By rolling over Iraq, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld hoped to deep-six the sixties.

The president was down with that. He never grooved on the vibe of the Age of Aquarius anyway.

Conservatives were eager to purge the decades' demons, from tie-dye to moral relativism, from Hanoi Jane to wilting patriotism, from McGovern to blaming America first, from Lucy-in-the-sky-with-diamonds to the Clinton-esque whatever-gets-you-through-the-night ethos.

In their preferred calendar, more Gingrichian than Gregorian, American culture fast-forwards from Elvis's blue suede shoes to John Travolta's white polyester suit.

Whatever else has gone awry in the Middle East so far, the administration may have succeeded in exorcising American queasiness about using force, and any vestigial image of the military as "baby killers."

As Robin Toner wrote in The Times yesterday, trust in the military is brimming, up to 79 percent from 58 percent in 1975, according to Gallup.

The tactical efficacy and moral delicacy of American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq solidified a trend: the children of Vietnam-scarred boomers trust the government, and especially the military, far more than did their parents, whose generational mantra was "Don't trust anyone over 30."

As Ms. Toner noted, a Harvard poll found that 75 percent of college kids trusted the military "to do the right thing" either "all of the time" or "most of the time." Two-thirds of the students supported the Iraqi war, with hawks beating doves 2 to 1.

Mr. Bush runs a "trust us, we're 100 percent right" regime. So we've got a young generation that wants to take it on faith. And an administration that wants to be taken on faith.

The beginning of a beautiful friendship? Maybe. Unless the White House politicizes 9/11 so much it squanders all that belief.

Karl Rove's re-election strategy is designed to tug 9/11 heartstrings, and his ads will be heroic images of Top Gun chasing down the bad guys.

The president and his posse diverted anger over 9/11 to Iraq, and now they are diverting it to Iran.

The Bushies are playing up Al Qaeda terrorists they say are hunkered down in Iran, even as they overlook all the Al Qaeda terrorists crouching in countries the administration doesn't want to
demonize, like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. And the hawks have turned to grooming Iranian exiles, who are pumping out reports of secret nuclear labs. Sound familiar?

After the war, the triumphal administration bragged about its Iraqi, Taliban and Qaeda scalps, painting our enemies as being in retreat.

"Al Qaeda is on the run," the president said in Little Rock, Ark. "That group of terrorists who attacked our country is slowly, but surely, being decimated. Right now, about half of all the top Al Qaeda operatives are either jailed or dead. In either case, they're not a problem anymore."

But Al Qaeda, it became horrifyingly clear a week later in Riyadh, was not decimated; it was sufficiently undecimated to murder 34 people, injure 200 and scare the daylights out of Americans everywhere.

If Bush-Cheney '04's use of Sept. 11 begins to look like cynicism, then cynicism is precisely what it will produce. Officials should stop speaking about threats and triumphs until they know exactly what they are speaking about. They should lose their bewildering and unconvincing color code, because orange doesn't communicate anything to anybody any more.

They should agree, in a spirit of humility and true public service, to stop getting obnoxiously in the way of the release of the 800-page Congressional report that will provide what every American has a right to know about 9/11.

As Michael Isikoff writes in Newsweek, the Bush team does not want the public to pore over the president's daily intelligence briefings, like the one given on Aug. 6, 2001, at the Crawford ranch that dealt with the possibility that Al Qaeda might hijack airplanes. Or the parts of the 9/11 report that deal with our petroleum pals, the Saudis, and their recalcitrance in cooperating in the war on terror. The report, he says, "discusses evidence that individuals with Saudi government connections may have provided the hijackers aid."

The public should take its cue from Mr. Bush's beau ideal, Ronald Reagan. As the Gipper advised, "Trust, but verify."