

# WHITE HOUSE'S MARCH OF FOLLY

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

**Y**EARS AGO, Barbara W. Tuchman, in "The March of Folly," explored one of the most fascinating paradoxes of history: the recurring pursuit by governments of policies contrary to their interests.

This so-called "folly," she argued, is bred by the irresponsible exercise of power, specifically the failure to govern "as reasonably as possible in the interests of the state and its citizens." The Bush administration would do well to read this illuminating work as it continues to grope for a coherent policy in its war on terrorism, his Thursday U.N. speech notwithstanding.

What has become tragically clear is that, aside from promoting the downfall of Saddam Hussein, our government has no clear objectives, and no clear understanding of who exactly the enemy is. Instead, we have a lot of "Star-Spangled Banner"-waving, lame-duck Office of Homeland Security with little to no access to the decision-makers, and an operating assumption that terrorism is a monolithic creature. It's not.

If we are still fighting the ghost of Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network, the administration has failed to understand bin Laden's goals in this war.

Shortly after 9/11, President Bush sold the American people on the war on terror by telling us that bin Laden was bent on destroying "America's way of life," which is based on "truth, liberty and justice." But scholars who studied his behavior tell us that bin Laden and his acolytes are much more concerned about the imposition of western values — materialism, individualism and globalism — on Islam. Their intent is to purify that re-

ligious tradition and unite all the Islamic nations of the world (most of which are Asian, not Arab) through a large-scale military act.

If we are now to fight Saddam Hussein, the administration has seemingly failed to understand that he has very little in common with the Islamic fundamentalists. President Bush, in his "axis of evil" address, made no distinction between Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

But Hussein is far more dangerous than either Iran or North Korea. He has already used bio-weapons and is probably in the process of stockpiling nuclear arms. His madness knows no boundaries, a fact that is understood by the vast majority of Iraqis, who want him deposed.

Despite these significant differences, the administration, with smug

self-assurance, is proceeding with its plans to launch a military attack on Iraq, believing, as the president has stated, that the United States "must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge."

This country has already lost more than 3,000 people in a terrorist attack that might have been prevented had our government taken more seriously the cultural, ideological and religious outlooks of multiple adversaries in shaping a more substantial national security policy than this doctrine of preemption.

Do we need to lose hundreds of thousands more before it does? ★

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