United We Stand

On 9/11, we were all Americans. In the aftermath of the most heinous attack of Americans on American soil, we were united. Those unprompted acts of terror, of unspeakable horror, perpetrated by evil men, were attacks not only on our country, but on the very symbols of our freedom. They were intended to strike fear into our hearts, spread chaos, and splinter us into a thousand disparate camps. Instead, these despicable acts galvanized us as a people, into One Nation.....Under God. “United We Stand” became our national motto over night, along with “We Will Never Forget”. They had failed.......or had they?

What has happened to us since 9/11? For today, it appears as if their most dastardly intentions are now bearing an ominous fruit. As a country, we appear to have forgotten who we are as a nation and as a people; we are anything but unified. The ultimate irony however, is that it isn’t the enemy who has wrought this upon us, but we, ourselves….our fellow Americans.

At a time when we should be unified against an enemy as real and evil and treacherous and capable as any this nation has ever faced, we appear to have completely lost our focus, our way. At a time when we should realize that we are indeed fighting an adversary of incredible intelligence, adaptability, agility and cunning, we seem to have forgotten him altogether. Instead of amassing the amazing strength of the most powerful nation on this earth, instead of remembering how strong and unbeatable we are if we remain united, focused on eradicating this evil cancer that has attached itself across the globe, we attack each other.

It must be quite amusing indeed for the evil perpetrators of these unspeakable acts of murder and terror, to see us so dis-unified. Rather than focus on them, who they are, and why they are doing what they are doing, we appear to have ignored them altogether, content instead, to attack each other, jockeying for political power and prestige. Instead of standing together as Americans, we use labels to attack each other. Democrats against Republicans, liberals against conservatives, right against left and on and on. We appear to relish highlighting our own faults and mistakes, and go out of our way to hide the tremendous successes of our military and our country abroad. On the world stage, we openly attack each other, laying blame, and engaging in an almost comical feeding frenzy, content to portray to the world that we Americans are liars, deceivers and criminals, with dubious motives, responsible for the very actions of the terrorists themselves. We have, at our own peril, taken our eye off the enemy. Worse, we have muddied the waters as to who exactly the enemy is.

The brave young Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and Marines who represent the military of this great nation understand that the enemy we face “over there” is the same enemy that attacked us here, on 9/11. Their doctrine and their proposed endstates are very clear to any who study Al Qaeda. This is not Vietnam; and the "bad guys" do not merely want us out of Iraq, as our hopeful and painfully naive peace advocates suggest. Lest we forget, this country was the victim of a savage, unprovoked attack against innocent civilians, long before we had troops in Afghanistan or Iraq. It was not an act of war; it was a premeditated and carefully planned act of mass murder, on a scale unprecedented in history.

This is a Pan-Islamic Terrorist Organization that has made it crystal clear that they will not stop, even if we do evacuate Iraq--they want us (the US and all westerners) completely out of the Middle East altogether. They want to destroy every pro-western (Arab and Muslim) regime (every “apostate” regime) in the area, and are willing to twist and distort the Koran and the Muslim faith to falsely justify their criminal actions. Just as hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan fiendishly touted the Bible as the cloak and justification for their evil acts, so too does Al Qaeda use the Koran to maliciously and deviously validate their wanton acts of murder and terror.
They want us out of the Middle East, and they want us to take the Jews with us (out of Israel) when we depart; if they do not get their way, they have vowed to kill every man, woman and child, and completely eradicate the Israelis in a manner not seen since the holocaust of World War II. These are just a fraction of their demands, and they are not willing to negotiate!

History is replete with examples such as this. For years we appeased Hitler, hoping he was a rational man and would surely be satisfied with the huge concessions (made in the name of peace) he was granted at the expense of other nations. Each concession however, merely brazened his demands, and wetted his insatiable appetite for yet more. In the end we were forced, by him, and others like him, to defend our freedoms; we were forced to wage the most terrible, horrific war the world has ever seen.

Al Qaeda is no different; it is a radical, extremist organization that has murdered more Arabs and Muslims than any other race or religion—all in the name of Allah. There are many similarities between these two evil regimes. Iraq, like Afghanistan, is not the endstate; any more than was Poland or Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. It is merely the unfortunate country where this battle for survival, between good and evil, is being waged today. Al Qaeda will not stop until it achieves all of its goals. As such, a phrase the Commander of US Central Command frequently stressed was: “it’s better to play the away game with Al Qaeda, or we will be fighting them here at home.” As obvious as this might appear to those who are fighting “over there”, the “home game” scenario is now a major, albeit ill-informed political platform in this country; a look at our media slant and the trend in our domestic politics to get out of Iraq, make this painfully obvious.

