

Strauss-Kahn, Petraeus, Et Al: Why is Sexual Philandering Judged More Harshly than Our Treacherous, Bloody and Failed War-Making?

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Region: [USA](#)

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It's the time when journalists review the past 12 months to tally blunders, setbacks and successes. It's a time too, to reflect on leaders—media leaders, financial leaders, political leaders. What they do not look at is the moral standard by which men— leadership is still about the actions and qualities of men—are judged.

Earlier this week, a fleeting news item revealed that the former head of the International Monetary Fund and possible French presidential aspirant had reached a settlement with the NY hotel maid whom he'd assaulted. At the time of the incident, Dominique Strauss-Kahn was portrayed in very bad light; the US media had a field day with his appearance in court. A year later the once powerful international figure maintains a quiet life and, we assume, the future holds no political prospects for him.

The case of Strauss-Kahn will remind us what happened to the celebrated American military leader, ex-CIA chief David Petraeus. (According to some, Petraeus too was possible presidential material.) The US media was easier on Petraeus than the IMF chief. Still, he too has slipped from the stage... for the present. Given the capriciousness of the press and its capacity to forgive the wayward ways of ambitious men, one or both of these naughty boys may one day return to public life. We have sufficient historical precedents for that.

None of that interests me. Because something more basic is being missed in both these judgments, namely the business of war that generals and their civilian commanders work in. How is it that today, sexual morality trumps the evils of war? Take recent American wars—the wars Petraeus himself (in a long line of military heroes) executed, under a series of US presidents.

Why is sexual philandering judged more harshly than our treacherous, bloody and failed war-making? By failed wars I do not simply refer to failure to achieve military goals. I mean wars conducted with a failed morality, wars justified by lies. No one is held responsible for hundreds of thousands of lives and many more wounded, civilian and military, for billions of misspent funds and widespread poverty. Today few will argue that these wars were worthwhile. Who dares to claim that the US sanctions-war and subsequent invasion and occupation of Iraq were morally justifiable or strategically sound? Surely the war against Afghanistan is equally ignoble and wasted? All that American leaders seek now is a successful 'exit strategy' from Afghanistan, one they can sell to US citizens and lawmakers as equal to the military departure from Iraq.

In acknowledging strategic failures, tallying of trillions of wasted defense dollars, witnessing

the utter destruction of nations, admitting that countries America claimed to liberate may actually be in far worse condition now than before, who is held responsible?

With US torture practices revealed, shameful behavior of soldiers exposed, the rage and antagonism US wars engendered, although a handful of journalists reveal US war crimes, in fact, no US leader has been fired, removed in disgrace, or charged with war crimes or incompetence. Simon Jenkins makes this point in his review of the David Petraeus scandal "Fire leaders for failure, not for cheating"(The Guardian Weekly, Nov. 23, 2012). In modern times US military leaders are remembered as valiant heroes; they lecture to university audiences and write popular books about their exploits. Why do we buy them?

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