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Mood indigo?

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By Daniel Gallington - A recent New York Times and CBS poll has more than 80 percent of us unhappy and believing that we are headed in the wrong direction. Want to know why?

In a nutshell, our politics — but mostly our politicians — have failed us. Accordingly, we are all mostly unhappy, Democrat, Republican and Independent alike.

The disenchantment began at least 10 years ago when Bill Clinton — a potentially gifted leader — dragged us through the details of his lifelong sexual exploitations. He wasted our time. He was a disgrace for the Democrats and they were (and are) ashamed of him. He was (and is) a laughingstock and has insisted recently on dragging us through it all again. How? It's the idea of him connected to the White House again that has most negatively impacted his wife's attempt at national office. In fact, she will fail because of him, and he is obviously oblivious to it. The message of the 80 percent: Go away Bill, please!

Next. Eight years ago, the presidential election was a political toss-up, and Americans don't like political toss-ups because they don't really settle anything. However, a few months after the election we were attacked at home, and — whatever else it was — Sept. 11, 2001, was an event made to order for a new president to become a great leader: like Franklin Roosevelt toward the end of the dark chapter of World War II and Harry Truman stepping up to the plate. But it didn't happen.

Why? After Sept. 11, 2001, we probably had 90-120 days to do just about anything we wanted to in response to the attack, and the world held its breath for us to do it. Seemed simple enough: bomb the hell out of the territory of the terrorists, and that would have been whatever part of Afghanistan we decided to hit. We also should have taken advantage of the moment and conducted broad sweeps of disputed border territory in joint operations with the Pakistanis, who would have had to cooperate with us then. But we didn't.

Had we done this, Osama bin Laden would be long dead, as would be thousands of other "real" terrorists and many of the relationships and associations they require for their continued existence. But we didn't.

Instead, we took a painfully long time to decide what to do; and finally decided to go to war in Iraq, in pursuance of a flakey-worded U.N. mandate based on the putative presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). And the war we so patiently chose has turned into a quagmire.

Even assuming we had no other choice but to invade Iraq (and that is certainly debatable) we only had one option after we did do: Win the damn war. Americans don't have the patience for

most other resolutions.

But we haven't done that. To the contrary, it took us four years to learn we needed a "surge" to establish effective control over the country. And, what about our "democracy" policy there? Come on, most of the people in Iraq don't want anything to do with democracy because it requires compromise — and they can't do that.

We also missed our opportunity — right after Sept. 11, 2001 — to extract from the Saudis whatever penalty we wanted because of their indirect — but extremely significant — complicity in the attacks, which were accomplished mostly by their own nationals.

Instead, we gave them a pass — this when we should have gotten their attention with the real prospect of a new government for their country — or a new country for their government. They have repaid their pass from us by presiding over an oil price and production ripoff that threatens directly our economy and allows them to continue to support radical Islam — which they do.

What to do now? What if we have truly gotten ourselves into a situation we can't win, or the operative departments of our government cannot execute a winning strategy (because — for example — they are worn out and overextended)?

If these conditions apply, we should fold our tents quickly and return home; and — most important in this event — absolutely no more American lives should be put at further risk in this venture. None.

The latest energy crisis — which many associate with the Iraq war — is no doubt another reason 80 percent of us are unhappy. Will it cause our economy to go in the tank? Most of us think it already has.

Global warming? Sorry Al Gore, while we know you invented the Internet and — as a lawyer — also have great insights into everything scientific and technical, this is most probably not one of the reasons 80 percent of us are unhappy. Ten percent? Sure, we'll give you 10 — at least until we have another record cold winter.

Social Security, Medicare? Again, not really, because most everyone knows what the "solutions" will be: Increased payroll taxes. And, while this might be difficult or unpleasant, it's not hard to figure out.

The main reasons at least 80 percent of us are unhappy? It began with a tiresome and disgraceful presidential scandal and continued with a failure of our national leadership to deal competently with the international threat from terrorism — this after being given a blank check by most of us to do it.

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