The fact is, we have not been attacked since 9/11 only because we have been so successful in fighting the “away game”. Our government, intelligence agencies and our military have effectively and efficiently ferreted out and systematically destroyed much of their leadership, infrastructure and capability. In the process, we have thwarted numerous attempts to attack this and other countries. Al Qaeda has a global network of operatives, “sleepers”, unobtrusively hiding amongst us, just waiting for us to let our guard down; we must not do so. WE MUST NEVER FORGET.

I’ve said the enemy is clever, cunning and ruthless. But equally significant is the fact that he can not beat us. A prominent Army General said over 2 years ago, that it was not the enemy we in the military fear most, but rather, losing the support of the American People; something that is becoming fearfully prominent today. The enemy understands this; he knows he cannot possibly win against us unless he succeeds in confusing the issues, dividing this country, and pulling the support of the people away from the only sure way to defeat him. As such, he is effectively waging an information war against us. He has been able to do this as a third rate, low budget (compared to the assets the US has to bring to bear), albeit intelligent and media-savvy adversary precisely because he understands how to use not only his media venues, but our own--very effectively against us.

This tactic, coupled with our loss of focus mentioned above, is the only way this enemy can win. We may be a peaceful nation, but we are a nation at war. We must acknowledge this war for what it is, a war of survival. We must demand to be kept informed, not merely with a daily body count and an occasional negative article on page 22 of the local paper. We must have fair, unbiased reporting. We must open the channels of communication, not only to explain the complex and significant challenges posed by this clever, nefarious enemy, and the tremendous feats of heroism and numerous successes of our brave kids in uniform, but in order keep the American People, and indeed the world audience, both informed and engaged. We have not been attacked since 9/11, but there have been numerous equally savage terrorist attacks, perpetrated by this same enemy, across the globe. This Information War and the
way to win it, must become our individual, personal goal and crusade. It is the "main effort" in the Global War on Terrorism. The enemy clearly understands this; we must also. An informed people will foil his best attempts to convolute and confuse. We must wage this information warfare on a global scale, using the same weapons as our flexible, savvy, adaptable and formidable adversary.

I am neither a poet, nor an eloquent writer; I am a Soldier. I am, for the most part, apolitical. I am part of an organization whose difficult, though honorable task is to protect and defend those freedoms so many not only take for granted, but accept as their God-given rights. But these freedoms are neither God-given, nor are they widespread in the world today; rather they are man made. They have been paid for with the blood and sacrifices, not just of our forefathers, but of the generation of our youth today.

I may be a naïve, simple Soldier, but here are some facts, as I see them. I believe in the American people. We are not the enemy, we are Americans. Though we make our mistakes and have our faults, we are not afraid to admit them to the world and move on. We are a good people, founded on a strong belief and faith in God. We are blessed to be citizens in the greatest, most benevolent nation in history. We believe in justice and in trying to do the right things for the right reasons. We know and understand and accept the leadership role we have as the last remaining super power. I know that Democrats are every bit as patriotic as Republicans, that the views of the right are every bit as significant as those of the left, and that the contributions of the white collar workers are only matched by the outstanding feats of their blue collar brethren.

I know that the “Greatest Generation” may well be the one that is defending our freedoms and our very way of life today. I know we are engaged in a war of survival, on par with the World Wars we have fought in the past, against enemies as evil as Hitler or Mussolini. I know that we were successful then because we banded together and supported those who fought for us against this evil. I know the only thing worse than failing to give credit to our brave men and women in uniform, is the travesty of failing to keep informed, the American People they so honorably serve. I know that we as a nation must band together, not fall apart. We are not the enemy—they are, but we need to know them, and understand what their diabolical intentions are, as well as their weaknesses, and what it will take to defeat them. We must continue to question, but must also remain united, at all costs, in this all important endeavor.

The second part of that phrase “United We Stand”, proudly displayed in millions of bumper stickers, decals and banners: is “Divided We Fall”. We appear to have forgotten this important caveat. If we do not remember who we are and what we stand for, if we do not acknowledge who the enemy is and the depth of this threat, this clear and present danger, we will most certainly face dire consequences. If however, we choose to never forget, as we said, and we understand how powerful United We Stand truly is, we will defeat this evil enemy, and secure a better future for our kids and grandkids……

*(Tom Harris is a native Houstonian. He is also a Colonel in the United States Army. He is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and holds two Masters’ degrees. He has been an active duty Soldier for 26 years, and has honorably served this country in Germany, England, Korea, the Balkans and throughout the Middle East. Above all, he is an American)*