

America's "killing hour": a revealing comment in the Wall Street Journal

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21 November 2001

An opinion piece in the November 13 *Wall Street Journal* ("As Taliban Falter, We Must Show No Restraint") reveals the thinking of the most militaristic and fascistic-minded sections of the US ruling elite, whose views are routinely expressed in the *Journal's* editorial pages.

The article, written by Ralph Peters, a frequent contributor to the *Journal*, argues that the American military should pursue the physical annihilation of all opposition in Afghanistan. One line captures the substance of the piece: "This is a killing hour, and we must rise to it."

Peters argues against any hesitation or restraint in the US drive for domination of Central Asia. The article is brutal and bloodthirsty. It reflects in naked form the character of the political forces carrying out the war in Afghanistan and the attack on democratic rights within the United States.

Peters is a retired US army lieutenant colonel, author and military analyst. He is frequently cited as a specialist in military affairs by the "liberal" media establishment, and has been prominently featured on programs such as National Public Radio's Diane Rehm Show.

His November 13 comment was written as Northern Alliance troops were advancing southward toward Kabul, after having gained a series of victories in the north. The Northern Alliance, an assortment of warlords and tribal chieftains, has received the support of the United States in its struggle against the ruling Taliban. It is a mixture of primarily Uzbek and Tajik ethnic minorities, while the Taliban is based on the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan's southern region.

As the Alliance moved to the south, there was concern that, because of ethnic tensions, it would not be able to rule effectively in Kabul and other areas. An unalloyed Northern Alliance victory and consolidation of power are also looked on with concern in some US foreign policy

circles, especially within the State Department, because of the Alliance's hostile relations with Pakistan, whose regime has already been destabilized by the war against its former Taliban ally in neighboring Afghanistan. It is feared that a Northern Alliance regime in Kabul will inflame the simmering conflict over Kashmir between Pakistan and India, both of which possess nuclear weapons.

The forces of the Alliance have a history of brutal actions against Pashtuns. Like the Taliban, it is a semi-feudal outfit that does not refrain from the most barbarous actions, including the execution of its enemies by placing them in locked crates to roast in the sun. Given that American war propaganda evokes the struggle for "democracy" and "human rights" against "terrorism," there is also concern that the Alliance might embarrass the US if it gets exclusive control of the country. Hence Bush's urgings only a week ago that the Alliance refrain from taking Kabul until some sort of anti-Taliban federation, including Pashtun tribal leaders, could be cobbled together.

The immediate purpose of Peters' article is to dismiss such political and diplomatic "niceties" and align himself solidly with the Alliance, arguing that if the US can use the Alliance warlords to exterminate its opponents, so much the better. He writes: "War is no time to listen to the voices of moderation, as exemplified by the worried tones of diplomats. If we give in to the nonsensical caution that the Northern Alliance should not be allowed into Kabul, we may squander the best opportunity to bring about the Taliban's broad collapse before the winter."

When Peters speaks of "the worried tones of diplomats," he is referring primarily to Secretary of State Colin Powell and his faction within the Bush administration. This section of the government has been attacked on a number of fronts by the right wing of the Republican Party, whose mouthpiece is the *Wall Street*

Journal. Powell has come under attack for deferring too much to Arab and European states, in, for example, his reluctance to quickly launch a new war against Iraq.

Peters criticizes the unwillingness of this section to fully support the Northern Alliance. “If we are fortunate,” he continues, “the Northern Alliance will break their tentative promise not to enter Kabul and seize the city at the first opportunity. [This is in fact what happened.] Their instincts are better than ours, and they know that when your enemy is down it is time to hit him harder than ever.”

As far as Peters and the social forces he represents are concerned, the “instincts” of the Northern Alliance are something to be admired, something on which the American military should model itself. When Peters speaks of “hitting your enemy when he is down,” he is perhaps referring the incident, captured on film, of Northern Alliance troops summarily executing an injured Taliban soldier after stripping him and having him beg for his life on his knees. “At present,” Peters continues, “we are fortunate that Afghans are killing Afghans and foreign religious mercenaries for us. Instead of urging restraint upon them, we should be cheering them on at the top of our lungs.”

The significance of Peters’ column extends beyond the immediate question of the Northern Alliance and America’s war in Afghanistan. He is seeking to legitimize the most barbaric actions against any and all opponents of American imperialism, at home and abroad. Massacres carried out by American troops—such as those that took place during the Vietnam War—are to be justified as healthy examples of “hitting the enemy when he is down.”

“Far more armies,” he writes, “have been destroyed during a retreat than during a battle....When an army feels hopelessly beaten and the soldier’s fear breaks the bonds of discipline to become panic, forces that appeared formidable days or only hours beforehand can dissolve into little more than desperate running targets for the victor’s pursuit....Wars are to be won. They are not playing fields for theorists. Enemies are to be destroyed, not merely admonished. And the best chance to destroy a military enemy is to pursue him relentlessly and ferociously when his organization begins to come apart.”

According to Peters, the main lesson that the American military should have learned from its engagements over the past decade, particularly the Persian Gulf War, is that constraint is no better than defeat: “partial victory is no more than a defeat with candy-coating.” He continues:

“In Desert Storm, we had the power and momentum to go all the way to Baghdad, but we listened to the diplomats.... Precisely the same self-hobbling thinking has persuaded our government that the Northern Alliance must be restrained in its progress.”

The moral: the US must assert its military hegemony without moral scruples or diplomatic constraints.

In drawing these conclusions, Peters is speaking for a prominent section of the American ruling class that feels the US must take advantage of the collapse of the USSR to unilaterally organize the world in its own interests. In his book *Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph?* Peters proclaimed the necessity and right of the US to “dominate the earth for the good of humankind.”

In the minds of Peters and his ilk, the United States needs to make an example of the Taliban and make the war in Afghanistan a precedent for future wars: this is what comes to those who get in the way of American interests. Peters and the *Wall Street Journal*, in proclaiming the creed of “America über Alles,” articulate more accurately the neocolonial and fascistic inclinations that underlie the present war than the professional liars whose hypocritical phrases about fighting terrorism and “defending civilization” form the staple of official propaganda.

Peters’ column deserves to be noted as a warning to the world’s population of the strategies and aims that animate the American political and media establishment. It should be preserved and catalogued for future generations, who will look back at the present period with a combination of shame and outrage, and speak with loathing of the warmongers on the *Journal* editorial board.



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