# America Lost the War on Terror

By [Alexei Bayer](#)

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We are approaching an unhappy anniversary. Ten years ago, New York lived through the horror of the destruction of the World Trade Center. We were all affected by the tragedy. In our small suburban community just north of the city, several families lost their loved ones. A sad occasion under any circumstances, this year's anniversary will be all the more disheartening because of the current state of the United States. The death of nearly 3,000 Americans was not only senseless, but in some perverse way it contributed to the country's downfall.

Remember the first reaction to 9/11? The unanimous support for the United States, the flowers at its embassies around the world and the headline in Le Monde "We're all Americans," which summed up the public sentiment. Then-President Vladimir Putin was the first foreign leader to express sympathy to George W. Bush, but only because the phone lines were jammed by foreign leaders rushing to do the same. It is all distant a memory now.

The outpouring of solidarity was not due solely to the vivid horror of the attack and the loss of life. It reflected the United States' standing in the world. It was not only the global economic, military and political leader but a moral one as well. Its Declaration of Independence and

Constitution proclaimed the values of freedom and human dignity, which have since become ideals that other civilized countries accept — or at least to which their leaders pay lip service. In a very tangible way, an attack by al-Qaida on New York and Washington was an attack on those ideals and therefore on the entire world.

But over the past decade, U.S. leadership has been tarnished, and the reason for this was a misguided response by Washington to those terrorist attacks. Its "global war on terror" subverted international laws and treaties that the United States had itself proposed and defended, and violated the human rights and freedoms of countless people around the world. U.S. moral authority was the first casualty of the war on terror.⊠

Then came two pointless and cruel wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The way they were financed bankrupted the U.S. Treasury, put the United States in debt to foreign creditors and undermined its economic power. Its military prowess and spending, which nearly exceeds the defense budgets of the rest of the world combined, has proved largely ineffectual against a poorly armed, disorganized foe. It still has the strongest military force in history, but fear among U.S. enemies has been tempered by the knowledge that the Pentagon is handcuffed by its existing commitments.

Finally, Americans were told by Bush in the aftermath of 9/11 to worry about nothing and to go shopping. The government created conditions for ordinary Americans to borrow easily and to spend freely, ostensibly without worrying about the future. A massive speculative bubble was created. When it popped, it impoverished the middle class. Moreover, Americans effectively abdicated their constitutional responsibility to control their government.

The initial attacks united the nation. Americans remain largely united, but in only one aspect: A Reuters poll in August found that 73 percent of respondents believe that the country is on the wrong track. The United States is now polarized, with Democrats and Republicans unable to find common ground even in the face of an economic calamity.⊠

This is proof that the United States was defeated in the war on terror that it had started. As they say, victory has many fathers, but defeat is an orphan.

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