more than 25,000 American casualties and a dwindling list of good reasons to stay, some modern-day Audie Murphys think those who make the common-sense suggestion to get our brave soldiers out of the meat grinder are simply wimps.

Some recent letters to the editor help demonstrate. One writer declared the United States is a “country of cowards and liberals” who “would rather give up and go home,” prompting America to succumb to Islamic domination within five years. Another scribe said America is filled with “a bunch of gutless, spineless wonders pushing for the defeat of our blessed country.”

Many people undoubtedly share these feelings. I know I do, although I also object. I agree we are a nation of “cowards.” But I disagree on the timing.

We are not spaghetti-spined because we might exit Iraq anytime soon. We became a bunch of yellow-bellies on September 12, 2001.

That was when, in our fear and anxiety, inspired by the endless images of the still-smoldering remnants of the Twin Towers, we Americans checked 200 years of self-reliance and the Constitution at the door, and handed the keys to the store over to a White House run by one guy whose military derring-do was performed in the skies over south Texas instead of South Vietnam and by another who ran from an opportunity to fight for his country no less than five times.

FBI Director Robert Mueller’s recent revelations about the agency’s abuse of the PATRIOT Act, rammed into law two weeks after 9/11, proves Ben Franklin was right: trading security for liberty leaves you with neither.

Specifically, national security letters waved by FBI agents to snare records on Americans from telephone companies, Internet service providers, banks, credit companies and elsewhere were used improperly, and on occasion illegally. Mueller maintained the problem was one of error and not intentional malice. Odd that federal agents’ not knowing the laws they enforce is somehow supposed to comfort us.

But let's not forget the government's eavesdropping on phone calls, snooping into emails, rifling of bank records and ignoring constitutional protections and separation of powers — all undertaken under the premise of keeping us safe.

Ultimately, though, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We elected the clowns who wanted — even demanded — this power and stood idly by when they seized it. And when some complained, well, they were just being “un-American.”

Few people have raised more hell about this subversion of American principles than James Bovard, author of the recent book *Attention Deficit Democracy*. Because of the “war on terror,” Americans, Bovard asserts, suffer from “Battered Citizen Syndrome,” which readily leads us to capitulate to fear-mongering politicians, particularly President Bush, who have yet to be right or truthful about anything.

“America is becoming a democracy of knocking knees, sweating foreheads, and folks who jump too high at any sound,” Bovard writes.

He adds, “The more fears government fans, the fewer people recall the danger of government itself.... The more people government frightens, the more legitimate its power grabs become.”

Thus, we tremble at the mention of terrorists from some hellhole half a world away, but applaud the people with the most power to control our lives — U.S. politicians and government agents.

In 200-plus years, Americans have conquered the world's greatest military powers, its toughest physical barriers, its deadliest diseases, and even the heavens themselves by putting a man on the moon. Yet, some of those folks' descendants think if we depart Iraq a bunch of cave-dwelling 12th-century goofballs will waltz down Pennsylvania Avenue, take over the White House, and replace the Constitution with sharia.

The irony, though, is that the people who equate the advocacy of pulling out of Iraq as cowardice believe the only thing preventing that are a couple of John Wayne wannabes who gladly stepped aside 35 years ago so someone else could do their fighting for them.

*Bill Thompson is assistant editorial-page editor for the Ocala, Florida, **Star-Banner**. This article originally appeared in the March 18, 2007, of the **Star-Banner**. Reprint permission granted.*

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