

In security we trust: Needed: A new Marshall Plan

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [June 19, 2002](#) issue

For several months Congress had been calling for President Bush to coordinate the work of security-oriented agencies spread throughout the executive branch. The president, who retains a 75 percent approval rating, resisted such a move. Some of his critics said it was because he did not want homeland security director Tom Ridge to testify to Congress—something he would have to do if his position is elevated to cabinet status.

But once Congress began examining the failure of the FBI and CIA to “connect the dots” that might have prevented the horrors of September 11, the president announced a restructure as a bold presidential move. Who even remembers that the idea came first from the Congress? Even Joseph Lieberman (D., Conn.), who is positioning himself to run for president in 2004, rushed to the president’s side with this bipartisan clarion call: “We’ve got to get our act together, and this is the best way to do it quickly.”

Do what quickly, senator? Create a massive federal agency so that FBI agents gathering data on danger in Phoenix and Minneapolis will receive a faster hearing in Washington? There is nothing wrong with a little efficiency in government. But efficiency will not make up for the lack of a national purpose that is higher than self-protection, and new lines of communication will not help us claim that purpose.

Since the most monumental failure of national security in modern times took the lives of thousands, the American people have become one huge, flag-waving cheering section for patriotism. Missing from this post-September 11 reaction is any forward-looking leadership from either political party—anything that addresses the imbalance in the world’s resources, an imbalance that is the root cause of terrorism. Ideologues like Osama bin Laden and the states that endorse them do not lack for resources, but the militants whom they inspire and recruit most certainly do.

Patriotism is a good thing, but obsessive nationalism isn't. We should be proud of who we are as a nation yet always be aware that we are only one nation among many. We are not alone with our fears and our desire to be protected from danger. We like to remind the world that we are Number One (in just about everything except soccer), but the message does not endear us to nations that have their own national pride and patriotic love for people, their own tribe and culture, and more than their share of war-generated death and destruction.

With its security obsession and xenophobia, the United States resembles a castle on the hill, with a king who is digging a deeper moat and filling it with the alligators of secrecy and reduced civil rights. We are in danger of placing our trust in the forces of security instead of turning our energies and passion outward toward the service of others. After all, a hungry mob is more likely to pose a threat to the castle than are people who have hope for the future.

We do not need a reorganized security force; this issue is only a momentary diversion. We need a new national purpose and a determination to place our trust not in military strength, but in a commitment to employ our massive power for good. It has happened before, most notably in the Marshall Plan, when the U.S. turned its World War II victory into an opportunity to rebuild the countries it had devastated. That could be done again through a combination of moral purpose and practical politics.

Most countries outside the U.S., especially in the developing world, have known human-caused disasters, wars, famines and massive killing in the name of nationalism posing as patriotism. That is why so many of them were initially sympathetic to the U.S. after the destruction of September 11. Now these same people wonder if the American people are going to wallow forever in the aftermath of that destructive moment. A nation that has withdrawn into a shell of self-pity and victimhood appears to others as a giant with no thought for anything other than itself.

Security must not be our sole purpose. We need to look outward to a starving, battered world and stop this silly, patently obvious business of pretending to build nations in our own image when what we are really doing is using the peoples of the world to serve our financial interests.

Despots arise when desperate people are too weak to prevent their ascension to power. Who creates the conditions that allow dictators to rise to power? Why is there

hunger and sickness and suffering in so much of the world and a few enjoying an abundance of riches? There are consequences of this imbalance, as Jesus told his disciples. “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon . . . God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” The energy we waste in reorganizing our national security system would be better spent finding ways to correct the root causes of terrorism.