

Commentary

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The worst thing we can do is forget

Are you finding it hard these days to get worked up about much? Small wonder. Even Bill Maher, our Lenny Bruce Lite, the other night blithely explained to Larry

King why no one should get upset about a mere 16 words in a State of the Union Address that is already, like the war in Iraq itself, old news. Maher sounded like

Ari Fleischer who, while still press secretary, declared, "The president has moved on. And, I think, frankly, much of the country has moved on as well." He then moved on.



More than 50 U.S. soldiers have moved on, too—in coffins—since May 1, when the president declared major fighting over in Iraq. If there is an afterlife, the three soldiers killed July 26 by a hand grenade while guarding a children's hospital might like to know whether the president's main sales pitch for the war was true or false. In fact the souls of all 160-plus Americans who have died chiefly in order to prevent Saddam Hussein from launching weapons of mass destruction might wonder why we accept the lazy schoolboy excuse that the president and all his advisers didn't read the appendix of a 90-page National Intelligence Estimate. While they wonder, the president and many of us are moving on.

If a few of us move on back in time, we would discover what is known as a historical parallel right in the Middle East. In 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The Israelis knew how to do it. Their leaders gathered their intelligence reports and read them. They grasped that armed forces were massing for attack on Israel's borders. The Israelis clobbered this real threat in

six days, seized strategic territory, and then called it quits. This is known as a legitimate pre-emptive strike. Real threat. Real enemy weapons poised for attack. Clear objectives. Clear end game. But let's move on.

President Bush justified our preemptive strike most poignantly with 16 words about Saddam's pursuit of African uranium oxide. Now we are being waved on by, as if our examination of the war, its causes and its current quagmire are nothing more than rubber-necking at a bad accident on the freeway.

Our White House traffic police tell us that once the bad guys are gone, the Iraqi people will embrace representative government and change the dynamics of the Middle East.

But if we move on by Operation Iraqi Freedom slowly, we see that the Iraqi people resent our continuing presence. So our leaders have adopted a "Night of the Living Dead" mentality in pursuit of the ghoulish Saddam and his male heirs. In George Romero's movie, the

simple logic was kill the brain, kill the ghoul. In Iraq, our logic is kill the ghouls, kill the anti-American insurgency. But since Odai and Qusai Hussein were killed in Mosul, more U.S. soldiers have been killed and attacks on our troops continue almost daily.

As you move on with your life, you might gain some perspective on all this, as I just did, in a truly American way, by entertaining yourself with borderline trashy reading. I recommend to you Jerry Capeci's and Gene Mustain's "Gotti Rise and Fall." The main villain is a criminal thug and mass murderer. He rules his kingdom with rapacious brutality. He defies many attempts by civilized authorities to bring him to justice. John Gotti, head of the Gambino crime family in New York, was a known mob star surrounded by other mobsters engaged in drugs, hijacking, union extortion, loan-sharking embezzlement, tax fraud, bribery and murder.

Gotti had slipped out of one trial, for assault, by intimidating the main

witness for the prosecution, a burly refrigeration mechanic named Romuald Piecyk. He evaded justice in a second trial, a case to prove his clear involvement in a pattern of racketeering, by bribing one of the jurors. If ever Dirty-Harry-style justice or manipulating evidence to get a conviction would have been justifiable, it was the case of John Gotti. Instead the FBI and local authorities worked doggedly to gather evidence that led to a legal conviction.

The Bush White House loved the "High Noon" metaphor leading up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But it seems to have forgotten that Cooper's sheriff was a clear and straight talker who worked within the law.

The New York Post summed up Romuald Piecyk's fear-induced amnesia in court memorably as "I FORGOTTI"! We shouldn't forget.

Not even 16 words.

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