Cheney is the Dark Knight

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I loved *The Dark Knight.* Heath Ledger is fantastic; the hype was for real this time. And Christian Bale plays an excellent Batman. It was a great flick. But its message was deeply statist, and the movie really reflects the sort of fear that scares Americans most, post-9/11.

Look at Ledger's Joker.

He doesn't commit crime for money, power, or any of the usual reasons bad guys do bad things. Instead, he commits crime to create chaos. (I'd say "anarchy" but a hundred anarchists are already predictably bemoaning the movie's equation of the term with chaos on some stupid anarchist Facebook page–seriously.)

In other words, the only goal of the Joker is terror.

Now, to be clear, the Joker is not a terrorist in the way the media portrays them–he's not Muslim or otherwise "other." He's a mad white dude. Nor does he act like how terrorism really functions. After all, a real terrorist creates mayhem to achieve a political goal, unlike the Joker. But similar to real terrorists, the Joker's aim is to instill fear in the heart of Gotham City, i.e. New York (even though the movie was filmed in Chicago), the home of 9/11, and therefore in the heart all Americans.

That's the kind of bad guy Americans fear today. We don't fear the mob–we sympathize with them (The Sopranos, American Gangster). We might fear young Black men, but some of us want to emulate them (wiggers love 50 cent). Being a criminal to get paper is so old hat–that's what global capitalists do all day every day, anyway. What's so scary about that? My boss taking away my health insurance is way scarier. And evil governments seeking unlimited police powers under our nose, well, that doesn't frighten in the way it used to, either. After Somalia, Darfur, Iraq, and eight years of Bush, what government could Hollywood concoct that would be scarier?

No, what Americans fear today is terror–chaos, mayhem, random violence. Since 9/11, Americans fear events that are no longer in their control, whether it's a terrorist attack or companies moving their factories to China or migrants crossing their borders or the rise of China and India as world powers. All of these things create a sense of insecurity, unease, and fear. The Joker represents this new bad guy.

Anyone who's seen *No Country For Old Men* also knows this bad guy–it's Javier Bardem's character, who kills everyone not for the money but because he wants to. Chance (displayed through the flipping of coins) plays a huge role in both movies' evil characters.

And the response to this terror is ...

... Dick Cheney. Remember how Batman uses his supertechnology to tap every Gothamites' phone so he can find out where the Joker is? This brazen violation of privacy is all done in the name of justice, of course. But so is Guantanamo and permanent detention without a trial. Morgan Freeman's character (Batman's tech support) is appropriately indignant for a moment, but Batman promises to do it just this once to capture the Joker. Freeman relents, the Joker is captured, the spy program is destroyed, no "innocents" are hurt, and peace and civil liberties are restored.

This fantasy is precisely the Cheney/Bush approach to fighting the war on terror. The Bush administration couldn't find better cultural-ideological support for this approach than *The Dark Knight* and its chaos-driven bad guy and its omnipotent hero. If only this movie had come out before Alberto Gonzalez's senate hearings!

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