

America on the Brink?

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

If we can't recognize a problem, we can't solve it. The superpowers of yesterday collapsed because they could not conceive of impending failure. We should recognize this and make corrections before it's too late. I don't want America to fail – no superpower has done more for the world as America.

America's greatest strength, is independent thinking. Thomas Edison not only invented a practical incandescent light bulb, he made one that was easily attainable for most people. Henry Ford's vision was to mass produce cars that common people could afford. American farming innovations have spared millions from miserable lives and deaths from hunger. Innovations in science and medicine have made incalculable improvements for people the world over. But, America seems to have lost its ability to think independently. It's no exaggeration that America is suffering from groupthink, allowing others to do their thinking. Oprah, Tom Cruise, Letterman, Dr. Phil, Dr. Chopra, and Al Gore are the intellectual leaders of the twenty-first century. Time was when "leader" was reserved for the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Edison, and Martin Luther King. The recent financial crisis clearly demonstrates how we accepted the advice of financial gurus who say we shouldn't regulate banking and consumers treat their homes as ATMs because a real estate bubble was merely a fool's hypothesis.

Now America is at the place where France was during the reign of Louis XVI from 1789-1799. In debt from fighting a war on American soil, the French were paying more in taxes than was received in government services. With America's prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Obama has fewer bullets to fire as he faces the biggest economic crisis in almost a century. Americans are left to pray that China and Japan will continue to buy U.S. Treasury bonds to keep us aloft. Just like Great Britain at the end of World War II America's too thinly stretched, begging for a financial rescue.

Americans think they have a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." The reality is a government "of political contributors by the lobbyists and for special-interest groups." Elections, the theory, remove the corrupt and ineffective. Yet the fact remains that the same people are reelected, disguised as Democrats or Republicans. Americans are happy for a month after elections thinking they voted out the old and voted in the new. But the vicious circle of corruption never ends. Net effect is corruption governmental institutions are designed to protect special interests rather than public. The financial crisis has clearly revealed, regulatory agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission have been captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate.

There is great danger for the U.S. and the world that the American people are losing confidence in their ability to compete with Chinese and Indian workers. However, every problem has a solution. This has always been the optimistic American view. But painful problems usually don't have painless solutions. America must get back to independent thinking and innovation if we want to retain our superpower status.

Our Best Days Are Ahead

By Bala Prasad

As we enter a new year, we should not underestimate the magnitude of the difficulties we face as a nation. We are still fighting wars on two fronts against enemies pledged to our destruction. Our economy continues to reel from a credit crisis of epic proportions, job losses continue to escalate, and the budgets of businesses and families across this country are stretched to a breaking point.

But we, as Americans, have seen darker times. And as we search for a reason to believe that our best days lie ahead, we need to look no further than the Americans who lived through the Great Depression, and the Second World War. While our current situation is indeed serious, it pales in comparison to what that generation faced: a quarter of Americans unemployed, a collapse of our banking system and a World War against a formidable military force that threatened to overwhelm the free world.

What allowed us to overcome these adversities as a nation and prosper as never before is the same thing that will allow us to overcome the challenges that face us today: it is not our policy, but our character. What we saw in the 1930s and 1940s was an unmatched example of the indomitable American spirit, that spirit that made America great. And the people that embodied that indomitable American spirit that were with us then are with us now: the farmers, who diligently plow the fields; the doctors, who selflessly heal the sick; the statesmen, who despite political pressure, do what is in the best interests of their country; the religious leaders, who love the poor and care for their souls; the families, who raise their children to be generous and engaged, not selfish and deceitful; the patriotic soldiers who, in their last measure of sacrifice, give their lives for our country. These were the American heroes who allowed us as a nation to triumph over our greatest adversity in the past, and they are the same heroes who will allow us to triumph over the adversity we face today, and tomorrow.

We can find our way forward by gazing backward to the example of those Americans who overcame even greater challenges before us. Their example instills in us the confidence that our best days are ahead of us. Their example teaches us not to lose faith on our country, and in our fellow citizens' capacity to overcome any problem, no matter how tough.

Ronald Reagan said that America is an exceptional nation, a shining city on a hill that stands as an example of freedom and responsibility for the rest of the world. Twenty-eight years later, Barack Obama underscored this same sentiment when he accepted the Presidency of the United States with this cautionary rhetoric: "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

If our leaders can continue to look at this country with hope and optimism, then it is our humble responsibility, as citizens of the free world, to believe, wholeheartedly that America's best days lie ahead.